

## American Media Institute's 12 Commandments:

- I. We always say "said." Never "added," "replied," "contended," or anything else other than said.
- II. Never start a sentence with the date. Ever. In general, time elements belong in the middle or the end of a sentence. The only exceptions to this rule are words or phrases like "later that day" or "next" or similar phrases that indicate the continuation of a sequence of events that was previously established.
- III. Quote first, attribute second. "Run!" John said. Not, John said "run!" Similarly, "according to" and other source attributions belong at the middle or the end of a sentence. "Water freezes at 32 degrees," according to an Energy dept. report. Never: According to the Department of Energy, "water freezes at 32 degrees."
- IV. When in doubt, consult the AP Style Book. If AP Style is silent on a subject, refer to "The Bloomberg Way," that wire service's style guide. This is especially true with regard to capitalization. In general, we only want to capitalize proper nouns (people's names, formal names of government departments or corporations and so on).
- V. American Media Institute exists to break news. Repeating previously reported quotes from other news organizations is unacceptable unless the very quote is at the center of the story. In all cases, the quote must be independently verified by the reporter. We do not recycle quotes from other publications or outlets; we call or contact sources directly and obtain fresh and original quotes.
- VI. Minimize at all costs the practice of sourcing or referencing partisan media outlets, blogs, newscasts, talk radio etc. These are not objective sources upon which to build a proper news story.
- VII. Sources for information should be made clear in every article. "According to" is your friend, as long as it is at the middle or the end of a sentence.
- VIII. Do not opine. You are a referee who impartially calls the plays, not a cheerleader or a player. Do not say that A caused B, but instead quote a source saying that he believed A caused B. Or simply state that A happened, then B happened. Stick to the facts.
- IX. Do not use adverbs and use adjectives sparingly. Never use adjectives to label the arguments of people on one side of a debate. Do not refer to the "liberal Bookings Institution" or the "conservative Heritage Foundation."
- X. Never begin a lede with a dependent clause. Ledes should be short and powerful, reveal what is new and interesting and, if possible, be memorable and colorful. Remember, in this online age, we have 17 words or fewer to seize a reader's attention.
- XI. Never say "for example." If it is clearly an example, then adding "for example" is redundant. If it is not clearly an example, you have a larger problem that adding "for example" doesn't fix.
- XII. Omit surplus words. Scrutinize copy to eliminate anything needless, redundant, opinionated, nugatory or supernumerary. Rarely use any of the words that appeared in the previous sentence. The simple Anglo-Saxon words that you learned before the 6<sup>th</sup> grade are best, not the Latin and Greek-based words that you learned in high school or college.