



## Writing Numbers

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Although usage varies, most people spell out numbers that can be expressed in one or two words and use figures for other numbers:

### Words

over two pounds  
six million dollars  
after thirty-one years  
eighty-three people

### Figures

after 126 days  
only \$31.50  
6,381 bushels  
4.78 liters

Here are some examples of specific situations.

### Days and Years

December 12, 1965 or 12 December 1965  
A.D. 1066  
in 1900  
in 1971-72 or in 1971-1972  
the eighties, the twentieth century  
the 1980's or the 1980s

### Time of Day

8:00 A.M. (or) a.m. (or) eight o'clock in the morning  
4:30 P.M. (or) p.m. (or) half-past four in the afternoon

### Addresses

16 Tenth Street  
350 West 114 Street

### Identification Numbers

Room 8  
Channel 18  
Interstate 65  
Henry VIII

### Page and Division of Books and Plays

page 30  
chapter 6  
in act 3, scene 2 (or) in Act III, Scene ii

### Decimals and Percentages

a 2.7 average  
13 1/4 percent  
.037 metric ton

### Large Round Numbers

four billion dollars (or) \$4 billion  
16,500,000 (or) 16.5 million

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## Notes on Usage

### Repeat numbers in legal or commercial writing.

The bill will not exceed one hundred (100) dollars.

### Numbers in series and statistics should be consistent.

two apples, six oranges, and three bananas  
**NOT:** two apples, 6 oranges, and 3 bananas  
115 feet by 90 feet (or) 115' x 90'  
scores of 25-6 (or) scores of 25 to 6  
The vote was 9 in favor and 5 opposed

**Write out numbers beginning sentences.**

Six percent of the group failed.  
**NOT:** 6% of the group failed.

**Use a combination of figures and words for numbers when such a combination will keep your writing clear.**

Unclear: The club celebrated the birthdays of 6 90-year-olds who were born in the city.  
(*may cause the reader to read '690' as one number.*)

Clearer: The club celebrated the birthdays of six 90-year-olds who were born in the city.

Try our exercise on writing numbers at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/eslnumberEX1.html>.

For more information on plural cases, see our handout on Noun Plurals at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/grammar/g\\_spelnoun.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/grammar/g_spelnoun.html).

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The following information must remain intact on every handout printed for distribution.

This page is located at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/esl/eslnumber.html>

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