

America 250 NC
Style Guide for Community Partners



North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural
Resources

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Style Guide

Introduction

Experts disagree about the capitalization of American Revolutionary War terms. To facilitate consistency in our writing, we have developed this reference guide. This guide is a quick reference for style, formatting, terminology, and best practices when writing about the American Revolution. At the same time, you can apply the concepts in this guide broadly.

Recommendations follow the Chicago Manual of Style to the largest extent possible. We have adapted sections of this guide from several existing publications, including the Office of Archives and History: Guide for Authors and Editors and the Journal of the American Revolution Style Guide. For style or formatting questions not addressed, consult the Chicago Manual of Style. You can find a comprehensive list of the materials consulted in the resources section.

Glossaries of Revolutionary War Terms

[Museum of the American Revolution Season of Independence Glossary](#)
[American Battlefield Trust Glossary of Revolutionary War Terms](#)

General Style and Format

American Revolution

The American Revolution and the American Revolutionary War are two different events. The former includes the latter, which occurred 1775–1783. Use the full title of the period or the war first; “Revolution” is acceptable thereafter.

Dates

Always month, then day, then year. (e.g., “July 4, 1776” not “4 July 1776.”) If only referencing a month and a year, do not separate them with a comma (e.g., “July 1776” not “July, 1776”).

When referencing a full date, also use a comma after the year when the sentence continues (e.g., “On July 2, 1776, Congress voted for independence.”). Do not use ordinals in dates (e.g., “July 4” not “July 4th”); the only exception is when using the number only (“The Declaration was signed on July 2 and made public on the 4th.”) Dates are not possessive, do not use a possessive apostrophe.

- On July 2, 1776, Congress voted for independence.
- Early in July 1776, Congress met and voted for independence.
- 1700s not 1700’s

Capitalization

Uses the Chicago Manual of Style throughout unless otherwise noted. See Resources for additional reference material.

act: Capitalize within titles (e.g., Sugar Act, Stamp Act, Townshend Acts) and use lowercase “act” when referenced without the title (e.g., “The Stamp Act received Royal assent on March 22, 1765, but the act was repealed the following year.”)

African American and Black: Both should be capitalized when referencing the cultural groups and are not necessarily interchangeable. Lowercase “people of color.” “Black people” should be used as the plural form of Black.

American colonies: Lowercase colonies. The British North American colonies, American colonies, the colonies, etc.

American Indians: (Indians, Indigenous, Native, or Native American): Capitalize. See [Treatment of Words and Phrases](#) for additional information.

military units: Words such as *army* and *navy* are lowercase when standing alone, when used collectively in the plural, or when not part of an official title. Capitalize the full official titles of armies and other military units. (e.g. the army, *but* The U.S. Army, Confederate States Army, *but* Confederate army; Thirty-ninth Regiment North Carolina Troops; a North Carolina regiment, the British navy, *but* Royal Navy, Continental navy, Continental army, Washington's army).

Battles: Capitalize full titles of battles. Capitalize the word “Battle” for full titles. Battle of Princeton, etc. Lowercase “the battle” when not part of the full title (e.g., “The battle went on for two hours”). Battles with specific formatting: Siege of Ninety Six (Capitalize “S” in six and no hyphen), Battle of Moores Creek Bridge (no ‘s).

centuries: Spell out with no capitalization (e.g., eighteenth century).

Congress: Capitalize First Continental Congress, Second Continental Congress, Continental Congress, or Congress when referring to the American legislature or a foreign body with the same term. For state congresses, use lowercase “congress.” See also Continental Congress.

Campaigns: Southern Campaign, Northern Campaign, Snow Campaign, etc.

Continental: Capitalize. As in Continental army and Continental currency.

Continental Congress: First Continental Congress and Second Continental Congress; not 1st and 2nd. Capitalize both words when only using “Continental Congress” and capitalize all three words when including “First” or “Second.”

Events: Capitalize most historical and cultural events (Boston Tea Party; Edenton Tea Party).

Loyalist: Capitalize. Same with Tory.

nonconsumption: Do not hyphenate and do not capitalize unless part of a title.

nonimportation: Do not hyphenate and do not capitalize unless part of a title.

numbers (basic): Spell out numbers up to and including one hundred (e.g., zero, one, ten, ninety-six, 104, 212); spell out whole numbers up to and including one hundred when followed by “hundred,” “thousand,” “hundred thousand,” “million,” “billion,” and so on (e.g., eight hundred, 12,908, three hundred thousand, twenty-seven trillion). If your sentence or paragraph includes several number references, we are flexible on style if doing so improves clarity. For example, use matching styles per category: “It took three cannons to kill 400 British regulars in one battle and two hundred cannons to kill 50 British regulars in another.” If there are two numbers and one is above 100 use numerals for both (e.g., “The unit had 4 cannons and 400 muskets.”).

numbers (beginning a sentence): Spell out numbers that begin a sentence or reword to avoid. Try “The year 1776” instead of “Seventeen seventy-six.”

Olive Branch Petition: Capitalize all three words.

Patriot: Capitalize. Same with Whig. “Rebels” can be used as an alternative to “Patriots.”

people of color: Lowercase.

ranks (military): Military ranks/titles are capitalized and abbreviated before the full name for the first mention, then capitalized and spelled out before the surname (e.g., Gen. George Washington, General Greene). Without a name, a rank is spelled out and lowercase (e.g., the general). Common abbreviations include:

- general – Gen.
- lieutenant general – Lt. Gen.
- major general – Maj. Gen.
- brigadier general – Brig. Gen.
- colonel – Col.
- lieutenant colonel – Lt. Col.
- major – Maj.
- Captain – Capt.
- admiral – Adm.
- vice admiral – Vice Adm.
- rear admiral upper half – Rear Adm.
- rear admiral lower half – Rear Adm.
- captain – Capt.
- commander – Cmdr.
- lieutenant commander – Lt. Cmdr.
- lieutenant – Lt.

regiment: Lowercase “regiment” unless part of an official title (e.g., “2nd Virginia Regiment” and “Royal Ethiopian Regiment” *but* “a North Carolina regiment”) and use ordinal numerals.

Regions: Capitalize place names (Raleigh) and geographic areas (Outer Banks; Coastal Plain; Piedmont). Capitalize regions of the United States (Northeast; South; West), but lowercase regions of North Carolina (southeast; west). Lowercase adjectives derived from them (eastern United States; western North Carolina).

regulars: Do not capitalize unless part of a title. (British regulars, light infantry.) Same applies to marines, grenadiers, light infantrymen, and riflemen. British marines weren't Royal Marines until the early 1800s.

revolution/revolutionary: Capitalize the Revolution and Revolutionary when referring to this event and era. When referring to political revolution in general and things related to it, lowercase (e.g., The American Revolutionaries emphasis on natural rights was truly revolutionary.).

Royal: Capitalize when part of an official title or name (e.g., "Royal Highness," "Royal Navy").

seasons: All lowercase – fall, spring, winter, summer.

ships: Italicize the ship name. Do not use italicized punctuation following an italicized word. HMS and USS are ship prefixes and do not require periods or spaces and are not italicized (e.g., USS *Constitution*).

titles (government officials and bodies): Use lowercase unless writing the formal title (e.g., Boston Committee of Correspondence, kings of Europe, King George III, town committee). Do not capitalize individual personal titles unless followed by the title person's name (e.g., Go ask the president. That belongs to President Adams. John Adams, as president, was commander in chief. John Hancock, the president of the Continental Congress. Go ask the prime minister. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. The king. The king of France. The royal governor of New Jersey.)

titles (nobility): When referring to members of the European nobility by their title, British noblemen who hold their noble title in their own right and whose family name is part of their title should be referred to by first name, title, and surname. If these noblemen hold military rank, the rank should precede their first name (e.g., Lieutenant General Charles, Earl Cornwallis, or Lieutenant Colonel Francis, Lord Rawdon). British noblemen whose title is associated with a geographic location should be referred to by their full name followed by their title (e.g., William Legge, Earl of Dartmouth). After first mention, usage of simply the surname or title is acceptable (e.g., Cornwallis, Dartmouth). "Lord" is an acceptable substitute for the actual title of all British noblemen (e.g., Lord Dartmouth, Lord Cornwallis). The sons of a duke or marquis, the two highest ranking positions in the British nobility, who do not hold a title in their own right, are referred to by their full names preceded by the courtesy title "lord" (e.g., Lord William Campbell).

French and German nobility are referred to in a slightly different manner from British nobles. In the case of French nobles, the title follows their full name, with military rank, if applicable, preceding the name (e.g., Lieutenant General Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau). When referencing German nobles, use first name(s), title, and surname (e.g.,

Friedrich Adolph, Baron de Riedesel). In the case of French and German nobles, the generic "lord" used for British nobility does not apply.

Tory: Capitalize. Same with Loyalist.

Whig: Capitalize. Same with Patriot.

White: Capitalize. White people; Whites; White colonists.

Treatment of Words and Phrases

Our goal is to provide you with the tools to communicate in a way that is respectful of all individuals. This guide is not comprehensive; it will focus on common language you might encounter when engaging with topics around the American Revolution. It is essential to remember that language is constantly changing. If you are working with a specific community, use their preferred terminology and avoid harmful or outdated language. Understand that communities are not static or monolithic; different parts of a larger community may prefer different terminology. If you are going to reach out to a community to inquire about language, do your research first. You may find your answer on their website, social media, or other platform.

American Indians

Use past, present, and future tenses to discuss American Indians. Avoid generalization; numerous American Indian Nations share geography with North Carolina, each with a unique and distinct history. When known, use specific tribal or nation names. Refrain from using terminology and phrases that perpetuate stereotypes. When possible, use terminology that members of the community use to describe themselves collectively.

African Americans

Black can be used regardless of nationality, while African American is specific to Americans of African, and especially Black African, descent. Today, some individuals in the United States identify with both terms, while others prefer one term over the other; some may prefer a different but related term (e.g., Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latino). When known, use an individual's self-identifier. See the list of accepted terminology:

Asian Americans

The Asian diaspora includes not only East Asian people but also South, Southeast, Central and West Asian. When possible, use terminology that members of the community use to describe themselves collectively. People of Asian descent, Asian people, Asian American, and when known specific nationalities such as Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, etc. are also appropriate.

The Institution of Slavery

When discussing the institution of slavery, focus on using accurate terminology that reflects the experiences and perspectives of those affected. It is also important to listen to and prioritize the

preferences of communities regarding terminology related to their heritage and history. When known, use an individual's self-identifier. Below is a list of accepted terms:

- **The Institution of Slavery or Chattel Slavery:** instead of “slavery”
- **Enslaver:** instead of “slaveowner” or “slave holder”
- **Freedom Seeker, Self-emancipated, or self-liberated:** instead of “runaway” or “escaped slave”
- **Enslaved, enslaved person:** instead of “slave/slaves”
- **Unrecorded:** instead of “unknown”

Names of Historical Figures

It became standard in the 1800s to refer to women using their maiden and married names, for example, Mercy Otis Warren or Judith Sargent Murray. However, this style was not the standard of naming in the eighteenth century. As a result, some women are best known today only by first name and married name, for example, Abigail Adams and Dolley Madison. In general, leave out the maiden names unless someone commonly used them in their lifetime. Writers from the time also tend to reference women by their first names on the second mention. Refer to people by their first and last names on the first mention, then their last names after that. For example, “The people voted John Adams as the second president of the United States. Adams served one term.” “Phillis Wheatley wrote poems on various subjects during the American Revolution. Wheatley wrote one of her poems about George Washington.” After first mention, use chosen names if a person had a chosen name, such as an enslaved or freed person changing their name.

Tips and Best Practices for Historical Writing

Active Voice

Use active voice. In historical writing, the passive voice fails to identify who or what performed the action you are describing, which results in excessive wordiness. For example: “The cavalrymen charged the artillery battery.” is preferable to “The artillery battery was charged by the cavalrymen.”

To learn more, read the Grammarly Blog [Active vs Passive Voice](#). For additional help, the [Hemingway Editor](#) is a free online tool to identify the passive voice in your writing.

Past Tense

Write about historical events in the past tense.

Chronology

Keeping your narrative in chronological order will facilitate understanding and avoid unnecessary confusion. While not always feasible, it is recommended. When necessary, to improve clarity, you can write out dates in parentheses.

Example: During the French and Indian War (1754-1763), most battles occurred in New York, Pennsylvania, Canada, and Nova Scotia.

Evaluating Perspectives in Source Materials

Who wrote your sources? What do you know about the author's background or experiences that could provide valuable context? What assumptions does the author make? What biases are evident? What is the author's agenda? Who was the intended audience? Why did they write it? Who are they writing it for? How does this source compare with other contemporary sources? Does it privilege a particular point of view? These are all important questions to ask when evaluating sources.

For example, there are several reports recounting what occurred during the Boston Massacre, the very name of which invokes certain feelings in a reader. British soldiers and bystanders wrote about the event that transpired on March 12, 1770. Consider the reasons, motivations, and intended audience of each source. How do they differ? How are they similar? How might reading only one affect your understanding of events?

Boston Massacre: British Perspective

[A Fair Account of the Late Unhappy Disturbance in Boston](#) compiled by lawyer Francis Maseres and Lieutenant Colonel William Dalrymple of the British 29th Regiment; Massachusetts Historical Society.

Boston Massacre: Colonist Perspective

[Reactions and Responses, Perspectives on the Boston Massacre](#), Massachusetts Historical Society.

To learn more, explore the Bowdoin College guide: [How to Read a Primary Source](#).

Content Warnings

Another practice to consider is the inclusion of a content warning when needed. A content warning is a clear written or verbal statement provided before someone experiences potentially difficult content. Content warnings can encompass a broad range of topics, including environmental factors like loud noises and flashing lights in exhibits or videos.

To learn more about content warnings and how to incorporate them into your work, read [Content Warnings in Museums and Galleries: Taking a Proactive Approach](#).

Resources

Reference guide for Wayside Makers, Civil War Trails;
https://civilwartrails.org/docs/CWT_sign-procedures.pdf.

Journal of the American Revolution Style Guide; <https://allthingsliberty.com/style/>.

The Impacts of Words and Tips for Using Appropriate Terminology, National Museum of the American Indian: <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/informational/impact-words-tips>

Inclusive Language Series: APIDA vs AAPI, University of Wisconsin-Madison;
<https://www.housing.wisc.edu/2024/04/inclusive-language-series-apida-vs-aapi-2/>

The Vocabulary of Freedom, Underground Railroad Education Center:
<https://undergroundrailroadhistory.org/the-vocabulary-of-freedom/>

Language of Enslavement, NPS: <https://www.nps.gov/frdo/learn/education/language-of-enslavement.htm>

Guide for Writing in History, Southwestern University;
<https://www.southwestern.edu/live/files/4173-guide-for-writing-in-historypdf>

Style Guide for Authors and Editors, North Carolina Historical Research Office; the link can be found toward the bottom of the page <https://www.dncr.nc.gov/about-us/history/division-historical-resources/north-carolina-historical-publications> or automatic download the Word document <https://www.dncr.nc.gov/style-guide-authors-and-editors/download?attachment>.