

## **Texas Tribune Style Guide**

*Updated: December 2010*

This style guide — which includes in-house style rules, reiterations of important AP rules, exceptions to AP rules and new rules on which AP hasn't ruled — will hopefully help us standardize content while striking our desired stylistic balance between news and magazine writing. This guide is not complete — it will always be growing — but will hopefully expand to include reference points for every area that writers on their specific beats might run up against.

### *In-house style (for headlines and web text other than body copy)*

- **The Texas Tribune** Always capitalize *the*, as it is a part of our organization's official name, unless shortening to *the Tribune* or using the term as a modifier: *The governor has a double-digit lead in the Texas Tribune poll.* Simply *the Tribune* is acceptable on first reference in taglines, blog posts and multimedia pieces, but spell out the name in its entirety when mentioned in full-length stories. In all, cases, do not italicize.
- **TribBlog, TribCast, TribLive**
- In an exception to AP style, use **double, not single, quotes in headlines and subheads.**
- In headlines and subheads, capitalize all nouns, pronouns, verbs (including *is* and *are*) and words of four or more letters. (This is *New York Times* style.) For reference:
  - Lowercase *a, and, as, at, but, by, for, if, in, of, on, or, the, to, v.* (court cases), *vs., via*
  - But capitalize *No, Nor, Not, Off, Out, So, Up* and all infinitives (*to Be, to Do, to Go*)
  - Capitalize *for* if used in place of *supports* (*Perry For Online Textbooks*)
  - Capitalize any regularly lowercased word that forms a verbal phrase: *Medina Stands By 9/11 Comments*
- **liveblog**
- If needed for space, use the following abbreviations in headlines for stories reporting on districts: *SD-10, HD-10, CD-10, SBOE 10, Sup. Ct. 10*
- As **subheads** (within stories) are already bolded and offset, **capitalize** only the **first word** and all proper nouns.
- The **percent sign** is acceptable to use in headlines.
- In Midday Briefs, use the following format when citing articles:
  - “In the first two months of 2010, GOP members of Congress have donated nearly four times as much cash to the National Republican Congressional Committee as their Democratic counterparts have donated to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.” — House GOP Amps Up Giving, *Politico*

- Note the em dash (with one space on either side) in between the quotation and the linked article title, and the comma separating the article from the publication title, which is italicized unless it is an online-only publication.
- When updating a blog post, *[Updated]*, with brackets and only the first letter capitalized, should be appended to its headline. Add new material to the bottom of the post using the following format:  
Original material

### **Update:**

New material

- In photo captions, complete sentences are not necessary, but in general, because images will live on in archives past their run dates, be as specific as possible, noting — when applicable — dates, locations, full names and political affiliations:  
*State Sen. Florence Shapiro, R-Plano, on Fox News on July 8, 2010*
  - Use full dates, rather than days of the week.
  - Full details may not be necessary for certain images (e.g., head shots)

### Tribune style

- **24/7**
- **accents** Use accents and other diacritical marks when an individual uses them or is known to use them (e.g., Mexican President Felipe Calderón). For precision, use them in city names (Juárez) and words in foreign languages.
- In general, **according to** should only be used when citing non-human sources: reports, media outlets, documents, etc.: *according to the state comptroller's report*
- **acknowledgment**
- **acronyms** As AP advises, avoid them when possible, unless an organization or agency is widely recognized (CIA, FBI, GOP, etc.). If referring to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, for example, try to refer back to the entity as "the department" or another similar general term. Every publication, though, has its own list of prolific terms that are acceptable to abbreviate on second reference. Ours:
  - *TxDOT, SBOE, more to come ...*
- **administration** Do not capitalize when referring to a presidential administration: *the Obama administration*
- Never use a hyphen after an adverb ending in *-ly*: *a politically charged accusation, a perfectly executed plan*
- **adviser**, not advisor, unless an official title or body is spelled otherwise: *National Security Advisor James L. Jones, Texas Office of the Medical Advisor*
- **a.k.a.** Use periods, contrary to AP style.

- **alumnus, alumna** Masculine and feminine singular forms, respectively. Do not use *alum*. Use *alumni* for groups of two or more men or groups of mixed gender. *Alumnae* is the feminine plural.
- **amendments to the Constitution** Follow AP number rules and capitalize: *First Amendment, 10th Amendment*
- **AG**, no periods, is acceptable on second reference to attorney general.
- **biracial**
- **BlackBerry(s)**
- **block-walk** (verb)
- **Border Patrol**
  - Capitalize *sector* when referring to specific Border Patrol jurisdictions: *the El Paso Sector*
- Use **brackets**, not parentheses, to clarify or add material in a quotation. "We don't have the money to fix them" would become, if necessary for clarity's sake, "We don't have the money to fix [Texas hospitals]."
- **canceled, canceling, cancellation**
- Lowercase **city** in all *city* of references: *He sued the city of Austin*. Similarly, lowercase *state* in such references: *state of Texas*
- Do not use the **serial comma**, which appears before the conjunction in a series.
- **composition titles** For easy consistency, italicize the names of all printed publications (newspapers, magazines, books, journals, etc.), films, TV shows, radio programs, etc. But use quotation marks for song titles, video games and article titles. Do not italicize or put quotation marks around online publications, including the Tribune.
  - Only capitalize and italicize *the* if it is part of a newspaper's official name, which can be found by looking at its nameplate. (Easy cheat: Use Google Images.) But per AP, lowercase *the* before newspaper names if a story mentions several papers, some of which use *the* as part of their name and some of which do not.
- Never use **comprised of**. *Comprise* means "consist of" or "contain"; the whole comprises the parts: *The U.S. comprises 50 states*. "Compose" means "to make" or "to put together." It can be used in both active and passive voice: *They composed a song. The movement is composed of Republican defectors*.
- Do not italicize **court cases**.
- Always use numerals with court names: *3rd Court of Appeals, 10th Court of Appeals*
- **daylong, weeklong, yearlong**
- **district abbreviations**, which are acceptable in stories on second reference, should be written as follows:
  - *SD-10, HD-10, CD-10*
- **dos and don'ts**
- Use **Dr.** as a formal title on first reference only before the names of medical doctors, and only when the profession is relevant to the story.
- **dropout** (noun), **drop out** (verb)
- **e-mail**

- Two people look at **each other**, but more than two look at **one another**.  
Possessive: *Each other's politics*, not *each others' politics*
- **Eldorado**, Texas; not El Dorado
- **em dashes** In addition to their use as prescribed by AP, use em dashes in comma-heavy clauses to aid flow. Rather than *Gov. Rick Perry has ordered state agencies, including the University of Texas, a public institution, to cut their budgets by 5 percent*, try *Gov. Rick Perry has ordered state agencies — including the University of Texas, a public institution — to cut their budgets by 5 percent*. Be careful, though, not to stuff a sentence with dashes, commas and colons, as this can often muddy a sentence more than aid flow. General rule: Never use more than one set of em dashes per sentence.
- **E-Verify**
- **everyday**, one word, is an adjective: *"It's not your everyday legislation," he said*. But **every day** is the adverb: *He runs every day*.
- **face-off** (noun), **face off** (verb)
- **fewer, less** Per AP rules, use *fewer* for individual items and *less* for quantity. But use *less* when describing distance, money and time: *The meeting lasted less than 30 minutes. He was holding less than \$100. The car moved less than 5 inches*.
- **flip-flop**
- Italicize **words in foreign languages**: He said being a *paletero* in Dallas afforded him the luxury of supporting his family by sending a portion of his earnings home.
- **forgo**
- **Founding Fathers** Capitalize when referring to the creators of the U.S. Constitution.
- **free rein**
- Use **freshman**, with an *a*, rather than *freshmen*, when using the word as an adjective: *two freshman state senators*
- **front-runner**
- **governor's race**
- **grassroots** One word when used as an adjective, its most common form: *a grassroots campaign*
- **H-E-B**
- **health care**
- **high court** Do not capitalize in reference to the Supreme Court
- **hold up** (verb), **holdup** (noun and adjective)
- **hometown**
- **independent** Do not capitalize when referring to individuals not committed to a political party.
- **innerworkings**
- In an exception to AP style: **internet**
- **Juárez** (note the accent) is acceptable on first reference to the Mexican border city Ciudad Juárez. The word for its inhabitants, *Juarenses*, does not receive an accent.

- **legislative titles** Because our site deals so heavily with both state and national politicians, specify *state* or *U.S.* on first reference to congressional members: *state Rep.*, *state Sen.*, *U.S. Rep.*, *U.S. Sen.* But if a story concerns only state representatives, for example — or if inclusion of *state* or *U.S.* would otherwise become cumbersome — drop the designations on subsequent references to other lawmakers.
- Capitalize **Legislature** when referring to a specific state legislature. But do not capitalize **legislative session**.
- As with *liberal* and *conservative*, lowercase **libertarian** when referring to the political philosophy. Capitalize only when referring to the **Libertarian Party**.
- **lineup** (noun)
- **loath** is the adjective that means "reluctant"; **loathe** is the verb that means "to hate."
- **Lone Star State**
- **long-standing**
- **long-term, short-term**, when used as adjectives: *a long-term investment*
- **longtime**, when used as a modifier: *longtime partners*
- **lowbrow**
- **majority-minority**, with a hyphen, may be used as an adjective to describe jurisdictions in which non-Hispanic whites compose less than half of the population. Four U.S. states — California, Hawaii, New Mexico and Texas — are currently majority-minority.
- **makeup** (noun)
- Contrary to AP style, spell out **mixed numbers**, but use decimals whenever practical: *After two and a half years in the position, the agency director received a 1.5-percent raise.*
- **multimillion, multibillion, multimillion-dollar, multibillion-dollar**
- **nail-biter**
- **nationwide**
- **never-ending**
- Spell out numbers **zero through nine**. Exceptions:
  - Spell out any number that begins a sentence (except for years).
  - Use numerals (*1, 2, 3 ...*) with percent figures, percentage-point figures, ages, with *million* and *billion*, dollar amounts
- **nonprofit, nonpartisan, nonfiction**
- Contrary to AP, use **okay**, not *OK*. "Perry does okay at corralling support in this area," she said. But use *OK*, not *okay*, when writing the verb form: *The district attorney OK'd the decision.*
- Use only **one space** between sentences.
- **outraise**
- **Panhandle**, when referring to a specific panhandle, such as the Texas region
- **party affiliation** Follow AP style, which allows any natural, logical construction, including:
  - *State Sen. Kirk Watson, D-Austin, said ...* (note the commas, not parentheses, in this construction)

- *Democratic state Sen. Kirk Watson of Austin said ...*
- *State Sen. Kirk Watson also supports the measure. The Democrat from Austin said ...*
- **Pell Grant**
- **policymaker, policymaking**
- **political parties** Capitalize *party* in names: *Democratic Party, Republican Party*
- **politics** is singular when the word refers to the study or science: *One of his favorite subjects is politics.* When referring to practices, the word is plural. *He said the governor's politics are reprehensible.*
- **President Barack Obama** on first reference, but *President Obama* is acceptable in captions. Include first names for all former presidents.
- **protester**, not protestor
- Use **proven** only as an adjective: *a proven source*
- Place commas and periods inside **quotation marks**, but dashes, exclamation points, question marks and semicolons only go inside if they are part of the quoted material.
- **Rainy Day Fund**
- **re-elect, re-election**
- **right-wing** (modifier)
- **Rio Grande**, not the redundant *Rio Grande River*
- **Rio Grande Valley** on first reference; *the Valley* is acceptable on second reference.
- **runoff**
- **run-up**
- Except for languages or proper nouns, do not capitalize **school subjects**: *U.S. history, geometry, chemistry*
- Use **serial semicolons** if at least three items form a series and at least one item in the series includes a comma: *Adding their names to the request were U.S. Reps. Solomon Ortiz, D-Corpus Christi; Ruben Hinojosa, D-Mercedes; Bob Filner, D-California; and Harry Teague, D-New Mexico.* Note that the semicolon is retained before the final conjunction.
- **stand-alone** (modifier)
- **standard-bearer**
- As per a recent AP revision, spell out all **states** when used in conjunction with city names. But the former AP abbreviations are acceptable to use in headlines. Some of the trickier abbreviations:
  - *Ky.* for Kentucky, *Ore.* for Oregon, *Pa.* for Pennsylvania, *Calif.* for California, *La.* for Louisiana, *Mo.* for Missouri
- **statewide**
- **straight-ticket voting** But: *Voters have the option of voting on a straight ticket.*
- **Sugar Land** The Houston suburb is written as two words.
- **superdelegate**

- Do not use **swath** — defined as a narrow strip — as a synonym for "area," "portion" or "group." Use the word only when looking to convey the image of a strip: *A broad swath of the United States, reaching from Texas to North Dakota, has remained largely unaffected by the recession.*
- **Tax Day**
- **tax-and-spend** (modifier)
- **Tea Party** Avoid Tea Partiers if possible; instead: Tea Party activists, Tea Party supporters
- Per AP, capitalize **Twitter** when using it as a noun, but lowercase as a verb. Also lowercase **tweet** as a verb, but capitalize it as a noun. Either verb is acceptable, but *tweet* is more common in modern parlance.
- **Texas-Mexico border**
- **Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition**
- **tier-one** (modifier)
- **time frame**
- **titles** In general, capitalize only official titles that directly precede an individual's name: *President Obama, Comptroller Susan Combs*. To avoid a clunky string of capitalized words, park longer titles (generally of four or more words) after names and lowercase them: *Kathleen Sebelius, secretary of health and human services, will not attend*. Lowercase titles on subsequent references to an individual: *The president supports the measure*.
- **toward/towards** Follow AP style, which recommends *toward*.
- **Trans-Texas Corridor**
- **University of Texas** On first reference, use *the University of Texas*. On second reference, *UT* or *the university* are acceptable. It is not necessary to specify *at Austin* unless the story references other UT System schools. In that case, use *UT-Austin*, with a hyphen, on second reference, and do the same for other schools (*UT-El Paso, UT-Pan American*, etc.), spelling them out in their entirety on first reference. *UTSA* is acceptable for the University of Texas at San Antonio on second reference.
- **Other university names** Look online for official university literature that features a school's full, proper name. The University of California System, for instance, uses commas (*University of California, Berkeley; University of California, Los Angeles*). On subsequent references, commonly used abridged references are acceptable (*Berkeley, UCLA*, etc.).
- **University of Texas System** On first reference, spell out in its entirety. On second reference, *UT System* or *the system* are acceptable.
- Use a consistent **verb tense** when quoting sources. Present tense usually conveys dramatic action more effectively, but past tense is often more functional in harder-news stories, which call for a verb tense that conveys summary narrative.
  - In subsequent quotes from sources, the verb should always follow the source's name or the pronoun. *"That's great," Perry says. Not says Perry.*
- **voter ID, voter ID bill** (no capitalization in any context)

- **Washington, D.C.**, gets commas on both sides of *D.C.* in all cases: *Palin's tour includes stops in Washington, D.C., and northern Virginia.* But leave out the second comma when the district is used as a modifier: *a Washington, D.C.-based human rights organization*
- **web, website**
- **whistle-stop**
- For **year ranges**, write out complete years: *the 2009-2010 school year*