

House style guide

Introduction

Using a style guide will help you and your colleagues to work to a common, agreed set of rules about the written style you use in all your documents. By 'style' we mean things like how you format dates and numbers, how you refer to job or divisional titles, whether you punctuate abbreviations, and so on. These are all areas where there are alternative but equally acceptable ways of styling your text.

Applying a house style will improve the quality and consistency of all your communications.

This house style also includes guidance on punctuation and grammar – to help clear up points that you might not be sure about.

Where you have the option to choose the style you prefer we've included a line or lines in red for you to edit and so create your own house style guide. For example, under abbreviations you'll see the line:

In this organisation we *do/do not* punctuate abbreviations

Choose which option best suits your organisation and create your own house style guide. If you tailor the guide to suit your organisation it will become an invaluable resource for all staff, and will make the task of writing good quality internal and external communications a little easier.

Abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviations are formed by omitting the end of the word:

Lieutenant becomes *lieut*

Contractions are formed by omitting the middle of the word:

Mister becomes *Mr*

Acronyms are formed by taking the initials of the words and creating a new word:

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation becomes *NATO*

Acronyms are generally written as all capitals and should always be spelt out in full at first mention with the acronym given in brackets:

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

Latin abbreviations

These are the commonly used: eg, ie, viz, p, pp, am, pm, etc

Punctuating abbreviations

Book publishers tend to use full stops when punctuating abbreviations and acronyms:

Mr., N.A.T.O., e.g. etc.

while magazine and newspapers tend not to punctuate abbreviations, so:

Mr, NATO, eg, etc

Either way is correct.

In this organisation we do/do not punctuate abbreviations.

Ampersands

Do not use an ampersand instead of the word 'and'. Only use it when part of a company name such as Marks & Spencer.

Apostrophes

Possessives

Single possessive: *the girl's school* is the school belonging to a single girl.

Plural possessive: *the girls' school* is the school belonging to a group of girls.

Plural noun possessive: *the children's school*.

When a word ends in s you can add the possessive 's or just an apostrophe '.

For example, an apostrophe alone is often used when the last syllable of the name is pronounced 'iz', thus avoiding an 'iz, iz' sound.

*the Bridges' house,
Moses' followers*

In this organisation when a possessive word ends in s we add 's/just' :

Apostrophes are not used with his, hers, theirs, ours and its, (except when it's means 'it is').

Plurals

Apostrophes should not be used to indicate plurals.

The Joneses, not the Jones's

The 1990s not the 1990's.

MPs, not MP's.

Capitalisation

The only words that **must** be capitalised in order to be correct are proper nouns:

William, Ireland, the House of Lords, the Rolling Stones

Having too many capitals makes text difficult to read so it is advisable to keep capitalisation to a minimum.

In this organisation we do/do not capitalise job titles:

Chief Executive, Cleaner, Director, Mailman, Board Member

chief executive, cleaner, director, mailman, board member

Dates and time

Days of the week and months are capitalised but **seasons are not.**

Collective nouns

Some collective nouns take a singular verb others take a plural.

The police are

Staff are

The government is

The company is

Colons

Colons are used to link two clauses but the first must be able to stand alone, while the second adds information.

The course is divided into three parts: beginning, middle and end.

Colons are used to introduce quotations:

She said: 'I am happy.'

Colons are used to introduce lists. (see Lists)

You will need the following:

shoes

boots

socks

trousers.

Commas

The main rule is to use a comma when it helps to clarify meaning.

Don't forget that commas are used in lists of adjectives - a cold, wet, blustery day.

Words such as however, moreover, are followed by a comma when they are the first word of a sentence and also preceded by a comma when they appear mid sentence.

Use commas in pairs to separate an optional clause, (a clause that could be omitted and the sentence would still make sense), in the middle of the sentence.

Date formats

In this organisation we write dates in the following format:

Tuesday, 4 May 1999;

Tuesday, 4th May 1999;

Tuesday, May 4 1999.

Hyphenation

Hyphens should be used:

- to separate identical letters as in *co-operate* and *re-emerge*;
- in compound modifiers when used as adjectives before the noun, for example, *off-the-shelf* software; *well-known* book; *large-scale* map; *up-to-date* records. (But note: *these records are up to date.*)
- In numbers made up of two words such as *seventy-two*.

The general rule is that hyphens add clarity, so (except for the cases given above) where there is no confusion there should be no hyphen.

Internet and computer language

In this organisation we use the following formats:

Internet/internet

Intranet/intranet

e-mail/email

web site/website

World Wide Web/world wide web

the Web/web

multimedia/multi-media

program/programme

CD-ROM/CD Rom

Italic, use of

Use italics for names of books, newspapers, magazines, films, plays, TV and radio programmes, albums and CDs, works of art, long poems, periodicals, newspapers, titles of operas, ballets, song cycles, symphonic poems, overtures and oratorios.

Also use italics for:

- individual names of ships, trains, aircraft, spacecraft;
- music volume indicators: *pp*, *f*;
- foreign words and phrases that are not in the dictionary.

Lists

Lists are introduced by a colon. List items that are complete sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop. Anything other than a full sentence should begin with a lower case letter and end with *a semi-colon/no punctuation*, except for the last item, which takes a full stop.

Money

If whole pounds appear in the same context as fractional amounts they should be treated the same way:

eg £6.00, £6.25 and £0.25

not £6, £6.25 and 25p

In this organisation we do/do not abbreviate money figures

£1 million/£1m

£25,000/ £25k

(If abbreviations are used they are close up to the number: 56p; £7.5m)

Numbers

Spell out the numbers one to nine. From 10 onwards write them as numerals.

Exceptions - at the beginning of a sentence and in references to centuries:

the nineteenth century, not the *19th century*;

in direct speech:

"I've told you a hundred times".

In sentences containing numbers above and below 10 all should be given as numerals.
Insert commas with four or more figures - 4,789

Measurements in recipes should be given as numerals: 6oz flour; mix 3 tablespoons water.

Compound numbers and fractions are hyphenated - forty-seven, three-quarters

Per cent

The alternatives are 50% or 50 per cent, never 50 percent (except in US usage).

In this organisation we use 50 per cent/50%.

Quotation marks

For direct speech use double quotation marks. A quote within a quote takes single quotation marks.

Single quotes should be used for highlighting words within body text, for example, a 'closed' network. Also use single quotation marks to enclose slang or jargon where necessary.

If the words quoted do not form a whole sentence then put a full stop outside the quotation marks. For example:

The girl thought the book was "overly long and extremely boring".

If the words quoted do form a whole sentence then there should be a full stop at the end of the quotation. In this case it is common practice to omit the stop at the end of the whole sentence, (as in quoted speech).

The girl said: "The book is overly long and extremely boring."

Solidus

The / sign denotes either/or. There are no spaces on either side of the /. Generally it should not be used in running text.

Time

The options are the 12-hour clock with am and pm, words with o'clock, or the twenty-four hour clock.

In this organisation we use

The 12-hour clock: 5.30pm (or p.m. if your style is to punctuate)

The o' clock style: half past five; six o' clock

The 24-hour clock: 17:30; 18:00

Weights and measures

Measurements should normally be quoted in metric.

The following abbreviations should be used:

mm	millimetre
cm	centimetre
m	metre
km	kilometre
g	gram
kg	kilogramme
ml	millilitre
l	litre

There is no space between the number and the abbreviation. Note that the form stays the same in the singular and the plural, for example, 1cm and 56cm.

Z or s

In this organisation when the word can be spelt both ways we use the s/z spelling.
Organisation/organization