

personal english



Grammar Tidbit #28

Writing Dates



The United States has a rather unique way of writing the date that is imitated in very few other countries (notably, **Canada** and **Belize**). In America, the date is formally written in **month/day/year** form. Thus, "January 1, 2017" is widely considered to be correct. In formal usage, it is not appropriate to omit the year, or to use a purely numerical form of the date. For example, if you were to write a formal letter for business, you would write out the entire date, including the name of the month (January 1, 2017). Writing it out in full allows for the notation to be understood even by people for whom the month/day/year form is relatively uncommon.

Europeans write the date in a different way and the accepted standards are changing. The format used depends on the country. In much of Europe, the date is written out in **day/month/year** format, also known as '**little endian form.**' Thus, January 31, 2017 would actually be known as 31/1/17 in short numerical notation. Many countries have adopted the **ISO standard of year-month-day**. For example, 2017-1-31. Although officially **Sweden** uses the ISO standard, some continue to use date/month year or date/month 'last two numbers of the year. For example, 31/1 2017 or 31/1 '17. Formally speaking, the date is typically written similarly to the way it would be written formally in America. For example, January 31, 2011 would simply have the month and day switched around, for 31 January 2011. Notice that in this formal version of the date, there is no comma. The **comma** separating the date from the year is an **Americanism** that Europeans do not follow.



Big Endian Form

Hungary and many **Asian countries** use big endian form when writing the date; this form places **the year first**:
2017 January 31

Day of the Week

When writing the day of the week, the American and common European ways of formally writing the date would put the **weekday first**: "Saturday, January 1, 2011." Using the **big endian form, the day of the week actually follows the rest of the date**. Thus, on a formal piece of writing, you would have 2011 January 1, Saturday.