



MLA, Numbers, and You

MLA style has specific guidelines when it comes to writing numbers. But of course, there are variations and exceptions. Here's a brief look at the most common ways to handle numbers.

When writing about literature or a subject that does not require frequent use of numbers, spell out numbers that can be written in one or two words (*five, twenty-seven, two hundred, three thousand, four million*), but use Arabic numerals to represent all others ($2\frac{1}{2}$, 101, 158, 3,458).

Examples: *I have ninety-nine problems, but numbers are not one of them.*
 He stuffed 168 envelopes yesterday.

However, if you are working with a subject that requires frequent use of numbers, such as a scientific paper, you will use numerals for all numbers that precede technical units of measurement (*16 amperes, 5 milliliters*), as well as for numbers that are presented together and refer to similar things, such as comparisons or experimental data (4 to 15). Spell out all other numbers that can be written in one or two words.

Example: *In the ten years covered by the study, the number of participating institutions in the United States doubled, and membership in the six-state region rose from 4 to 15.*

Other key points about MLA numbers:

- With an abbreviation or symbol: 6 lbs., 4:20 p.m., 3%, 8 KB, \$9, 2"
- In an address: 4401 13th Avenue
- In dates: 1 April 2001 or April 1, 2001, the twentieth century (when by itself), twentieth-century literature, 19 BC or AD 565, and 19 BCE or 565 CE
- Indicating time of day: 2:00 p.m., five o'clock (spell the number when using o'clock), a quarter to twelve or half past ten (spell the number when time is expressed in quarter or half hours)
- In decimal fractions: 8.3
- In page references: page 7
- Large numbers can use a combination of numerals and words: 4.5 million
- Ranges of numbers: 2-3, 21-48, 923-1,003, 1,003-05
- Ranges of years: 1898-1989, 2000-08, 748-742 BC, 143 BC-AD 149 (BC and AD are required when giving a range that starts before AD 1)

Adapted by Jared Miller from:
MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Paper

Need more help? Schedule an appointment with the Writing Studio in 2420, Park Place at
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