

Using numbers in your writing

This guide helps you decide how to express numbers in your academic writing.

Please check your own referencing guide, or with your tutor, to see if your subject area has specific guidance. A good way of becoming familiar with what is usual in your subject is to look in relevant journal articles.

Should I use numerals or words?

When you are writing numbers within a sentence, there is a simple convention for whether to use numerals (103) or words (one hundred and three). For numbers from zero to nine, write the word. For numbers from 10 upwards, use numerals.

When using ordinal numbers (first, second, third...), write the word rather than use the numeral (unless you are writing a date).

e.g. In this case, four people chose the first option, and the remaining 26 chose the second option.

If using decimals, use numerals *e.g.* 2.75.
For fractions, use words *e.g.* three-quarters.

Instead of "1000s of people", use "thousands of people".

Starting a sentence with a number

If you can, avoid doing this by re-structuring your sentence.

e.g. "1960s music..." can become "The music of the 1960s..."

If this is not possible, use a word rather than a numeral. Remember that numbers between 21 and 99 are hyphenated.

e.g. Twenty-seven of the participants were able to attend the meeting.

Percentages

[APA referencing style](#) requires the following:

- Always use a numeral and the % symbol to write a percentage:
e.g. Of the respondents, 90% were able to explain the theorem clearly.
Only 9% of users were satisfied with the service.

Learning Development

[MLA referencing style](#) requires the following:

- Use the symbol when you use a numeral:
e.g. The number of language students has increased by 15%.
- Use the word when you use a word
e.g. Only three per cent of English students regretted their choice of course.
- N.B. If you are giving several percentages or numbers, it is more appropriate to use numerals even for numbers less than 10.

Disciplines using other referencing styles (e.g. Harvard) may have different conventions so read some journal articles in your field, or check with your tutor, to be clear on what is expected.

Dates

When you write a date, use numerals:

e.g. "...1st June, 2021" or "Wednesday 23rd June".

If you are writing about a decade, use the numerals followed by an 's'. You can choose to use an apostrophe or not, but be consistent whichever you choose:

1980s or 1980's