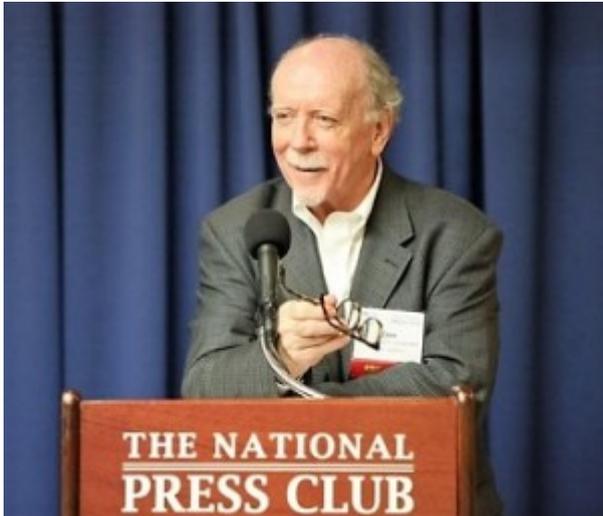


# Editing Prayers Answered: AP Publishes 2016 Bible of Journalism & PR Style

*By Don Bates, APR, Fellow PRSA*



Language changes. So does writing style and never so much as in the fourth estate. The 2016 edition of the [Associated Press Stylebook](#) is no exception. It reflects key changes and additions that have ballooned it from 60 pages in 1953 to 561 pages in this 51<sup>st</sup> edition. It's published in print and digital form, and for the first time as an interactive e-book for Kindle, Nook, Kobo and iBooks. There's a Spanish version, as well.

As Gary Pruitt, AP president and CEO, explains: "Today's Stylebook still outlines basic rules of grammar, punctuation, usage and journalistic style, but it also reflects changes in common language, offers guidance on media law, explains AP's news values and principles, and helps to navigate the ever-changing world of social media."

Most important for writers and editors in public relations, publishing, advertising and marketing, the AP guide provides thousands of usage rules – e.g., how to handle job titles, headlines, street addresses, company names, new technology

terminology. In turn, this knowledge gets reflected as a standard these writers' readers can understand in virtually any context.

The 2016 edition contains over 240 new and modified entries. One of the main changes is *internet*, now spelled lowercase as in Webster's New World College Dictionary, AP's preferred dictionary. Now, *web* is also lowercase in all instances, and *webpage* and *webfeed* are one word. *Voicemail* is one word. Dozens of new entries in the food section include *medjool dates*, *kombucha*, *shawarma*, *mescal*, *microgreens* and *horchata* (a penny if you know what all these words mean without looking them up). And the Stylebook clarifies the forms for such terms as *happy holidays*, *merry Christmas* and *season's greetings*. Yes, it's *merry Christmas* unless it's an exclamation, *Merry Christmas!* But it's *Happy holidays!* *Season's greetings!* *Happy birthday!*

Two entries [PR](#) writers should definitely heed are *dash* and *hyphen* since so many confuse the two, or more accurately, confuse hyphen as a dash. In AP style (and in all style manuals), a dash denotes an abrupt change in thought or an emphatic pause. Its punctuation requires an *em* dash with spaces on both sides.

**Example:**

I said I was leaving – despite his insistence that I stay – and I left.

Technically, this dash is three times wider than a hyphen. You can use three successive dashes on most keyboards to make the extended dash, hit return, then hit the “back” button. Many writers use two dashes to get a similar effect. In lists, AP uses dashes instead of bullets, and periods, not semi-colons, at the end of each listed item.

**Example:**

Jones gave the following reasons:

- He never ordered the package.
- If he did, it didn't come.
- If it did, he sent it back.

Another important entry for PR writers is *media*, which now reads: "Generally takes a plural verb, especially when the reference is to individual outlets: *Media are lining up for and against the proposal*. The word is often preceded by "the." Sometimes used with a singular verb when referring to media as a monolithic group: *The media plays a major role in political campaigns*."

### **Changes to the 2016 Stylebook also include:**

- 50 new and updated technology terms, including emoji, emoticon and metadata.
- Entries discouraging the use of child prostitute and mistress; restricting spree to shopping or revelry, not killing; and using the number of firefighters or quantity of equipment sent to a fire, not the number of alarms.
- DJ is now allowed on first reference, and spokesperson is recognized, in addition to spokesman and spokeswoman.
- New guidance on the terms marijuana, cannabis and pot; cross dresser and transvestite; accident and crash; notorious and notoriety.
- New entry on data journalism.

To meet the needs of PR writers who prefer different formats for different purposes, the Stylebook now comes in print, spiral-bound, online and e-book editions. Among its companion products, the "AP Styleguard" provides automatic checking for AP style in MS Word and Outlook. "AP Lingofy" proofs content you create as you post to WordPress, Blogger, Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook and more.

To learn more about AP style products, go to [apstylebook.com](http://apstylebook.com).

If you do, say a prayer that somewhere in writer heaven there's a special place for the people who started this reference work over a half century ago. Maybe put a word in for sainthood, too.

***About the Author:** Don Bates, APR, Fellow PRSA, teaches PR writing and management at New York University. He also teaches public and private PR and business writing workshops that address today's new writing formulary and accompanying new rules. Contact Don at [db155@nyu.edu](mailto:db155@nyu.edu).*