

## Using Numbers in an APA Document

There are numerous guidelines for determining when to use figures (e.g., 0 – 9) or words to express numbers in an APA document. Upon completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Determine whether to use figures or words to express numbers in a specified context.
- Determine whether to precede numbers less than one with a zero.
- Determine how many decimal places to display in numbers that contain decimals.
- Determine whether to use commas in numbers of greater than or equal to 1,000.
- Format the plural form of a number.
- Turn off the automatic formatting feature in Microsoft® Word® that converts ordinal suffixes to superscripts.

### Reference Location(s) in the APA Manual

Refer to the following sections of the APA manual for specific formatting guidelines for numbers:

Section	Content
3.42 Numbers Expressed in Figures	Explains the guidelines for using figures to express numbers.
3.43 Numbers Expressed in Words	Explains the guidelines for using words to express numbers.
3.44 Combining Figures and Words to Express Numbers	Explains the guidelines for using words and figures in combination to express numbers.
3.45 Ordinal Numbers	Explains the guidelines for formatting ordinal numbers.
3.46 Decimal Fractions	Explains the guidelines for formatting numbers less than 1.
3.47 Roman Numerals	States the guidelines for using Roman numerals.
3.48 Commas in Numbers	States the guidelines for using commas in numbers greater than 1000.
3.49 Plurals of Numbers	States the guidelines for formatting the plural form of numbers.

### Overview of the Formatting Guidelines

Numbers may be expressed as figures or words depending on how they are used in a sentence or paragraph.

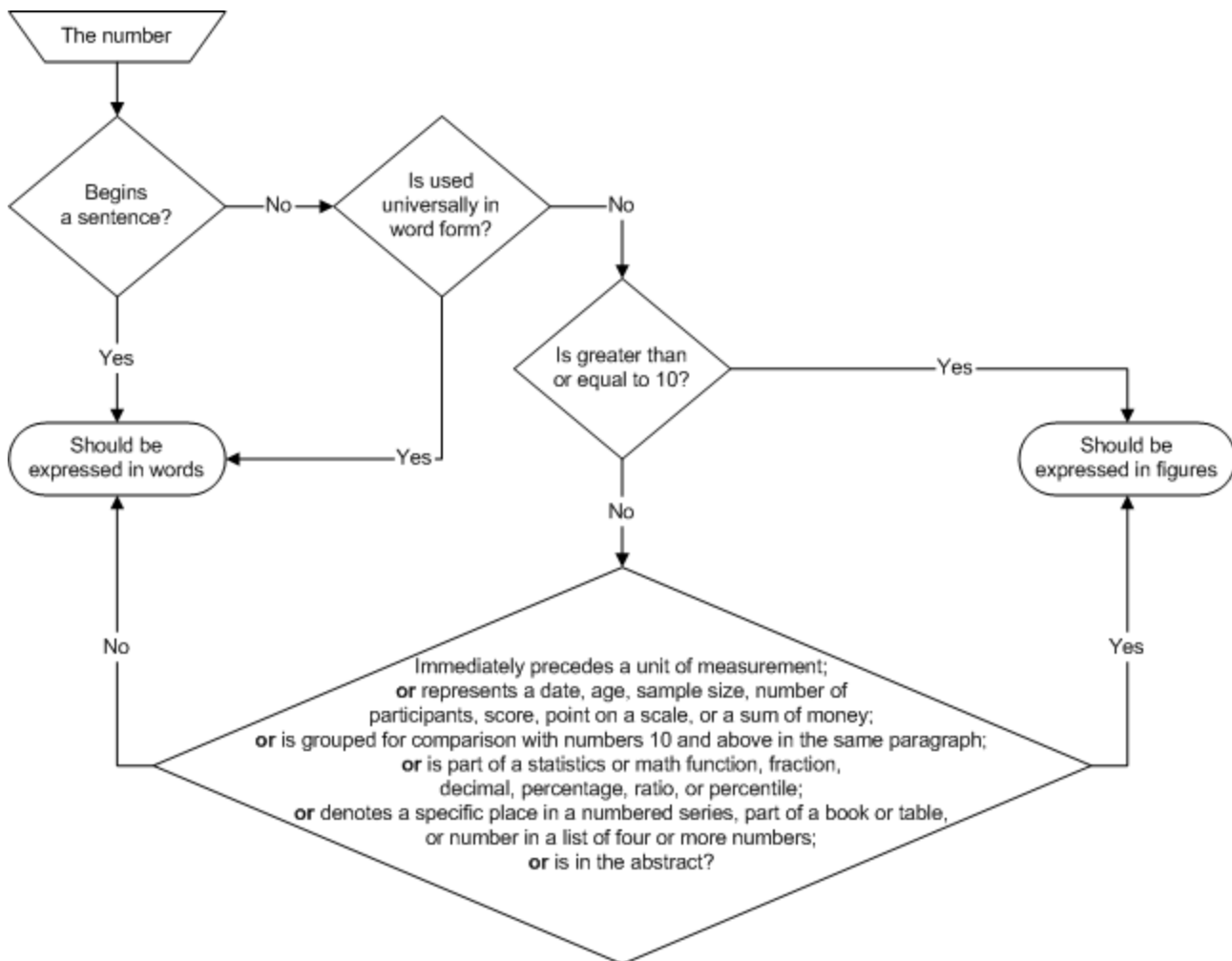
Examples of Numbers	
Expressed as Figures	Expressed as Words
1	One
10	Ten
453	Four hundred and fifty-three

7th	Seventh
17th	Seventeenth

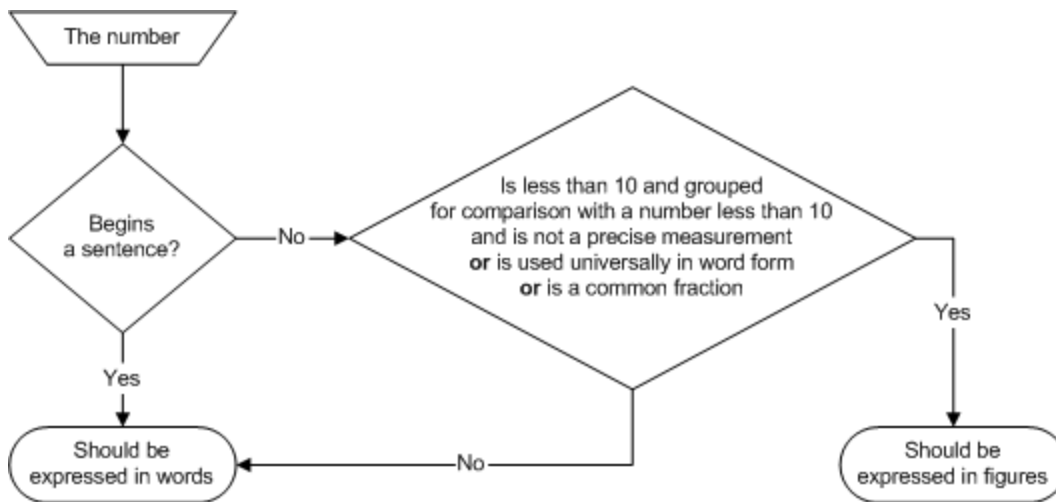
There are rules that govern when to use figures to express numbers and when to use words. The main rules entail using figures to express numbers greater than or equal to 10; numbers below 10 that are used in comparison with numbers 10 and above; numbers used in statistical or mathematical information, numbers that are units of date, time, size, or money; numbers that denote specific places in a numbered series; and numbers in an abstract. However, there are several specific guidelines as well as exceptions. For example, when a number begins a sentence or when it is universally accepted in word form, you should express it in words.

Below are several flowcharts to help guide you in determining whether to express a number as a figure or as words. The rules apply to both cardinal numbers (e.g., 1, 2, 3, and 4) and ordinal numbers (e.g., 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th). Keep in mind that overlap in the guidelines and exceptions to the general rules often require using multiple decision flows.

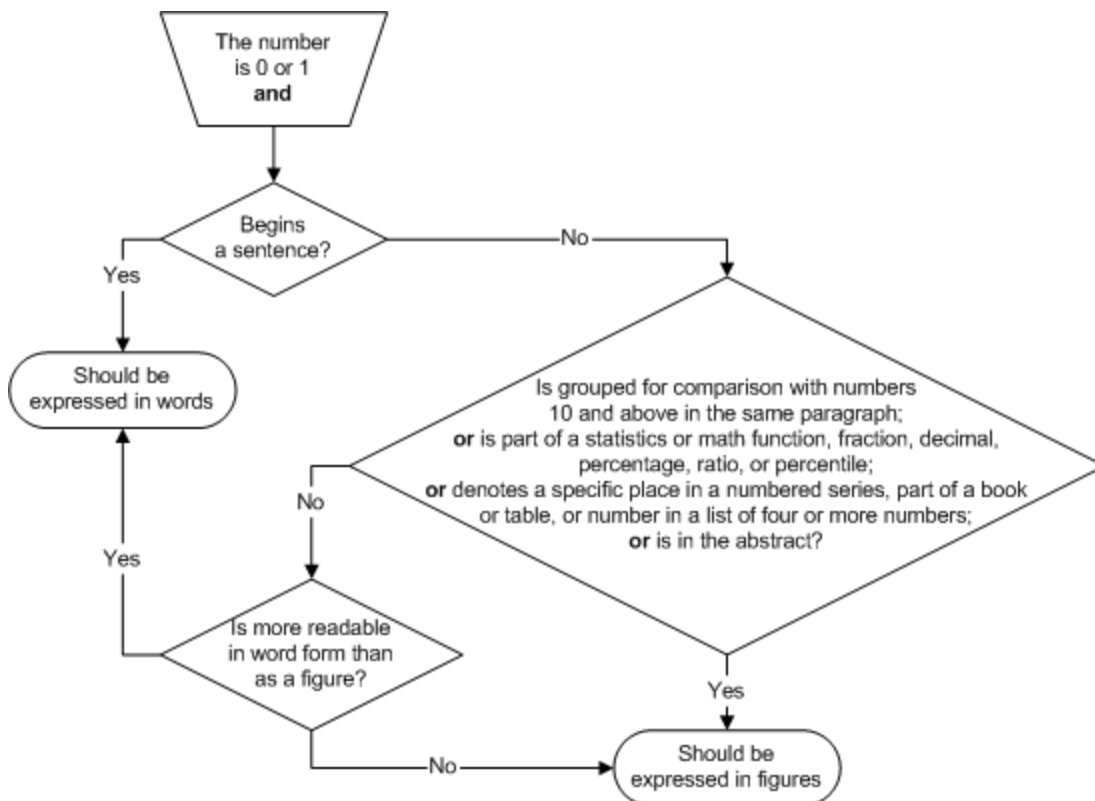
General decision flow for expressing numbers as figures:



General decision flow for expressing numbers as words:



General decision flow for expressing *zero* and *one*:

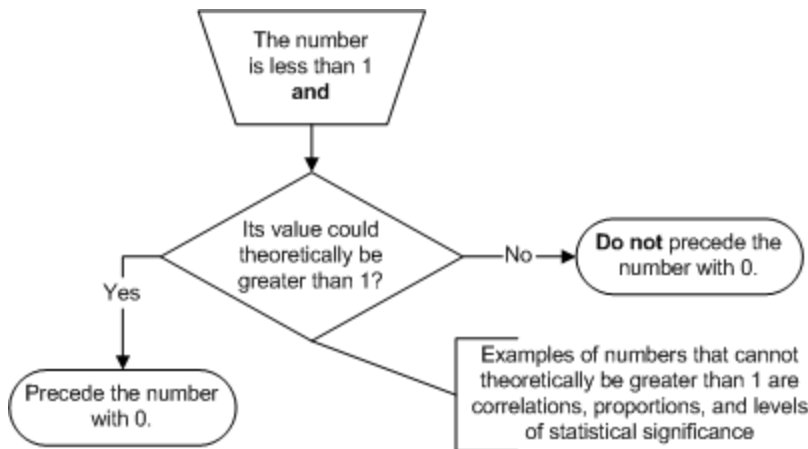


Sometimes both words and figures are necessary within one sentence. Examples are sentences that contain large rounded numbers and back-to-back modifiers. However, in cases where the use of both words and figures detracts from readability, the preferred method is to express the numbers in word form.

There are additional rules that govern the formatting of numbers with decimals and commas. For numbers with decimals, you must determine whether to precede the number with a 0 (if the number is less than 1) and how many decimal places to display.

Decimal Numbers	
Preceded with a Zero	Not Preceded with a Zero
0.57 (average score)	$r = .72$
0.27 min	$p < .01$

The flowchart provided below indicates how to determine whether to precede a number less than 1 with a zero:



Generally, numbers that contain decimals should display two decimal places. However, there are exceptions depending on the type of number being reported and the required level of precision.

Another rule involving numbers is to use commas in numbers greater than or equal to 1,000. Generally, you should use a comma between groups of three digits for numbers. If the number represents a page number, binary number, serial number, a measurement of temperature or frequency, the number of degrees of freedom, or numbers to the right of a decimal point, you should not use commas.

When formatting the plural form of numbers, add an *s* or *es* to the number. Do not use an apostrophe.

Plural	
Figure Form	Word Form
7s	Sevens
10s	Tens
100	Hundreds

The same rule applies to the plural form of years. For example, the plural form of 1999 is 1999s.

## Examples of Numbers

### *Correctly Formatted Numbers*

Below are sample passages containing numbers formatted correctly.

Six test treatments were used in the experiments conducted in the 1990s. Test 1 contained 30 multiple-choice questions from section 4 of Form 83-1 of a regular GRE examination with no indication that the test was experimental. The content of Test 2 and Test 3 was identical to the content of Test 1, but Test 2 contained an indication that the test was experimental, and Test 3 used a special answer sheet. Test 4 contained 8 multiple-choice items that were identical to the 10 items on Test 1 and 14 open-ended questions that corresponded to multiple-choice questions. Test 5 was the same as Test 4 but contained only five multiple-choice items. Test 6 contained 30 multiple-choice questions.

Of the 2,234 students enrolled in the course during the 10-year period of the experiment, 70% scored above the regulatory cutoff (85.28). Most of the students who scored above the 80th percentile were 2nd-year students.

### *Incorrectly Formatted Numbers*

Below are examples of incorrectly formatted numbers.

6 test treatments were used in the experiments conducted in the 1990's. Test 1 contained 30 multiple-choice questions from section four of Form 83-1 of a regular GRE examination with no indication that the test was experimental. The content of Test 2 and Test 3 was identical to the content of Test 1, but Test II contained an indication that the test was experimental, and Test 3 used a special answer sheet. Test 4 contained eight multiple-choice items that were identical to the 10 items on Test 1 and 14 open-ended questions that corresponded to multiple-choice questions. Test 5 was the same as Test 4 but contained only 5 multiple-choice items. Test 6 contained thirty multiple-choice questions.

Of the 2234 students enrolled in the course during the ten-year period of the experiment, seventy percent scored above the regulatory cutoff (85.281673). Most of the students who scored above the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile were second-year students.

**Annotations:**

- Begins a sentence
- Contains an apostrophe
- Denotes part of a numbered series
- Switches to Roman numerals
- Grouped with numbers 10 and above
- Not grouped with numbers 10 and above
- Numbers greater than 10
- Missing a comma
- Denotes a unit of time
- Too many decimal places
- Represents a percentage
- Formatted as a superscript
- Denotes a unit of time

## Common Mistakes Made with Numbers

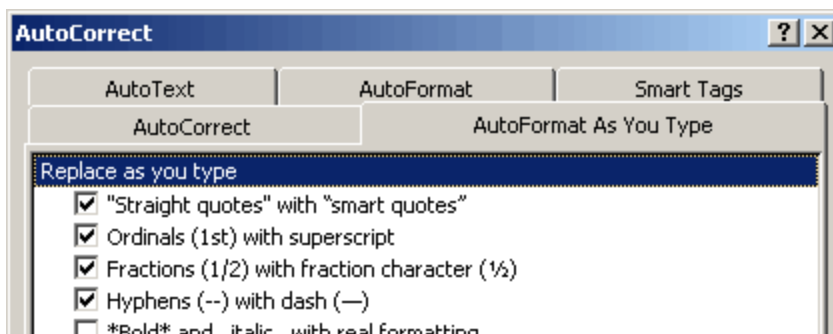
Listed below are common mistakes made when formatting numbers.

- Starting sentences with numbers expressed as figures
- Using an apostrophe in the plural form of a number
- Using the word form of a number to represent an age or unit of time
- Formatting ordinal numbers as superscripts
- Inappropriately expressing numbers less than 10 as figures
- Inappropriately expressing numbers greater than 10 as words

## Applying the Guidelines in MS Word

By default, MS Word formats ordinal numbers and common fractions as superscripts. You can turn these features off for manually undo the effects. To turn off the automatic formatting of superscripts or fractions:

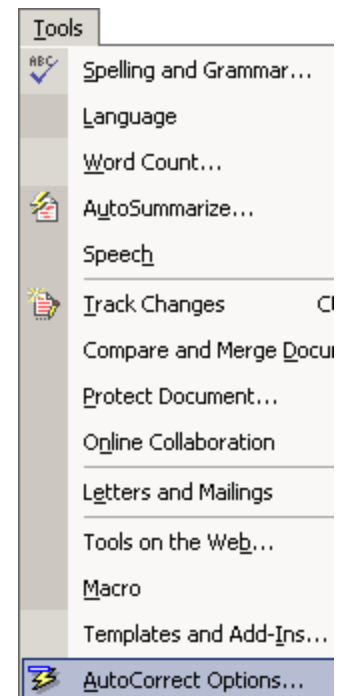
1. Select the *autocorrect options* command on the *tools* menu.
2. When the *autocorrect* dialog box opens, click the *AutoFormat as You Type* tab.



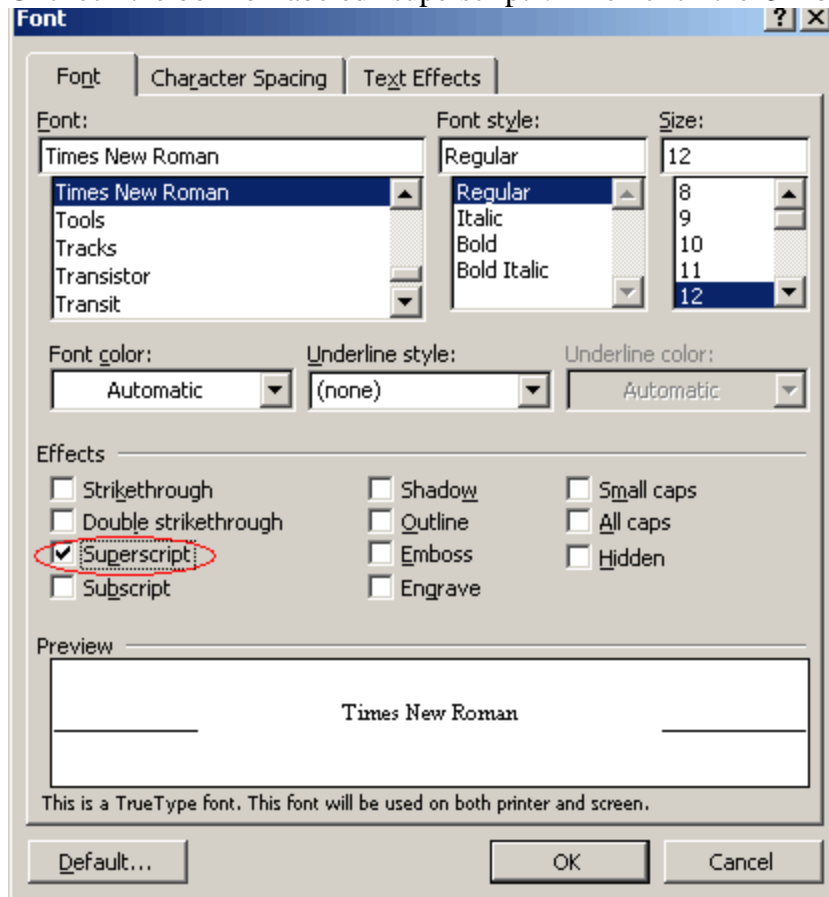
3. Uncheck the box labeled “ordinals (1<sup>st</sup>) with superscript” to turn off the automatic conversion of ordinal numbers.
4. Uncheck the box labeled “fractions (1/2) with fraction character (1/2)” to turn off the automatic conversion of fractions.
5. Click the *OK* button to apply the settings and close the dialog box.

If you do not want to turn off the automatic formatting, you can manually undo the effects. To remove the superscript from an ordinal number:

1. Select the superscripted text.
2. Select the *font* command from the *format* menu.



3. Uncheck the box for labeled “superscript”. Then click the *OK* button.



To manually replace a fraction character, backspace over the character and retype the numbers.

## Reference

American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.