

Dates and Numbers

There is a variety of ways of writing dates and numbers in English texts which can often lead to confusion for language learners. Below is a series of guidelines to help you to write dates and numbers properly. Whichever method you adopt, remember to be consistent throughout the text you are writing.

Dates

1. Dates are usually written like this: number + month + year

The following are both acceptable and a comma can be included after the month. The day of the week can also precede the number.

Rita Levi Montalcini died on 30 December 2012.

Rita Levi Montalcini died on Sunday 30th December 2012.

2. This is how to write centuries.

The twentieth century OR The 20th century was characterised by technological innovations.

NOT The XXth century

3. Be careful with ordinal numbers. They all end with 'th' apart from first/1st; second/2nd; third/3rd.

It was her thirtieth birthday last Monday. Mary arrived second in the competition.

4. Timespans. Dates can be linked by a dash, the words 'from ... to' or 'between ... and'.

1950 - 1994

16 September 2004 - 30 April 2005

from 1950 to 1994

from 16 September 2004 to 30 April 2005

between 1950 and 1994

between 16 September 2004 and 30 April 2005

Numbers

1. Generally, numbers consisting of one or two words are written fully. Nonetheless, it is acceptable to write numbers up to ninety-nine as words.

Can you buy me six bottles of wine? NOT Can you buy me 6 bottles of wine?

William has four brothers. NOT William has 4 brothers.

2. Large numbers tend to be written as numerals as they are clearer to read.

There were 750 pupils in the school. NOT There were seven hundred and fifty pupils in the school.

3. However, if a sentence starts with a number, no matter how big, it should be written out in words.

Two students were late. NOT 2 students were late.

Seven hundred and fifty people were in the school. NOT 750 people were in the school.

4. Fractions tend to be written as words. Those that contain two parts have a hyphen.

Two-thirds of the students come from Italy. NOT 2/3 of the students come from Italy.

A quarter of the class is Italian. NOT A 1/4 of the class is Italian.

5. Numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine are also written with a hyphen.

Most students graduate at the age of twenty-four.

6. Numbers with five digits or more are written either with a space or a comma (not a full stop) before every three digits counting from right to left.

11, 287 OR 11 287 NOT 11.287

943,205 OR 943 205 NOT 943.205

7. Percentages are written with a full stop (not a comma). You can either use the symbol or write the words 'per cent'. This can also be expressed as one word: percent.

17.8% OR 17.8 per cent NOT 17,8%

Note also that no article is needed before the percentage.

Sixteen per cent of primary school teachers are male.