Acronyms and Abbreviations

Edit for the Harvard audience, but “when in doubt, spell it out.”

Unclear acronyms

If acronym is unclear, e.g., AID, which could be Agency for International Development, Army Intelligence Department, Association for International Development, or something else, first research the possibilities online or in a dictionary. With multiple possibilities, it’s best to go to source ( alum) to clarify, but consider the audience: the AARP may be unfamiliar to you, but anyone over fifty-five knows it stands for American Association for Retired Persons.

Spell out military ranks and decoration acronyms. For reference list, see Resources.

Narrative copy

Spell out the acronym and in parenthesis include the abbreviation for the first reference. Use the acronym thereafter.

“The Class Report Office (CRO) is now located at 124 Mount Auburn Street. Alums are sometimes confused and head to the CRO’s old location at 8 Story Street behind Crate and Barrel.”

If an acronym immediately follows in the next sentence, do not spell out first reference.

“The Center for Training and Development offers a number of courses in technology. CTD is located on the third floor of 124 Mount Auburn Street.”

We use 't'l and 'round, not till or round

State names

Always spell out state names in narratives.

“We flew over Atlanta, Georgia,” not “We flew over Atlanta, GA.”

University or colleges

Spell out university and college in running text. But feel free to acronyms like UNC or UCLA or UMass if that’s how the author originally had it. See the list of Acronyms of Harvard Schools.

“My daughter is enrolled at Wellesley College.”

“My daughter is enrolled at Wellesley.”

Not “My daughter is enrolled at Wellesley Coll.”

"Versus"

Abbreviate versus as vs. except in the instance of legal cases, in which case you would use v. instead.

Patriots vs. Steelers

Brown v. Board of Education.

Periods in acronyms

Generally no periods are used in acronyms, but there are a few exceptions.

YMCA, PTA, MSPCA, IPO, SEC, NGO, CEO, CFO, CIO, CTO, UK, UN, US, USA, NYC, SF, USSR, PRC, MS (mail stop), PMB

L.A., i.k.a., a.k.a., D.C., P.O., R.R., C.R., etc. (no spaces in between)

Address abbreviations

In stats, we abbreviate most address segments, with a few exceptions. We spell out all floor numbers in running text and stats for first through tenth, numbers thereafter.
If the address is the name of the building—One Post Office Square, One Microsoft Way—spell out the number One and Square or Place. In all other cases the number appears as a numeral.

Spell out University, College, Institute, etc., when part of business address:

- English Dept., University of Pennsylvania.

**Do not abbreviate**

1. "First" through "tenth" as numbers in street names or floors of buildings; always spell out "Floor";

2. SUNY, CUNY, UCLA, etc., when part of an address line;

3. "Saint" to "St." when it conflicts with an abbreviation of "street" to "St."

   - 123 Saint Mark’s St. (not 123 St. Mark’s St.)

4. Compass points on Central Park or "End" avenues;

   - Central Park West (not Central Park W.)
   - West End Ave. (not W. End Ave.)
   - Avenue of the Americas

5. Commonly known acronyms;

6. The list of street types below:

   - Circle, Center, Court, Cove, Crescent, Drive, Fort, Lane, Mount, Park, Plaza, Point, Room, Route, Suite, Trace, Trail, Turnpike

**Do abbreviate (in stats)**


If Co., Inc., Ltd., or Corp. is a part of the full name, then spell out.

- The Nature Company