

mla writing out numbers

MLA writing out numbers is a crucial aspect of academic writing that ensures clarity and consistency throughout a paper. The Modern Language Association (MLA) style has specific guidelines regarding the use of numbers in writing, which can sometimes be confusing for students and writers alike. This article will explore the rules and recommendations for writing out numbers in MLA format, providing clear examples and practical tips to help you master this essential component of academic writing.

Understanding the Basics of Numbers in MLA Format

When writing in MLA style, understanding when to use numerals and when to write out numbers can significantly affect the readability and professionalism of your work. The MLA Handbook offers guidelines that writers should follow to maintain consistency and clarity.

General Rules for Writing Numbers

1. Numbers Zero through Nine: In MLA style, spell out numbers from zero to nine. For example:

- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- Five
- Six
- Seven
- Eight
- Nine

2. Numerals for Numbers 10 and Above: Use numerals for numbers 10 and above. For example:

- 10
- 11
- 12
- 15
- 20
- 100

3. Beginning of a Sentence: Always spell out numbers that begin a sentence, regardless of their value. For example:

- "Twenty students attended the lecture."

Exceptions to the General Rules

While the above rules cover most situations, there are exceptions that writers should be aware of:

- Consistent Usage: If you are discussing related numbers that fall on either side of the threshold (e.g., "three cats and 14 dogs"), it is acceptable to use numerals for both for consistency.
- Measurements and Statistics: Use numerals when reporting measurements, statistics, and other precise data. For example:
 - "The distance between the two cities is 150 miles."
 - "The population of the town is 3,500 residents."
- Dates and Times: Always use numerals for dates and times. For example:
 - "On May 5, 2023, the event will take place at 3 PM."
- Ages: Write ages as numerals. For example:
 - "The child is 5 years old."
 - "She is 30 years old."
- Money: Use numerals when discussing amounts of money. For example:
 - "The book costs \$15."
 - "He donated \$100 to the charity."

Special Cases in Number Usage

In addition to the general rules, certain contexts warrant specific treatments of numbers. Understanding these contexts can help you navigate MLA writing more effectively.

Ordinal Numbers

When using ordinal numbers (first, second, third, etc.), the rules are slightly different:

- Spell Out: Ordinal numbers from first to ninth should be spelled out. For example:
 - "She finished in third place."
- Use Numerals: For ordinal numbers 10 and above, use numerals. For example:
 - "He was the 15th person to arrive."

Fractions

Fractions can be tricky in academic writing. Here's how to handle them in MLA format:

- Spell Out Simple Fractions: Simple fractions should be spelled out. For example:
 - "One-half of the students passed the exam."
- Use Numerals for Complex Fractions: In cases where the fraction is complex or used in a statistical context, numerals may be used. For example:
 - "The ratio of students to teachers is 3:1."

Formatting Numbers in MLA Works Cited and In-Text Citations

Understanding how to format numbers in your Works Cited page and in-text citations is equally important in MLA writing.

In-Text Citations

In-text citations should follow the same rules as general writing. For example:

- "According to Smith, there were 20 participants in the study."
- "The survey revealed that 5 out of 10 respondents preferred option A."

Works Cited Page

When listing sources in your Works Cited page, the same principles apply. Use numerals for numbers 10 and above, and spell out numbers zero through nine. For example:

- Smith, John. "The Impact of Climate Change on Coastal Cities." *Environmental Studies Journal*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2023, pp. 5-15.
- Johnson, Emily. "Three Ways to Improve Public Transportation." *Urban Development Review*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2022, pp. 100-120.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

As with any set of guidelines, it's easy to make mistakes. Here are some common pitfalls to avoid when writing out numbers in MLA format:

1. Inconsistency: Avoid switching between numerals and spelled-out numbers within the same context. Maintain consistency to enhance clarity.
2. Neglecting Context: Always consider the context in which you are using numbers. For example, using numerals in a casual context may not align with academic standards.
3. Forgetting Special Cases: Remember to account for exceptions like ages, dates, and

measurements, where numerals are preferred.

4. Starting Sentences with Numerals: Always spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence to maintain formal tone and style.

Conclusion

Mastering the rules of MLA writing out numbers is essential for any student or academic writer. By following the guidelines set forth by the Modern Language Association, you can enhance the clarity and professionalism of your writing. Remember to spell out numbers zero through nine, use numerals for numbers 10 and above, and consider the context of your writing. Avoid common pitfalls, and practice consistency throughout your work. With these principles in mind, you will be well on your way to producing high-quality, MLA-compliant writing that effectively communicates your ideas.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the MLA guideline for writing out numbers in text?

In MLA style, numbers that can be written in one or two words should be spelled out, while numbers that require more than two words should be written as numerals.

Are there exceptions to the MLA rule for writing out numbers?

Yes, MLA guidelines state that when a number begins a sentence, it should be spelled out, and certain specific contexts, like dates and times, also require numerals.

How should I write out large numbers according to MLA format?

In MLA format, large numbers should be written as numerals if they are 10 or above, while numbers below ten should be spelled out.

What is the recommendation for using numbers in academic writing in MLA?

MLA recommends consistency in number usage throughout the text, meaning if you start using numerals for a series, continue with that format.

How are fractions and percentages treated in MLA writing?

In MLA style, fractions should typically be spelled out (e.g., 'one-half'), while percentages should be presented as numerals followed by the percent sign (e.g., '25%').

Should I spell out numbers in citations according to MLA guidelines?

In citations, you typically write the numbers as they appear in the original source. If the source uses numerals, you should do the same.

What should I do if my writing includes a mix of spelled-out numbers and numerals?

You should aim for clarity and consistency; stick to one format for a specific context or section, but follow MLA's general rules for when to spell out or use numerals.

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