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Jr. Naming Etiquette

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This article discusses the etiquette "rules" governing the name suffixes, *Jr.* and Roman numerals *II*, *III*, and so on. One of the main issues considered is how those suffixes change upon the death of a parent or relative. Other issues consider punctuation and formatting.

KEYWORDS naming, *Jr.*, *II*, *III*, suffix, namesake, punctuation, formatting

Introduction

An estimated 25 percent of children born in the United States have the same first and middle names as a parent or grandparent (McAndrew et al., 2002). Most of these namesaked children are male (McAndrew et al., 2002). Boys are more likely to be named after a father, grandfather, and so on, on their father's side of the family than on their maternal side, whereas the opposite is true for girls (McAndrew et al., 2002). One reason for such namesaking is "family-binding" (Algeo and Algeo, 1983). In addition to being named after a parent or relative, many children are also given a suffix, either a *Jr.* or a Roman numeral, for example, *III*, which is an even stronger onomastic bond (Algeo and Algeo, 1983). The present article discusses the "rules" governing the conventions about those suffixes. Among the issues examined are how those suffixes change upon the death of a parent or relative, where they should appear in a name, how they should be punctuated, and how they should be formatted. These conventions are based on etiquette mavens Emily Post, Amy Vanderbilt, Letitia Baldridge, Llewellyn Miller, and Judith Martin.

Mavens

Emily Post (1872–1960) was born Emily Price and became Emily Post after marrying Edwin Main Post in 1892. The couple named their firstborn son *Edwin Main Post Jr.* Her first book on propriety, *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics, and at Home*, was published in 1922 and became a best seller and was regularly updated. Her daughter-in-law, Elizabeth Post (husband Bill Post) published six subsequent revisions of the seminal etiquette manual. The couple named their second son *Bill Post Jr.* Peggy Post, her successor, is the wife of Emily's great-grandson. Her husband, Peter Post, likewise writes on etiquette. Lizzie Post, Anna Post, and Daniel Post Senning, co-authors of the eighteenth and subsequent editions of the "Post" conduct manuals, are Emily's great-great-granddaughters and great-great-grandson, respectively. Amy

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Vanderbilt (1908–1974) published her first book on social deportment, *Amy Vanderbilt's Complete Book of Etiquette*, in 1952 and it quickly became a bestselling authority on the subject. The book was retitled *Amy Vanderbilt's Etiquette* in later editions, and is still regarded as a standard text on the subject. One of the updates was by Letitia Baldridge (1925–2012), who was social secretary to Jacqueline Kennedy. Her brother, Howard M. Baldridge Jr., was former Secretary of Commerce. Baldridge's image appeared on the November 27 1978 cover of *Time* magazine under the caption, "New American Manners." Llewellyn Miller (1899–1971) was a journalist, drama critic, and editor. Her best-known book on manners, first published in 1957 and subsequently reprinted several times, was *The Encyclopedia of Etiquette*. Judith Martin (b. 1938), better known as "Miss Manners," is a columnist and has been an authority on etiquette since 1978. Her best-known book, published in 1982, is *Miss Manners' Guide To Excruciatingly Correct Behavior*.

Who Is a Jr.?

Junioring a son, or occasionally a daughter, is not as simple as it might seem. In fact, an intricate etiquette has evolved to deal with the various nuances associated with junioring. In the 1600s and 1700s, it was not unusual for a father to name more than one of his sons after himself. To distinguish them, the first son was called *Sr.*, the second, *Jr.* Two such brothers, both named John Porter, appear in records from North Carolina dated 1642. The elder brother, John Porter Sr. died childless. The younger brother, John Porter Jr. also gave his son the name *John Porter Jr.* (Powell, 1979: 5, 126). In Maine during the 1600s Edmund Littlefield did not name his two sons after himself, but gave them the same first name, *Francis*. The older one was *Francis Sr.*, the younger, *Francis Jr.* (McDowell, 1995: 116).

Current etiquette authorities insist that the *Jr.* suffix[1] should only be bestowed if a male child is given the same exact forename, middle name, and surname as his father if he is still alive (Miller, 1962: 393; Post, 2004: 321; Tuckerman and Dunnan, 1995: 636). The abbreviated suffix is always capitalized, e.g. *Jr.* not *jr.* If the suffix is spelled out in full, the first letter is written in lower case—*junior*, not *Junio*r (Tuckerman and Dunnan, 1995, 656; Vanderbilt, 1959: 561). Sometimes when a child named *Jr.* dies, the next child to be born is given the same suffix. This is what happened after President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's firstborn son died in 1909 and his second son was later christened *Jr.* when he was born in 1914.

Most experts on naming conventions insist a girl should never be given the *Jr.* suffix (Vanderbilt, 1959: 500; Miller, 1962: 393). Llewelyn Miller (1962: 393) is adamant on the point; she states categorically that juniorizing girls is an etiquette breaker — "A girl never uses 'Jr.' after her name even though it is the same as that of her mother." Winifred Sackville Stoner ("Mother Stoner"), founder of the Natural Education Movement, Carolina Herrera, the designer; and (Anna) Eleanor Roosevelt are notable exceptions — each named their daughters *Jr.* after themselves. *Younger* or *2nd* are also sometimes used in wills and estates when two women in the same family have the same name. In those cases the younger woman is identified as *younger* to distinguish her from the older woman who may not have been identified as such for tactful rather than legal reasons. It is one thing to be older, comments Miller (1962: 393), it is another to be old.

Numerals

Monarchs and popes use numerals when they take the same name as a predecessor. For monarchs, that predecessor can be a father, but does not have to be. The sons of popes are not supposed to ascend to the papacy after their own fathers die. Their numerals are chosen as a mark of honorific succession not bloodline. To avoid any suggestion of a familial relationship, there is a deliberate choice not to take the name of the preceding pontiff.[2]

Among commoners in countries like the US where English is the official and/or national language, a traditional naming custom is to append the same kind of regal or Vatican numeral to the surnames of boys. Whereas the *Jr.* suffix traditionally denotes direct descent from a father, a *II* is given to a child named after an older relative, like a grandfather or an uncle, or after a famous person to whom he has no biological relationship (Baldridge, 1990: 592; Post, 2004: 312). (Some prefer *2nd*, *3rd*, *4th*, etc., but that is just orthography.) A son with the same name as his father can technically be a *II*, but this is atypical. A noteworthy exception, for example, is US President Barack Hussein Obama who was named after his father, but whose suffix is *II*, instead of *Jr.* (White House Blog, 2011). (For other exceptions, see "rule breakers," below.)

A child named after either a father who is a *Jr.* or after a living grandfather, is entitled to be called the third (Miller, 1962: 393; Post, 2004: 321). This was once written with either the numeric *3rd* or the Roman numeral *III*, but now it is nearly always the latter (Post, 2004: 321). A *IV* suffix is sometimes given to a son whose father, grandfather, and great-grandfather are all alive and all have the same name. A girl named after an aunt or grandmother can also be a *II*, but, like the *Jr.* appendage for girls, it is uncommon.

A new wrinkle in numerical naming appendages, unimagined in the pre-computer age, involves giving a child a suffix like a software program's. In 2004, self-confessed engineering "geek" Jon Black Cusack, from Holland Michigan, decided his computer-age son should have a computer-age name. Cusack felt *Jr.* was too commonplace so he named his son, *Jon Blake Cusack 2.0*, as if he were a software upgrade. Cusack told the local newspaper, the *Holland Sentinel*, that his male friends thought the name was "cool." It was a harder sell for his wife, Jamie, but she finally agreed. Cusack said he got the idea from a film called *The Legend of 1900*, in which an abandoned baby was given the name 1900 to celebrate the year of its birth. "I thought that if they can do it, why can't we?" he told the *Sentinel*. When Jon Version 2.0 was born, Cusack sent celebratory emails to family and friends, telling them, 'there's a lot of new features from Version 1.0 (i.e., Cusack himself) with additional features from Jamie'." If Version 2.0 had a child, Cusack said he could name it *2.1* (BBC News, 2004).

Moving up

It was once an unwritten "rule" (Miller, 1962, 393; Baldridge, 1978, 508) that a *Jr.* dropped his suffix when his father died. Novelist Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1922–2007) dropped his *Jr.* when his father died in 1957. So did actor Jason Robards when his father, who was also an actor, died in 1963.

There are some exceptions. If *Jr.* has become an integral part of one's identity and not simply an appendage, the *Jr.* is kept after a father's death. William F. Buckley Jr., for example, continued to use his *Jr.* after his father died (Tuckerman and Dunnan, 1995: 656) (although in his case, he was not in fact a *Jr.*, see below). An excellent example is provided by John D. Rockefeller, the founder of the family fortune, and his son, John D. Rockefeller Jr., who was likewise famous. The son retained his suffix and continued to be called *John D. Rockefeller Jr.* after his father's death (Miller, 1962: 393).

A second exception is when a father is so famous it would seem presumptuous for a son to assume his name. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt died, his son, Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr. kept his *Jr.* suffix. Had singer Frank Sinatra Jr. dropped his suffix after his father's death, he would certainly have been mocked for doing so by the media.

A third exception also concerns confusion between people's identities, only in this instance the potential confusion is between a mother and her daughter-in-law. If a *Jr.* dropped his suffix and his mother were still living, mother and daughter-in-law might be confused because both would then have the same name (Fox, 1996: 221; Post, 2004: 312) (however, see "Mrs., *Jr.* and *Sr.*" below).

Naming etiquette becomes trickier when there are several living generations with numerical suffixes, and one of the older ones dies. For instance, what does naming etiquette demand for survivors after the death of a great-grandfather who juniored his son, who in turn numbered his son *III*, who in turn numbered his fourth-generation son *IV*? Some authorities contend everyone simply "moves up a notch" (Baldridge, 1978: 528; Martin, 1982: 31; Miller, 1962: 393; Tuckerman and Dunnan: 1995, 656; Vanderbilt, 1959: 561). Baldridge (1978: 528) made it an immediate concern — a man "needs to take action when the preceding holder of the name dies," without explaining the dire consequences of not doing so. Post (2004: 312) offers the reasonable suggestion that the only "rule" in this case should be "common sense." Many men consider their numerals part of their name. A *IV* gets used to being called *4th*. Even were he comfortable with becoming a *III*, his wife might object to once again having to change her name. Moving up suffixes would undoubtedly cause confusion for people who used to know the new *John Jr.* as *John III*. At the very least, they both would have to throw away any cards or stationery engraved with their former numerical suffix (Martin, 1982: 54–55).

Moving up might also cause some identity problems. A *Jr.* who legally dropped his suffix, or a *IV* who became a *III*, would have his father's name but his identity would still be tied to his former name. Bank accounts, deeds, credit accounts, passports, voter registration, club associations, driver's license, and so on, would all have to be changed. A man who dropped or changed his suffix but receives a check with the former suffix, would have to endorse it on the back with his former name first and his new name underneath (Baldridge, 1978: 508). A unique legal problem involving naming, not mentioned in the etiquette books, occurred when George William Jorgensen Jr. underwent a sex change from male to female and became Christine Jorgensen (1926–1989). After her sex change she became engaged to Howard J. Knox in 1959. However, the couple could not get a marriage license because Christine had not legally changed her birth certificate which still listed her as male, with an accompanying *Jr.* suffix. The couple subsequently ended their engagement and Christine never married (McQuiston, 1989).

Sr.

Etiquette mavens insist a man should never refer to himself as *Sr.* (the British counterpart is *Snr.*) even if his son is a *Jr.*, although occasionally it is permissible for others to refer to him as such, as in the previously mentioned instance of the Rockefellers, both of whom were socially prominent in their own right (Fenwick, 1948: 557; Loughridge, 1955: 105; Miller, 1962: 393). However, it is not uncommon for US senators to use the *Sr.* suffix in their names, for example, Tennessee senator, *Albert Gore Sr.* (1907–1998), Virginia senator, *Harry Floyd Byrd Sr.* (1887–1966).

Some writers also use *Sr.* and *Jr.* to distinguish father from son when they both have similar names. This is especially common in the British news media. An example is a March 2012 headline in the *Guardian*, "George Bush Sr. expected to endorse Mitt Romney at Houston event" (MacAskill, 2012).

Mrs., *Jr.*, and *Sr.*

When a woman marries and takes the name of her husband, etiquette requires she also take the *Jr.* or numerical appendage if it is part of his name, and she should use it when referring to herself by his first name, for example, Mrs. John Smith Jr. But if she uses her own first name, she does not include the suffix, for example, *Mrs. Mary Smith* (Tuchman and Dunnan, 1995: 656; Post, 2004: 321). If her husband drops his suffix, etiquette requires her to drop the suffix from her name as well. The same conventions apply to married women who prefer *Ms.* to *Mrs.* (Post et al., 2011).

Since confusion between a widowed mother and her daughter-in-law might result when her son dropped his suffix, a mother may add a *Sr.* to her name to avoid such confusion, especially if mother and daughter-in-law both live in the same city (Martin, 1982: 696; Miller, 1962: 508; Tuckerman and Dunnan, 1995: 656). If mother and daughter-in-law both live at the same place, mail or invitations should be addressed to *Sr.* and/or *Jr.* respectively (Post, 1997: 309). If both attend the same formal dinner, *Sr.* and *Jr.* should also always be used on their respective place cards (Post, 1997: 309).

Punctuation

Up to the 1990s, it was *de rigueur* to place a comma before a *Jr.* or *Sr.*, but not before a *II* or *III* (Post, 2004: 312; Tuckerman and Dunnan, 1995:662). The latest (18th) edition of *Emily Post's Etiquette* (Post et al., 2011) still maintains a comma should be inserted between the last name and a *Jr.*

The venerable *The Elements of Style* insisted on keeping the comma before a *Jr.* in its first two editions (1918; 1972), but dropped the comma in its third edition (1979). When *The Chicago Manual of Style* dropped it in its 14th edition in 1993 to make it consistent with writing names that had Roman numerals, it appears to have established a new precedent. *Garner's Modern American Usage* states that both forms are correct, but contends the comma-less form will eventually prevail for the simple reason that it makes possessive formulations like *John Smith Jr.'s* boss seem less awkward than *John Smith*, *Jr.'s* boss (Garner, 2009). Another reason the comma is likely to be dropped is computer data processing. If a comma is used in a data field,

it may become a "delimiter" which divides one data field from the next. The same is true for the period in *Jr.* since it too would become a delimiter; however, there is no sentiment advocating its removal.

Formatting

There is no problem regarding where to place a *Jr.* when a name is written in the usual fore-, middle- and surname format, but there is some uncertainty as to where to place the *Jr.* when names are listed alphabetically by surname. For example, in the case of *John Jones Jr.*, does the *Jr.* come after *John*, as in *Jones, John Jr.*, or after the surname, as in *Jones Jr., John*? Placing the Jr. after the first name (e.g., *Jones, John Jr.*) may be misunderstood as being the actual middle name rather than an appellation; placing it after the surname (e.g. *John, Jones Jr.*) will fool a computer that does not recognize appellations into "thinking" it is a last name. If names are subsequently sorted by surname, *Jr.* would be listed in its alphabetic position for surnames. When *Robert Ben Williams* and *Tom Ben Williams Jr.* are alphabetized, *Williams Jr., Tom Ben* would then appear before *Williams, Robert Ben*.

Formatting names with appellations becomes problematic in the computer age if the boxes for names do not include a separate place for a *Jr.* or *III*. A problem occurs when filling out computerized forms where the fore-, middle-, and surname are given separate boxes but no space is provided for a suffix. There are two alternatives: squeezing the suffix in with either the first or surname; or just leaving the suffix completely out.

Some states like Alaska, California, and New York have a box for suffixes like *Jr.*, *Sr.*, and *II* on their birth certificate forms. Other states like Pennsylvania and Vermont do not. The Vital Records Office in Lansing, Michigan, advises anyone who wants to register a child with a *Jr.* to place it in the box for "last name," making *Jr.* an official part of the last name and not a suffix.

Rule breakers

As is seemingly always the case with many "rules" pertaining to etiquette, several have not been adhered to. The "rule" against appending two suffixes to a child's name, for example, both a *II* and a *Jr.* is sometimes ignored. The *Texas Birth Index* for 1990, for example, has two boys who are both *Jr.* and *II* (the latter is also contrary to the rule about a father giving a *II* to his son). There is also a child who is both a *Jr.* and *III*, and four who are both *Jr.* and *IV*. The *Vermont Birth Index* for 1985 also has a boy with both a *Jr.* and a *II*. The Texan rule about naming a son *Jr.* only if he has the same name as his father has led to double *Jr.* For example, J. Archibald Roach Jr. named his son *J. Archibald Jr. Roach Jr.* (born 1947).

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) was not legally *Martin Luther King Jr.* when he died. Dr. King's father was born *Michael King*, a name he continued to use until 1934 when, upon his own father's death, he was asked to take on the names of his uncles Martin and Luther. Michael King then became *Martin Luther King* and soon thereafter began to call his own son *Martin Luther King Jr.* (Burrow, 2009: 28). But Dr. King Jr. never legally changed his name. When he was assassinated and died

in 1968, he was still legally *Michael King Jr.* In 1957, he named his first-born son *Martin Luther King III*. (His wife, Coretta Scott King, said she had reservations about naming him after his father, anticipating the burdens it would create for him, but her husband said he had always wanted his son to be named *Martin Luther III* (Gettleman, 2001).

William F. Buckley Jr. (1925–2008), the iconic conservative editor and founder of the *National Review*, was not really a *Jr.* by birth. Buckley's father was William Frank Buckley, whereas the *F* in *Jr.*'s name is an abbreviation for *Francis*, a middle name apparently insisted on by the priest who christened him so that he would have a saint's name. At the age of five, the younger Buckley asked to have his middle name changed to *Frank* and his parents agreed. After that he was William F(rank). Buckley Jr. (Martin, 2008).

Another notable exception was President Ronald Reagan. The President named his son *junior* even though his son's middle name is *Prescott* and the President's middle name was *Wilson*. Former president *George Walker Bush* is known in the media as *Jr.* (Ide, 1998) but he is not formally a *Jr.* because his father's name is *George Herbert Walker Bush*.

Several violations come from the entertainment industry where name recognition sells tickets. Actor Lon Chaney Jr. was not born with that moniker. His birth certificate debuts him as *Creighton Tull Chaney*. But Creighton's father, Lon Chaney, the "man of a thousand faces," was a major silent screen success and Hollywood moguls, ever ready to capitalize where they can, changed Creighton's name to *Lon Chaney Jr.* to increase his box-office cachet. Country music singer, Hank Williams Jr., born Randall Hank Williams, changed his name to take advantage of his more famous country music icon father. Randal named his son *Shelton Hank Williams*, but professionally Shelton advertises himself as *Hank Williams III*. Frank Sinatra Jr., son of the famous singer, was born *Franklin Wayne Sinatra*, and changed his name professionally to take advantage of his legendary father's name (which was originally *Francis*). He named his own son *Frank Sinatra III*.

One of the most unusual breaches of naming etiquette is heavyweight boxer George Foreman's use of suffixes as a way of marking the birth order of his five sons. Foreman named his firstborn son, *George Jr.* Subsequent sons were chronologically named *George III*, *George IV*, *George V*, and *George VI* (Moss, 2008).

Summary and conclusions

This article reviewed the "rules of etiquette" pertaining to the use of *Jr.* and numerical suffixes in names. These "rules" were derived from manuals on deportment written by various authorities on social propriety. Since these arbiters do not agree in some instances, "opinions" may be a more appropriate descriptive than "rules." Nevertheless, the fact that these pundits have given considerable attention to naming indicates they all deem the nuances associated with suffixed names to be sufficiently important enough to warrant discussion. Despite the interest in such naming conventions, however, none of these writers offers an explanation or speculates as to why parents choose to suffix their children's names.

Other writers (e.g., Algeo and Algeo, 1983; Cameron, 1987; Levick, 2004; McAndrew et al., 2002), however, have reflected on the sociological and psychological impact of such naming. Algeo and Algeo (1983) for example, speculated that giving a child a suffix is a way of solidifying the bond between a child and his/her family. McAndrew et al. (2002: 851) offer a similar explanation, emphasizing the evolutionary advantages of "advertising kinship and procuring future investment of resources from the father and other relatives." Although this kind of namesaking may strengthen family bonds, several studies also suggest that individuals who are suffixed, especially those who are juniored, develop emotional problems as adolescents more often than others their age not so named (Cameron, 1987; Levick, 2004). One reason cited for such emotional problems is a failure to live up to parental expectations (Levick, 2004).

In sum, an entire etiquette has evolved concerning the appropriate way of naming a child after someone in his/her family. A child may be a given the same exact name as a parent or relative, or the same exact name as a parent or relative, plus a suffix. Those with such suffixes often have to deal with issues that those without such suffixes do not usually encounter. One such dilemma is whether they should change their names when the person they have been named after dies. Another is how to write their names on official documents. Beyond questions about naming etiquette, there may also be sociological and psychological consequences of being a namesake with a *Jr.* or a *III*.

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Notes

[1] In the UK, the abbreviation is *Jnr*. The French use *fils* ("son") as the comparable suffix.

[2] Although many popes are known to have fathered children, only one, John XI (931–935), was the son of a reigning pope, Pope Sergius III (904–911) (McBrien, 1997: 154).

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