

Editorial guidelines

November 2008

Introduction:

This editorial style guide will help you to write copy that is:

- Quick to read
- Easy to understand
- Accurate
- Persuasive
- Stylish

Busy people want you to get to the point, quickly. Can readers grasp the gist of what you are saying in **20 seconds**? Have you **highlighted key words**? If not, they may never get your message. The guide offers tips on:

- Consistent written style
- Punctuation
- Abbreviations and capital letters
- Common mistakes

Tone of Voice

Company identity is more than the glossy look of a brochure.

It's also in what and how we communicate. We need to communicate in a way that creates an open, easy relationship with the reader.

Talk with them, not at them. Humanise or personalise your written material by using **we** and **you**. Better still, use I to talk to people as you would in any conversation. And you can mix 'I' and 'we' in the same document – it makes you sound friendly, trustworthy and **accessible**.

Know your audience

Think about who you are writing for, what they need to know and how to express that. What will be meaningful to them? Provide clear, useful information.

Insight into your audience will help you keep the information and the 'tone of voice' relevant to them, eg a clinician is used to different language than a patient.

Convey your message

Is there one key point that you wish to convey? If so, include it as soon as possible and repeat during the piece and in the conclusion (whilst avoiding excessive repetition).

Tell the story

Make sure you explain the relationships - who is doing what and why. Ensure you have the correct spellings of names and job titles. Give a brief overview of what is happening/has happened and why, focusing on the benefits as well as the reasons. Highlight key points of interest, be explicit and clear and use plain English.

Get to the point:

- Short sentences are easier to read, and easier to write. Average business sentence length is **15 to 20 words**
- **Paragraphs** should also be kept **short**. Long, unbroken chunks of type intimidate readers
- **Summarise** your point before going on to explain
- **Organise** your thoughts into logical points
- Use **subheadings** wherever possible
- Bold **key words** within paragraphs – good for quick scans
- Mix lengths of sentences and paragraphs
- Leave a **space** between paragraphs
- For added **clarity** use other devices like dashes within sentences, bullet points or quotes

Consistency is key

When readers scan quickly from page to page, on the website or through a magazine, inconsistencies stand out. They lessen the **credibility** and integrity of the information. Be consistent in the language you use, as well as the punctuation.

Be aware of repetition

You need to use consistent meanings but not continually repeat messages or phrases within the same paragraph.

Keep it correct

Check all your facts and do not misuse or confuse words, and get spellings right or you will appear less credible.

Guide your reader

Present the information in a logical structure which is easy to follow. Any executive summary or news release should have the main points in the first paragraph. Subsequent paragraphs can then provide more information.

Use dates

Readers should be clear about the timing of key activities and deliverables.

Say what you mean

Avoid odd sentence construction. 'Joe Bloggs was arrested for riding his bicycle through a red light by a traffic warden.' Should read 'Joe Bloggs was arrested by a traffic warden for riding his bicycle through a red light.'

Plain and simple

- Use your **own voice**, not one that you think will be more 'impressive'
- Remove words without losing the meaning
- **Cut out** unnecessary **jargon**

You will not devalue your writing by using simple words (known as plain English). In fact, you'll make it clear and **accessible** for the reader. For more information, see www.plainenglish.co.uk.

Below are some common plain English alternatives:

Instead of...	Use...
additionally	and, also
amend	change
amongst	among

approximately	about
assist	help
commence	start, begin
comply	meet, follow
concerning	about
conduct	carry out
consequently	leading to, following on
financing	paying
frequently	often
is able to	can
in excess of	more than
in close proximity to	near
mandatory	required, necessary
on occasion	sometimes
participants	members, users, those taking part
permit	let
prior to	before
purchase	buy
regarding	about
require	need
specified	given, particular, detailed
subsequently	afterwards, next
utilise	use
whilst	while
with reference to	about, on

Keep it active

The most basic sentence sequence is **doer – verb – thing**, for example: ‘Many people use computers.’ This is the **active voice**. It gives a simpler, more concise sentence with more direct impact. The reader will instantly get what you mean.

A **passive voice** makes the sentence longer and over formal: ‘Computers are used by many people.’ You can spot passive sentences easily. They use the words: be, been, being, by, is, was, were and are. Aim for about **75% active** to 25% passive in your documents.

Be accountable

It is **your responsibility** to proofread, check facts and finalise your copy. Imagine you are the last person to see the text before it is published. So take your time.

Once the document is written – and you have time – do something else for a while. You will come back to it refreshed and ready to edit, ready to give it that final polish. This will help to cut down mistakes and amendments further down the production line, **saving you time and money**.

The time it takes to remove all the unnecessary formatting prior to professional design can double the time it takes to do the job.

Writing for the web

It takes longer to read text on screen than on paper. Readers tend to scan a web page, looking for key words, rather than reading the page from start to finish, left to right.

What makes a good web page?

- Short, sharp sentences with main points and latest information first
- A clear, concise story - about half the information of a paper publication
- Consistent style and clear structure to guide the reader
- Good images and meaningful titles, subheadings and links.

What are you publishing?

- Be clear about the purpose of the web pages
- Identify who your target audience is and what you want to tell them
- Decide what information your readers will find most useful.

What are you going to say?

- Identify the essential information, focusing on key facts and points and explaining how these affect your audience
- Your words should set in context documents, images, or links to other website pages.

Writing for print

How will you present and structure the information?

Highlight key information and simplify complex information, or break it up using bullet points, subheadings, images, attachments or links. Think about how the page structure will help your readers find information.

What makes a good publication?

- Clear introduction, executive summary and chapters or sections with meaningful titles
- Clear, simple language that is easy to understand
- Useful subheadings, quotes and references to other information
- Clear branding, consistent style and clearly laid out pages
- Good use of images, charts, white space and colour as appropriate.

What are you publishing and why?

- Be clear about the purpose of your publication, who your target audience is and what you want to tell them
- Do you need readers to take action? If so, indicate how they can take that action
- Think about the expectations of your audience, eg a professional audience may have different expectations to a member of the public.

What are you going to say?

- Identify the essential information that must be included in the document
- Create meaningful chapter, section and story titles and focus on the key information
- Explain issues in simple language, including how they affect your audience.

How will you present and structure the information?

- How will you highlight key information
- Simplify complex information by breaking it up using bullet points, subheadings, images, charts, tables, white space and colour as appropriate
- Proofread and spell check the document
- Apply the writing tips and house style throughout.

A

A or an

Use **an** before words beginning with a vowel or vowel sound, except those that start with u or have a 'u' sound, eg: an architect, an exterior; **a** unit, a European. Use **an** if the word has a silent 'h', eg: an hour **but a** for: a house

Abbreviations

If it is spoken as letters it is an abbreviation; if it is spoken as a word it is an acronym (see acronym). Avoid less well-known acronyms and abbreviations - they confuse and clutter

Write names of organisations or phrases in full the first time they appear, followed by the abbreviation in brackets, for example, Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership (HQIP). **Do not** use full stops or spaces between or at the end of the initials

Use of initial capitals depends on the abbreviation. Miles per hour and similar measurements are lower case. Names, qualifications and titles usually have an initial capital. Check with the organisation or person concerned if unsure, eg: PhD, BSc, BAe, MoD

Abbreviated negatives

Use: aren't, can't, hasn't, don't, **sparingly**. They make text easier to read, but may make serious information less professional

Accents

Give non-English words and names their proper accents within English text eg canapé. Anglicised words do not need accents, eg: cafe. Accents are found in the 'insert' menu under 'symbol'

Acronyms

If an abbreviation is properly spoken as a word, only the first letter is capitalised, eg: Unison

Act (parliamentary) – lower case except when citing full name, the police act vs the Police and Criminal Evidence Act

Advisers not advisors. Note - advisers act in an advisory capacity

Affect makes a difference to **vs. Effect**: a result or to bring about (a result)

Ageing not aging

Ages: the woman was in her 20s, no apostrophe; his 21st birthday

American spellings – do not use except in proper nouns (Centers for Disease Control)

Apostrophes (') see punctuation

Appraise: to assess value, quality or performance **vs. Apprise**: to inform

Arbitrate: to hear evidence from different parties then hand down a decision **vs. Mediate**: to listen to the different arguments then try to bring the parties to agreement

Assure: you assure your life **vs. Ensure**: to make certain **vs. Insure**: you insure against risk

B

Bacteria – plural; a bacterium is one of them

Bail out – to scoop out water or secure release on bail **vs. Bale out** – to escape

Bi-monthly – ambiguous so avoid. Can mean twice a month or once every two months, so spell out which; ditto bi-weekly

Birthdays – people have birthdays, events have anniversaries

Brackets (parenthesis) – see punctuation

Britain or Great Britain – divided into England, Wales and Scotland

United Kingdom – Britain plus Northern Ireland

British Isles –United Kingdom plus the Republic of Ireland, Isle of Man and Channel Islands (and other isles, about 4,000 in total)

Both

Avoid, ‘both men and women’, simply say ‘men and women’. Except when ‘both’ is a plural – ‘both women have reached the tops of their professions’

Bullet points

Bullet points, used **sparingly**, are an effective way of emphasising a key message. They also make long sections of text short, punchy and easy to read. Bullet point format is:

- Use a **colon** at the end of the previous line
- **do not** use punctuation at the end of each point, except a full stop on the last point
- punctuate if a point is more than one sentence long – but keep to a minimum
- use an **initial capital** to start when points could also form individual sentences
- use **lower case** letters when points form a list
- use the same font and size as the text
- use **rounded points** (like these) or lower case letters: a., b., c.
- **do not** use more than about eight or nine points
- **do not** run points across two pages – they get lost

C

Canvas: painting material **vs. Canvass:** to solicit votes

Capital letters

Do not use CAPITALS to emphasis text, use **bold**. Keep capital letters to a minimum to help the eye scan more easily through text. The rule is **specific/generic**: Capitalise **specific** names, job titles and organisations, eg: ‘Dave Smith, Chief Executive. Lower case **generic** references to a job title, group or organisation, eg: ‘the chairman spoke of...’. **Do not** use initial capitals for proper names in common use: alsatian, champagne etc

Captions

Write captions for illustrations and photographs as a sentence but without a full stop

Carer – an unpaid family member or friend who helps a disabled or frail person with the activities of daily living; don't use it to describe someone who works in a caring profession

Colon – see punctuation

Commas (see punctuation)

Companies

Singular collective nouns if business enterprises (the company is, the firm is); however, teams etc may be considered plural when the individuals within the larger group are of prime concern – Manchester United is a company; Manchester United are a great team (allegedly!)

Company names

Use the format used by the company. Use an ampersand if the company does, eg B&Q. Ltd is abbreviated without full stops. No full stops for plc, which remains in lower case, or for company titles, eg: J P Morgan, J S Sainsbury.

Compare to: liken to **vs. Compare with:** make a comparison

Compass points north, south, east, west, northeast, southeast (always lowercase)

Complement: completing something **vs. Compliment:** praise or tribute **vs. Complimentary:** free

Comprises: the report comprises 20 pages **vs. Consists:** the report consists of 20 pages

Conditions are lower case except where they start with a name – so cancer of the colon, multiple sclerosis, but Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease

Conjunctions

You can use **and, but, nor** and **or** to start a sentence, as they help to bring the reader 'into' the information. You can also use subordinating conjunctions: although, because, if, since, when, while

Continual: things that happen repeatedly but not constantly **vs. Continuous:** an unbroken sequence

Convince: someone of the facts **vs. Persuade:** someone to do something

Co-operate, co-ordinate but uncoordinated and so on

D

Dashes (see punctuation)

Data are plural

Department of Health (DH) – not DoH. Refer to the Department of Health or DH in the singular

Diagnostic – as an adjective; serving to identify a particular disease. As a noun; the practice of medical diagnosis or a technique used in medical diagnosis

Disability

The Disabled Rights Commission use the following terms to describe disability: disabled people, disabled person, wheelchair user, learning disability, visually impaired, hearing impaired or a person who is hearing and speech-impaired. **Do not** use 'the disabled'

Always use positive language about disability. Do not use outdated terms that stereotype, stigmatise, label or de-personalise.

Avoid: afflicted by, sufferer, suffering from, victim of, struck down by

Prefer: people living with, people with, person with

Avoid: handicapped, invalid, sufferer

Prefer: disabled person, person with an impairment, person with a mental health problem, person with a learning difficulty

Document control

Policy, legal, codes of practice, regulations, professional information, guidance notes and reports etc, must have a document control footer. This helps companies to meet legal, British standards and quality regulations

It also **helps** anyone looking at the document to **understand** its status – draft or published, its implementation dates and which page they are on

Disease, sickness, illness are OK, but prefer condition

Avoid: sick person, the sick, the ill, diseased, disease carrier, special need(s)

Prefer: specific need(s), individual need(s)

Disc – as in a slipped one **vs. Disk** – as in a computer

Doctor – use GP, for general practitioner. Keep doctor for hospital doctors / consultants, or use their job title, eg paediatrician

Dots and dashes – are sometimes justified but more often misused:

Dots (ellipses) denote missing words, as in a sentence that tails off, or a phrase ... omitted from a quote. If you do omit words ... from a quote, ensure the core meaning is not lost

Dashes should be used to isolate subsidiary clauses – like this – or to indicate a grammatical pause – commas usually do the job better.

E

Effect: a result or to bring about (a result) **vs. Affect:** make a difference to

Effectively

Effectively is usually misused or confused with 'in effect'. **Avoid** where possible. 'The Agenda for Change was launched effectively in 2000' means the intended effect was achieved; 'The Agenda for Change was in effect launched in 2000' means this was not the official launch, but the event described had the effect of launching it

email

Like e-commerce, email is a generic term. **Do not** use an initial capital, unless it starts a sentence. It does not have a hyphen.

Many people are still unsure how to structure emails. A good general rule is to:

- Remember anything written is a legal document, including email
- Emails can be read by many people. If you write something offensive, threatening or libellous it may result in disciplinary or legal action against you
- Structure emails as you would a letter
- Emails tend to be less formal if you are writing to someone you know, but business emails must consider the above points
- Use email as a back-up to face-to-face communication, not a replacement

Emphasising text

Do not use CAPITALS to emphasise text, use **bold**

Words emphasised out of context with the rest of the sentence use 'single quotes'

European references

The UK is in Europe. **Do not** use phrases such as 'the UK and Europe', say instead, 'mainland Europe' or refer to the specific countries involved

European Economic Community (EEC): no longer used

European Union (EU): includes the UK

European Commission: use 'the Commission' after first mention

Euro: not to be used as a prefix – except for Euro-MP or MEP

England – do not use if you mean Britain or the UK

Enormity – is enormously misused; its primary meaning is dreadful wickedness. So "the enormity of Shipman's crimes" is fine but "the enormity of the problem" is not

Ensure: to make certain **vs. Assure:** you assure your life **vs. Insure:** you insure against risk

Ever – prefer "yet"; ever can refer to both the past and the future. So we can't know that something is the biggest /deadliest/most contagious "ever" because a bigger /deadlier/more contagious one might be along tomorrow

Exclamation marks – are almost always unnecessary

F

Feelgood – where this is the feelgood factor, one word. But if you keep yourself healthy you will feel good, two words

Fewer: individual items or people eg, 'fewer managers...' **vs. Less:** measurements such as time eg, 'you have less time than you think'

Focused

Following – do not use as a synonym for after (a man dies after, not following, an accident).

Forego – to go before **vs. Forgo** – abstain from

Fractions – spell out phrases such as two-and-a-half, three-quarters

G

Gender issues

Remember who you are talking to. **Never** use ‘his’ to cover men and women. Avoid ‘his or her’; say instead ‘their.’ Use gender neutral words, eg: firefighter, PC, humankind, humanity

Avoid the use of businessmen, housewives, male nurse

Geographic regions

Well-known geographical areas in the UK have initial capitals eg, Black Country, East Anglia, West End, Lake District, Midlands, West Country

Government (see parliament)

Government remains in lower case in all contexts and all countries. It is also **singular**, as in ‘it’ not ‘them’. Organisations, governments, ministries and their agencies use initial capitals when their full name is used: The Cabinet, Cabinet Office, National Assembly, Department of Health

Use lower case for generic local or adhoc government agencies, commissions, public bodies, quangos eg: customs and excise, parole board, the environment department, a state department ruling, the foreign ministry, the administration. Also special groups: home affairs select committee

GP – use GP not doctor for general practitioner

Green paper – (governmental), use lower case

H

Headlines

Bold headlines and subheadings. Only the first word has an initial capital, the rest are lower case, except if a proper name appears in the heading. **Do not** use a full stop at the end of a headline or subheading

Avoid abbreviations in headings to keep it clear what the document is about

Avoid headings that are longer than one line by emphasising the main point of the text within the headline. Say *‘Planning reform – RICS briefs minister’* instead of *‘RICS responds to minister’s consultation paper of reform of the planning system’*

Healthcare - use lower case

Healthcare acquired infection (HCAI) or **healthcare associated infection (HAI)**

Hospital – a, not an, hospital. Only cap the “H” in the full name of a hospital.

Hyphens

Do not use them to split a word at the end of a line. Hyphens link words and parts of words together to make a single word or meaning. There are no spaces between the words and the hyphen.

Use hyphens when two words have the same letters at the joining point, eg: part-time, film-maker, co-ordinate, or if one of the words has a vowel in it.

The rules are not fixed but here are some common examples:

Hyphen

pre-empt
co-ordinate
re-establish
co-operate
well-founded
ill-educated
half-price
shake-up
sell-off
buy-in
bye-law

Non hyphen

fellow members
prearrange
nonconformist
bystander
classically carved
half a dozen
halfway
buyout
buyback
bypass
byelection

Hyphens are not used for adverbs eg: genetically modified, politically naive. But they do form two-worded descriptions: two-tonne vessel, three-year deal

Co as prefix: use a hyphen only to **avoid confusion**: co-operate, co-ordinate, co-opt, co-production
But: coeducation, coexist, uncooperative, uncoordinated

Re as prefix: use the hyphen with vowels 'e' or 'u', eg: re-entry, re-examine, re-urge. **Do not** use a hyphen with vowels 'a', 'i', 'o' or 'u' (pronounced as 'yu'), or any consonant, eg: rearm, rearrange, reassemble, reiterate, reorder, reuse, rebuild. Use the hyphen to **avoid confusions**: re-read, re-cover/recover, re-form/reform, re-creation/recreation, re-sign/resign

I

Incurable – refers to a condition that cannot be cured but where treatment is offered in the hope of prolonging life or controlling symptoms **vs. Terminal** - when the condition has failed to respond to these treatments

Install – not instal

Ise, isation – not ize, ization (except in the few cases that are always spelt with -ize, eg, capsize, tranquillize)

Infinitives, split

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the Plain English Campaign you can split infinitives sparingly for effect

Italics

Italics can be difficult to read – especially online. **Only** use italics for the following:

- Titles of books, plays, films, other literature, eg *Wuthering Heights*
- Full names of newspapers, journals and magazines, eg *The Daily Express*
- Legal case names
- Foreign words
- Latin words
- To show emphasis within a quote or speech, eg, 'It can't be *that* bad'
- For short intros and article leaders before the main text

J

Jargon

Avoid buzzwords. Ask yourself if the reader will understand what you mean, if not, use something simpler. You increase impact by using jargon **only** when necessary

Justified text

Do not justify text as it makes it difficult to read – it is easier left aligned

L

Licence: noun, as in driving licence **vs. License:** verb, as in alcohol licensing

Like/as if

Never use the former to mean the latter, 'It looks as if he's finished' not 'it looks like he's finished'

Lists – see bullet points

M

Major – don't use as a synonym for big or important **vs. Majority of** – usually reads better as 'most'

Mental health – (See disability) – don't use: mental handicap, mentally ill, madness, backward, retarded, victim of, suffering from, afflicted by, slow and other outdated terms. Prefer "a person with mental health problems", "people with learning difficulties", "mental illness". For more guidance in this area see <http://www.shift.org.uk/~mediahandbook.html>

Minister – lower case; minister of health etc

More than – see fewer – use in preference to "over" in matters of quantity

Mortality rate – prefer 'death rate'

MRSA – methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (OK to use MRSA at first mention)

Multiracial

N

Nevertheless – one word

New year – as in "I'll do it in the new year", is lower case. Caps for New Year's Day/Eve

None – both singular and plural

Nonetheless

Northeast, northwest, northeasterly – lower case, no hyphens

Numerals

Use words for numbers from one to nine – though with such exceptions as ages (Mark, 6), dates, percentages, temperatures, times, scores, votes, weights and measures

Common sense sometimes calls for a word instead of a figure – "I've told you a hundred times", "You look like a million dollars"

Conversely, figures sometimes take precedence to avoid a distracting mix (children are tested at ages 5, 7 and 11, not five, seven and 11)

Don't start a sentence with a number

Numbering paragraphs

Section headers are numbered 1.0, the sub headings are then 1.1 and the sub-subheading are 1.1.1.

The next subheading goes on to 1.2. Separate points within these sections are numbered a, b, c

Numbers – roman

No full stops within general text eg: Edward VIII, Article XVI, Part II, Psalm xxiii. Only use them in legal sub-sections eg: i., ii., iii., iv., v., vi., vii., viii., ix., x., c., m

O

Only

Place 'only' before the word or phrase it qualifies. For example, 'she only touched the key, but did not press it; she touched only the key, not the switch; she touched the only key'.

Obliques (/) – Avoid obliques within text, for example, "from/to", "and/or", "he/she" – recast the sentence to render the oblique unnecessary

OK – not okay and not O.K

Online – no hyphen

On to, onto – both are correct depending on context, for example: "He travelled on to Manchester from London"; "She jumped onto the roof"

P

Paragraphs – text should contain plenty of paragraph breaks. Keep paragraphs short: aim for no more than three sentences. New paragraphs don't have to be for new subject matter, and it's ok to have a one sentence paragraph

Parliamentary terms (see also government)

Only use an initial capital for parliament when it is part of the institution's name: the Houses of Parliament, the European Parliament. Use lower case in general terms or if an institution goes by another name: the Spanish parliament (the Cortes), the Russian parliament (Duma)

Political parties: the full names of political parties use initial capitals – including the word 'party': Labour Party, Conservative Party. Also in terms of 'a prominent Liberal', 'the Conservatives say' or 'the Tories say'. But use lower case in general terms: liberals, conservatism

Acts and bills: use capitals for full names of acts, eg, 'Data Protection Act 1984', the Act on subsequent mentions. But lower case in general terms eg, 'we need a radical environmental planning act'. Always include the year of the act at the end.

Bills remain lower case until passed into law. Specific bye-laws, regulations and schedules have an initial capital, eg, 'Regulation 2 of Schedule D'.

Per cent – use "%"

Percentage points

A fall from 4% to 2% is a drop of two percentage points or 50%, not 2%

Personal: something private to you **vs. Personnel:** as in personnel department or human resources

Plural or singular?

Businesses, governments, official bodies, working parties, institutions, local authorities and so on are treated as singular. Certain bodies, however, may be treated as plural in contexts when the individuals within the larger group are of prime importance, for example, "Manchester United is a company" but "Manchester United have won the cup"

Plurals – generally prefer an "s" to Latin or Greek forms (so stadiums, not stadia) though with obvious exceptions dictated by common use – data, media

Practical: adapted to actual conditions or (of a person) able to make things function well

Practicable: capable of being effected or accomplished

Practice: noun, 'I run my own surveying practice'

Practise: verb, 'I am a practising surveyor'

Principal: the first in order of importance, a principal teacher **vs. Principle:** keeping to your beliefs, a man of principles

Program: as in computers and as in all US contexts **vs Programme:** for the arts, media, training and government 'programmes' in UK English

Proofreading

It is your responsibility to check your work is correct and complete before sending it to be designed or published. Delays and amendments can be costly. The best way to proofread is to print your document, never check it on the screen

Punctuation

Consistent use of punctuation will make your writing clear in structure, meaning and emphasis. A well-placed comma can do wonders for sentence meaning

Apostrophes (') have two main uses. They do not make words plural, unless they are single letters; eg 'dot your i's and cross your t's':

a. Belonging to: Singular names add an 's: the prime minister's decision

Plural nouns eg: government's policy. If the plural noun ends in 's', add the apostrophe after : the managers' meeting

Where names are both plural and singular, just add the apostrophe: Reuters' news teams, Barclays' bank closures.

b. Letters have been left out: Don't, instead of do not; I'm, instead of I am

Its – belonging to it, no apostrophes.

It's – abbreviation for it is, as in 'it's raining'

Colons (:) precede lists (including bullet points) or an indented quote. They **do not** have a space between them and the previous word, **nor** do they have a dash afterwards.

Also use when introducing a complete quote. (Paul Jones said: "This is all becoming clear.")

Semi-colons (;) It is said that a semi-colon is longer than a comma but shorter than a full stop. Use **sparingly** to:

a. Clarify lists of items that contain commas eg: the team included Terry Smith, project manager; Mark Brown, architect; and Kathy Jones, surveyor.

b. Join two sections of the same sentence instead of and, but, nor and or, eg, 'the chairman opened the conference by introducing the speakers; not that many of them needed introducing.'

Commas (,) are often used as a **natural breath mark**, usually to:

a. Introduce quotes within a sentence

b. Go between items in a list

c. Link or form a break between separate thoughts within the same sentence

Dashes (–) Used **sparingly** dashes break up long paragraphs, making them easier to read:

A long dash replaces a comma, or provides a distinct break within the sentence, eg 'Range text left to right—do not justify.'

Ellipses (...) Best used in quotes. Use three full stops with a space after last word and before next word, eg, 'not only ... but also'. Avoid using except in conversational style

Exclamation marks (!) An exclamation mark shows in writing what you would normally say loudly or strongly. **Do not** use it to emphasise text. Use **sparingly**

Forward slash (/) Also known as an **oblique**, **do not** use spaces between the words and the slash eg: 'in/out', 'I can/cannot attend...'. Avoid using in text

Full stops (.) One space follows a full stop. **Do not** use full stops between abbreviation letters or at the end of headlines, captions or credits

Parentheses () More commonly known as brackets, they often replace commas. Use brackets to show explanations, abbreviations and additional comments, or to give references and statistical information, 'an antique table (c1884)'. When brackets contain a whole sentence, final punctuation falls within the brackets, otherwise it's outside. Use square brackets to denote words inserted into a quote for clarification ("It [the cat] sat on the mat.")

Quotation marks (“ ”) Also known as speech marks or inverted commas. UK print practice uses **single quote** marks, eg, 'you must write it like this'. Single quotes are used when a phrase or particular term is highlighted within a sentence, eg, 'gigabyte'. Double quotes are used to highlight a spoken quote eg, "Have you any idea," he asked, "what a 'gigabyte' is?" Punctuation marks go inside the marks if they relate to the words quoted; outside if they relate to the main sentence

Q

Quotes and referenced material

Book titles and other publications are always written in italics. Take care quotes are correctly attributed and literary quotations are 100% accurate. The standard citation format is:

- **Books:** *Title*, author, city of publication, publisher, date of publication.
- **Magazine,** newspaper and journal articles: the name of the article is on one line, with the rest of the information on the following line.
- **Websites:** quote the full URL of the page from which the reference is taken; along with the date you accessed the information and the organisation that owns the site

R

Race – do not mention a person's colour, country of birth, ethnicity, religion and so forth unless it is vital to the story (for example when a condition is more prevalent in a particular ethnic group)

Racial terminology

Do not use 'ethnic' to mean black or Asian people. **Do not** use 'immigrant'. **Do not** use the words black and Asian as names, but as descriptions: black people rather than 'blacks', an Asian woman rather than 'an Asian'.

Radiographer vs. radiologist – radiographers take X-rays, radiologists read them

S

Scientific names

Latin uses the globally accepted convention of initial capital on the first word, then lower case for the second eg: *Homo sapiens*, *Branta canadensis*. Latin should be italicised

Stationary: not moving **vs. Stationery:** writing materials

St John Ambulance, not St John's

Sentences – use short, concise sentences, and keep sub-clauses to a minimum: the more ideas you try to force into a sentence, the harder it is to say what you mean

Southeast, southwest, southeasterly – lower case, no hyphens

Statistics – don't clutter text with figures. "Almost a fifth" is generally more accessible than 19%

T

Telephone numbers – break after area code and then into groups - 0161 834 1234, 020 7234 5678 (note the London code is 020 and not 0207 or 0208)

Terminal is used when the condition has failed to respond to these treatments **vs. Incurable** – refers to a condition that cannot be cured but where treatment is usually offered in the hope of prolonging life or controlling symptoms

That – is almost always better than "which" in a defining clause (The train that I take), leaving "which" for clauses between commas (The train that I take, which leaves at 5.30pm)

Titles (see also capital letters and names)

Again the generic/specific rule applies for when to use an initial capital. The proper names of book titles, journals, TV programmes, paintings, etc are italicised, eg, *A Tale of Two Cities*. No need to use initial capitals for and, for, from, in, of, the, to

Jobs: all lower case, eg: prime minister, US secretary of state, ambassador, chairman, regional director. Differentiate between title and job description, President George Bush is his title but the president of the United States is his job

Use 'Dr' at second mention for medical and scientific doctors. If you use Dr you do not then need the PhD, and vice versa

Dignitaries: barons and baronesses are lords and ladies, even at first mention: Lady Thatcher, Lord Healey, etc. Do not write Lady Helen Brown say simply Lady Brown. Some titles include a place name, eg, Lord Callaghan of Cardiff, while others do not.

The Duke of Westminster, the Duke at second mention.

There are many contradictions so check **Debretts** or **Who's Who** if in doubt

Trademarks – Avoid using trademarks unless absolutely necessary, use a generic term instead. If you do use a trademark make sure that, a) the product is the one you mean (don't say Hoover if you mean Dyson), and, b) render the name exactly as the trademark

Try to – not try and ("I'll try and be healthier" means I will try (*what?*) and I will be healthier; "I'll try to be healthier" means what it says)

Trusts – use lower case to talk about trusts generally, and use capitals only in the full name of a specific organisation, such as Anytown Primary Care Trust

U

Underline - **Do not** use underlining to emphasise text. Use only to highlight a hyper-link

Unique - only one, having no like or equal. Phrases such as 'very unique' and 'even more unique' make no sense

V

Vice-president, vice-chairman etc

W

White paper – lowercase

World wide web

Use lower case for: internet, web, website, net and world wide web. Write web addresses (URLs) in lower case, www.hqip.org.uk without the 'http'