

Feedback 32 Report

Thanks to those of you who sent in participated in Feedback 32 on dates, numbers and quantities. We received a total of 139 responses to the questionnaire, both online and in hard copy, with 44 responses in Age group 4 (65+), 56 in Age group 3 (45-64), 20 in Age group 2 (25-44), and 19 in Age group 1 (10-24). In the results presented below, Age groups 1 and 2 have been put together, so as to create a reasonable base for comparison. Special thanks go to students in the Diploma of Professional Writing & Editing course at the University of Ballarat (32), and the Sunset Coast Literati, WA (4) who sent in multiple feedbacks.

21st century dates

Feedback 32 revisited some numerical issues from earlier Feedbacks. The questions about what to call 21st century dates were first posed at the turn of the millennium in Feedback 13 (AS 7.1, May 1999). It was interesting to observe whether the nomenclature had now firmed up, at the end of the first decade. While we only had half as many responses in our most recent survey as to the 1999 questionnaire, it's still revealing to compare some trends (see below, Table 1). "The two thousands" was the strongly preferred option in both instances, although the addition of "the noughties" as an option reduced the vote for the two thousands from 75% to 60% overall. For the particular year, the wordy "two thousand and" was preferred to "twenty O" in both surveys, but in a reversal from 1999, the more succinct twenty tens is now preferred to the two thousand and tens for the decade (1999 – 40%, 60%; 2010 – 68%, 32%). This reversal was particularly evident in the youngest age group, 62% of which chose the two thousand and tens in 1999, while 76% went for the twenty tens in 2010. There was also a slight overall preference for the shorter form for the individual date twenty fifteen (55%) rather than two thousand and fifteen (45%) in our most recent survey, but this was not tested in Feedback 13.

Table 1

Feedback 32	Total (139)	Age 1+2 (39)	Age3 (56)	Age 4 (44)
1. the twenty Os	9%	3%	8%	16%
the two thousands	60%	62%	56%	66%
the noughties	31%	35%	36%	18%
2. two thousand and five	86%	100%	93%	70%
twenty O five	12%	0%	7%	26%
two double O five	1%	0%	0%	5%
3. the two thousand and tens	32%	24%	37%	33%
the twenty tens	68%	76%	63%	67%
Feedback 13	Total (279)	Age 1+2 (95)	Age3 (93)	Age 4 (88)
1. the twenty Os	10%	9%	11%	12%
the two thousands	75%	75%	75%	75%
the twenty hundreds	15%	16%	14%	13%
2. two thousand and two	81%	88%	77%	73%
twenty O two	16%	10%	19%	25%
two double O two	13%	2%	4%	2%
3. the two thousand and tens	60%	62%	58%	59%
the twenty tens	40%	38%	42%	41%

AD/BC

Several other numerical issues covered in Feedback 32 followed up on Feedback 14 “Spaced Out”, (AS 7.2, December 1999). Another dating issue, covered by both of these surveys, is the use of the abbreviations BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini). BC has traditionally appeared after the date, and Feedback 14 and 32 both support this convention, with the percentage choosing this option increasing in the later survey (from 84% to 97% overall). Conversely, in academic circles at least, AD has tended to be placed before the date. Feedback 14 acknowledged this possibility with a split of 73% after to 27% before. Feedback 32 suggested that the split convention is disappearing, with a stronger preference for placing AD after the date (90%), bringing it close to the figures for BC. There was very little support for the use of the alternative abbreviations BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era), with 81% of respondents to Feedback 32 saying they would never use them.

Mobile phone numbers

There’s no doubt that mobile phones are more ubiquitous now than a decade ago, so it’s hardly surprising that the conventions for expressing mobile numbers seem to have hardened. In Feedback 14, the choice appeared to vary by age: the youngest narrowly preferring the pattern 4 digits + 2 + 4 (0406 66 4666), and the oldest going for the equivalent of the old country telephone number: 3 + 3 + 4 (040 666 4666). The pattern that has established itself as favourite across all ages is 4+3+3 (0406 664 666), with 79% approval from Age1+2, 89% from Age 3 and 90% from Age 4. Curiously, it is the youngest age group that retains a penchant for the 3 + 3 + 4 (21%) pattern, with 4 + 2 + 4 having fallen completely out of favour.

Spaced out

The other comparison of results that can be made between Feedback 14 and 32 is over the choice of using a space between a figure and a unit – in the earlier survey the example is am/pm, and in the latest it is kg. The *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers* (6th ed., 2002), recommend that am/pm follow the same convention as IS units such as km/kg by having a space between the number and the unit. The results for am/pm showed an almost equal balance of preferences (52% no space. 48% space) with the first three age groups voting for no space by a proportion of 3:2, and the oldest group preferring a space by the same margin (see Table 2). The preference for no space is much stronger with kg – 78% overall against 22% for space, with a massive 96% of the youngest age group opting for it. The oldest group again prefers the spaced version, but by a slightly smaller margin than with am/pm (54% to 46%). This divergence might indicate a general belief that there should be no space between numbers and units, with the status of kg as part of the International System of units giving it stronger support.

Table 2

Feedback 32	Total (139)		Age 1+2 (39)		Age3 (56)		Age 4 (44)	
10kg	39	78%	23	96%	10	77%	6	46%
10 kg	11	22%	1	4%	3	23%	7	54%
Feedback 14	Total (290)		Age 1+2 (51)		Age 3 (129)		Age 4 (109)	
10pm	143	52%	30	60%	70	57%	43	43%
10 pm	131	48%	20	40%	53	43%	58	57%

The 65+ age group appears to be more aware of the convention described in the *Style Manual*. What this space should be called – a hard space, non-breaking or unbreakable space – elicited few responses when applied to the example of five digit numbers. Hard space had a slight preference amongst those that expressed an opinion.

Gb/GB

Another question about symbols involved the capitalisation of ‘b’ in the abbreviation for gigabyte: Gb/GB. The overall preference (60% to 40%) was for GB, which tallies with the *Style Manual* recommendation to use this to maintain the technical distinction between the unit ‘bit’ – usually symbolised by a lowercase ‘b’ – and a ‘byte’ which is a multiple of a ‘bit’.

Number spans

Australian *Style* readers didn’t completely agree with the *Style Manual* on number spans. The recommendation is to use the minimal amount of characters necessary for clarity, e.g. 11-12 not 11-2, but 125-7 not 125-27. Our respondents uniformly preferred the simpler 105-7 to 105-07, and the less ambiguous 115-17 to 115-7. However, they still went for the longer form when there was less chance of confusion, choosing 125-27 and 1345-47 rather than 125-7 and 1345-7 by a ratio of 3:2 overall.

Midday/midnight

Finally, while there was almost no argument that half-past midnight is 12.30 am, and half-past midday 12.30 pm, there still appears to be some resistance to the use of the 24 hour clock to mark this distinction. Remarkably, a preference for 00.30 to express midnight increased with age, only 16% of those aged 44 and under choosing it, as opposed to 28% for the age range 45-64, and 44% of those 65 years and above.

Click [here](#) for previous (Feedback 31) report.