

# **Numbers (Words and Numerals) in Academic Writing**

**M.A. Semester IV  
Course: EC - II**

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**The main rules about the use of numbers in standard academic writing are about:**

**A. When to write numbers in words**

**B. When to write numbers in digits**

**C. When there is a choice between words and digits**

**D. How to avoid confusion with numbers in a sentence**

**E. How to write numbers correctly**



# A little numbers warm-up

- **Digit: a digit is a single numerical symbol from 0 – 9**
- **Number: a string of one or more digits**
- **Arabic numerals: 1; 7; 41; 109; 852; 3,061**
- **Roman numerals: I, VII, XLI, CIX, DCCCLII, MMMLXI**
- **Cardinal numbers: one, 7, forty-one, one hundred nine, 852, three thousand and sixty-one**
- **Ordinal numbers: 1<sup>st</sup>, seventh, 41<sup>st</sup>, 109<sup>th</sup>, eight hundred fifty- second, 3061<sup>st</sup>**

## **A. When to write numbers in words**

- 1. In general, words should be used for numbers from zero to nine**
- 2. It is true for both cardinal numbers (e.g., two, II) and ordinal numbers (e.g., second, 11<sup>th</sup>)**
- 3. When a sentence begins with number you should use words, whatever the size of the number. If possible, rewrite the sentence so that number is not at the beginning**

**E.g., Fifty respondents agreed with the statement**

**There were 50 respondents who agreed with the statement  
(rewritten sentence)**

- 4. Generally, within the body of sentence, a mixed number need not be spelled out. However, when a sentence begins with a mixed number, it should be spelled out in numbers.**

**E.g., Two and three-fourth of the three apples went missing**

**5. When expressing part of a very large round number, e.g., million, billion, etc., you should use words**

**E.g., The population of the UK is approximately 70 million**

**It is common to use abbreviations m for million and b for billions**

**E.g., The population of the UK is approximately 70 m**

**6. Conversely, numerals should be used instead of words when large and small numbers are combined, whatever the size of the number, since this makes comparison easier**

**E.g., There were 2 respondents in the first category and 22 in the second (correct)**

**There were two respondents in the first category and 22 in the second (incorrect)**

**9. Hyphenate all compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine**

**10. Hyphenate all written out fractions.**

**E.g., We recovered about two-thirds of the stolen cash**

**One-half is slightly less than five-eighth**

**11. Reference to centuries are spelled out, without capitals:**

**E.g., Many communication technologies were developed in the twentieth century**

**12. With percentage, the standard is to use numerals as % (not percent)**

**E.g., According to report 94% of the workforce is employed in the service sector. Only 6% work in agriculture**

**13. An exception to this is when you are using a percentage to begin a sentence. In this case, use words to express the entire percentage.**

**E.g., Thirteen percent of the patient reported that their symptoms improved after taking the experimental drug**

## **B. When to write numbers in digits**

- 1. With figures of four or more digits, use commas. Count three places to the left and put first comma. Continue placing commas after every three digits. Do not include decimal point when counting**

**E.g., - 1,054 people, Rs. 2,417, 592.21**

- 2. Money – Use digits for exact amount but digits and words for rounded and large amounts**

**E.g., \$24.28 (Exact amount): 98 dollars, \$15 million (rounded and large amount)**

- 3. Measurement – Use digits with a measurement symbol/unit**

**E.g., 32°C or 32 degrees centigrade, 6 cm or 6 centimeters**

**4. Decimals – Use a period to indicate decimal point. Give exact amount in digits**

**E.g., 0.45 (not 45); 2.36**

**5. Survey – Write survey results in digit form**

**E.g., A survey of participants revealed that 4 out of 5 students worked part-time**

**6. Scores – Write scores in digits**

**E.g., Students' scores ranged from 8 to 75 out of 100**

**7. Statistics – Use digits to describe statistical information**

**E.g., The survey focused on 90 teachers, 10 Principals, and 34 staffs from 20 different schools**



**8. Dates – Dates are usually written in the conventional combination of numbered date, named month and numbered year**

**E.g., The service was set up on 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2012**

**Another convention to write dates is in the order of named month, numbered date and numbered year. No ‘th’ is necessary when month is mentioned first.**

**E.g., June 30, 1934**



## **9. Decade –**

- ▶ **When spelling out decades, do not capitalize them**  
**E.g., The US economy grew rapidly during the eighties and nineties**
- ▶ **When expressing decades using figures, it is simple to put an apostrophe before incomplete numerals and no apostrophe between the numbers and s**  
**E.g., The US economy grew rapidly in the '80s and '90s**
- ▶ **Some writers place an apostrophe after the number**  
**E.g., The US economy grew rapidly in the 80's and 90's**
- ▶ **You may also express decade in complete numerals. Again it is clearer to avoid apostrophe between the years and the s**  
**E.g., The US economy grew rapidly in the 1990s**

**10. Span of numbers – use digits**

**E.g., Pages: 56-74, 115-117**

**Years: 1864-1899**

**Streets: 36-99 SPK.ST**

**11. Division in a book – Use digits to refer divisions in books and plays**

**E.g., Volume 5, Chapter 6, Page 45, Act 2, Scene 4**

**12. Age – It is acceptable to use a figure when writing an age**

**E.g., I have a 8-year old son**

**13. Addresses – A street address requires a number. Therefore, it is acceptable to use a figure instead of writing out the word.**

**E.g., 1234 Ash Street**

**She lives at 772<sup>nd</sup> Rocky Lane**

# Roman Numerals

- ▶ Roman numerals are expressed by the alphabets.

| <b>Numerals</b> | <b>Values</b> |
|-----------------|---------------|
| <b>I</b>        | <b>1</b>      |
| <b>V</b>        | <b>5</b>      |
| <b>X</b>        | <b>10</b>     |
| <b>L</b>        | <b>50</b>     |
| <b>C</b>        | <b>100</b>    |
| <b>D</b>        | <b>500</b>    |
| <b>M</b>        | <b>1000</b>   |


**Example:**

|                 |             |
|-----------------|-------------|
| <b>I</b>        | <b>1</b>    |
| <b>III</b>      | <b>3</b>    |
| <b>MM</b>       | <b>2000</b> |
| <b>MDCLXVII</b> | <b>1667</b> |

( How to memorize Roman numerals)

**I Value Xylophones Like Cows Do Milk**

**The use of roman numerals survives in a variety of speculated context:**

- 1. Books – often to number the chapter**
  - 2. Preliminary section of Content Page in research report**
  - 3. Plays, separate acts into sections**
  - 4. On fancy clocks and watches**
  - 5. Annual sporting events, like the Summer and Winter Olympics**
  - 6. Copyright dates**
  - 7. Name of monarchs (Queen Elizabeth II) and popes (Pope John Paul II)**
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# References

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