



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

STYLE.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS STYLE GUIDE

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The University is full of writers so we developed this style guide to support both experienced writers and those of us who feel less experienced in writing for our wide range of audiences. The guide will help to create a clear and consistent way of writing, making it easier to get our messages across.

The guide isn't intended to replace publisher- and discipline-specific style sheets, which academics follow. It is for University documents and particularly for outward-facing, essentially administrative publications by schools and faculties, both printed and on the web.

We think the tips within the guide will make our materials more inclusive, reinforce our University tone of voice and give a professional feel to communications. It may also help in less obvious areas, such as when research councils ask for clear English in grant applications. We hope the guide becomes a reference point for all writers, building our skills and increasing our confidence in order to enhance our professional reputation.

Just for completeness, we have included a section on common mistakes in spelling and punctuation. We hope you find it useful, but if you can think of any ways to make it even better – please let us know.

Section 1 is general guidelines and section 2 has information about making copy accessible to all.

WRITE.
STYLE.

SECTION 1

**GENERAL GUIDELINES
FOR PRINT AND WEB**

Abbreviations and acronyms

Avoid these if at all possible. The first time you use an abbreviation or acronym, explain it in full, after which you can refer to it by the initials, eg School of Politics and International Studies (POLIS).

Use 'and' rather than '&' unless part of a brand name eg Marks & Spencer.

Apostrophes

Apostrophes have two uses:

They can show that some letters have been taken out of a word to shorten it.

- **Do not** becomes **don't**.
- **I will** becomes **I'll**.
- **Will not** becomes **won't**.

The apostrophe goes where the letters have been removed. This is used in informal writing and you should not shorten words when you're writing formally.

Apostrophes can also show you that something belongs to or is part of something else. To show belonging you add 's. The cat's tail means the tail of the cat. The student's results means the results gained by the student.

If the word already ends in -s then add another -s and the apostrophe goes between them. The bus's wheels; St. James's Street.

When the plural form of a word ends in -s, as most plurals do, you do not add an extra -s to show belonging. Instead, put the apostrophe after the -s. The dogs' bowls means the bowls that belong to the dogs. The students' results – the results gained by the students.

There is no apostrophe after the word Masters in the sentence; we offer many Masters degrees.

Its and it's

Its denotes possession, eg the dog scratched its nose.

It's shows a missing letter, eg It is not fair; It's not fair. It has been eaten; It's been eaten.

Acronyms and abbreviations can alienate readers who are not familiar with them.

The level of informality depends on your audience.



Capital letters

Do not use lengthy blocks of capital letters.

Headings and titles

Generally, use lower case wherever possible, but upper case for names of faculties, schools or departments.

However, proper names for buildings, place names and brand names should all be upper case.

Building names

- Marjorie and Arnold Ziff Building
- E C Stoner Building (1 space between the initials)
- Brotherton Library
- Parkinson Court
- Social Sciences Building

Job titles

- the Vice-Chancellor
- the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching
- the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health
- Julie Smith, Health and Safety Manager

Use lower case where you are describing a role:

- the head of geography (note this isn't a title – just a description)
- a senior lecturer in the School of History
- the health and safety managers

Never write Doctor in full in titles, use Dr instead (without a full stop).
Always write Professor in full.

The tendency towards lower case reflects a less formal society and has been accelerated by the explosion in popularity of the internet. As a forward-thinking, influential university, our style reflects these developments.

The Leeds brand is more friendly and consciously less formal than other universities (eg Oxbridge, Durham)

It is also more difficult to read a block of capitals as the varying height of lower case letters gives the reader additional information.

Publications such as *The Guardian* use lower case for titles. Others, like *The Times*, use upper case.

The words Building/Library have a capital to match the new campus-wide signage.

However, designers favour block capitals and you can use these in short titles.



Faculties, departments, institutes and schools

Use upper case:

- from the Faculty of Biological Sciences, University of Sheffield
- from the Institute for Medieval Studies
- from the School of Geography at the University of Leeds, or the School of English at the University of Leeds
- from the Leeds University Business School (LUBS)
- contact Human Resources

Course and module names should be lower case, unless a proper noun eg geography, English, molecular oncology, environment and ecology, computing and data analysis.

Universities

Upper case for University of Sheffield, the University of Leeds or “the University” in the context of Leeds University (but “a university”). But, the universities of Leeds and Birmingham.

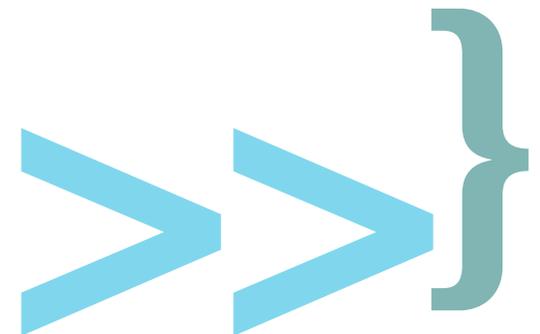
Government agencies, other organisations

Use initial caps, eg Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

University schemes

Use lower case, eg the staff review and development scheme (but capitals for the abbreviation SRDS).

If there is a doubt over whether to use capitals or not, we err on the side of lower case.



Colons / semicolons

Use a colon:

- before a list. There are only three ingredients: sugar, flour and coconut.
- before a summary. To summarise: we found the camp, set up our tent and then the bears attacked.
- before a quote. As Jane Austen wrote: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”

Use a semicolon:

- to link two separate statements that could stand as separate sentences, but are closely related. The children came home today; they had been away for a week.
- in a list that already contains commas, or where the items consist of several words. Star Trek, created by Gene Roddenberry; Babylon 5, by JMS; Buffy, by Joss Whedon; and Farscape, from the Henson Company.

Clichés and jargon

Avoid using the expressions:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| • world-class | • engage staff |
| • going forward | • roll out (the project) |
| • first-class | • exit strategy |
| • cutting-edge | • at the end of the day |
| • welcome to the website (superfluous) | • bottom line |
| • peaks | • drill down |
| • click here (on a website). Instead, write: “access the School of Geography website for more information” and make the words in blue the link | • raise the bar |

Alternatives could be internationally-regarded, international calibre, first-rate, superior, areas of excellence, end, investigate, etc.

eg, etc and ie

Don't use full stops after or between eg, ie or etc

Alternatively you could use the long form; for example, that is, and so on.



If you have heard of these phrases, no doubt your audience will have too. It's tempting to use a word because it gives an authoritative ring to your writing, but don't.

'Click here' is not good practice and is not accessible. It can make emails go into spam as the 'click here' is an indicator on many spam filters and is used a lot in phishing emails.

Fairness and inclusiveness

It is important not to give unintended offence to readers. In areas of ethnicity and disability, words that were once commonly used can quickly become offensive. It is not easy to keep up with change, but some of the terms that the Equality Service recommend are: wheelchair user (not 'wheelchair bound'), disabled people (not people with disabilities) and using schizophrenic to refer only to the psychiatric disorder (not to designs, for example). If in doubt, contact the [Equality Service](#)

Do not use the pronoun 'he' unless you are definitely referring only to a male. Where you are writing about an unknown person who may be male or female, it is usually best to make the whole thing plural. Write 'if students submit their essays late...' (this is better than 'if a student submits his/her...' and 'if a student submits his...'). Use 'they' with words such as 'everyone' which refer to large groups of people, as in 'everyone has their own recovery time'.

Use words for jobs and roles that clearly include both sexes. Say 'contributions from business' (or 'contributions from business people') rather than 'contributions from businessmen'; use chair or head (not chairman or chairwoman); headteacher (not headmaster or headmistress); and firefighter (not fireman).



Leading

Leading (or line feed) is the space between one line of type and the next, measured from baseline to baseline. If leading is too narrow or too wide, the text will be difficult to read. As a basic rule, the leading should be a minimum of two point sizes larger than the type face.

Word/letter spacing

Changing the spacing between letters or words and altering the proportion of the letters (horizontal scaling) are often used to fit more text onto a line. This should be avoided as too little or too much space can make text illegible.

Text alignment

Left aligned text with a 'ragged' right-hand margin is the most legible as it is easier to find the start and finish of each line. The spaces between each word are also equal. Don't justify as this makes the text difficult to read. If text is placed against an image, make sure the straight margin is next to it, not the ragged margin.

Bullet points

Introduce bullet points with a colon:

- Bullet points should be grammatically congruent with each other.
- If they are very short phrases they should have no capital letter and no punctuation.
- If they are independent sentences they should start with a capital and end with a full stop.
- The last bullet should have a full stop to show that the sentence has ended.
- Where there are two sentences, a full stop should end the first and second.

Font

Our identity management (IM) guidelines only allow use of Sabon, Trade Gothic and Arial in print. On the web use Georgia for headlines and Verdana for body text. Georgia is a serif font, so never use it for anything other than headlines/subheads on the web.

Use 12 point for paragraph text in print. From an accessibility standpoint it is best to avoid using a font smaller than 12pt. However, this will have an impact on page count and cost so if you need to use a smaller font, state that alternative formats are available and provide them on request. See our [IM guidelines](#) and the accessibility guidelines which were developed with the Equality Service or read section 2 below.

For text use only clear “sans serif” fonts. “Sans serif” means that the font does not have the tiny lines at the end of each character.

Arial is a particularly good choice of sans serif font for accessibility, and is the University's corporate font.

Sabon is very close to Georgia in style, but looks a bit sharper when printed. We use Georgia on the web as it's a standard font that works on PCs and Macs.

Contrast

There should always be high tonal contrast between the text and the background it is printed on. Contrast is greatest when dark colours are combined with very pale colours.

Reversing out copy (eg white text on a black background)

The background colour should be as dark as possible. White copy reversed out of a very dark colour or black is the most legible. Attention should be paid to type size and very light weights of type to ensure copy is always legible. Reversed out copy should be avoided where possible as it uses more toner to print out and is not accessible.

Copy on images

Setting text on an image can make it difficult to read. The background must always be even in tone with excellent contrast and should be digitally retouched, if necessary.

Design

Accessible design is clean, simple and uncluttered with good visual navigation.

Hyphens

Use sparingly and run together familiar words eg nearby, firefighter. In general, use hyphens when the last letter of the prefix and the first letter of the second word are the same. But there are exceptions eg coordinate. Hyphens can avoid confusion, such as re-cover and recover; four year-old children and four-year-old children.

Use hyphens with:

- the Pro-Vice-Chancellor
- A-levels
- up-to-date fashion (it describes the noun)
- but 'bring the ledger up to date' (with no noun following)
- mid-week
- mid-January
- north-west

Don't use hyphens with:

- wellbeing
- email
- online
- GCSEs
- postgraduate

The hyphen is not an ornament; don't place it between two words that don't need uniting and can do their work equally well separately.

Italics

Treat these in a similar way to capital letters and use with discretion. Partially sighted people can find italics difficult to read, so using bold copy or a strong colour to add emphasis is a good alternative.

Use italics for foreign words, such as *le petit-déjeuner*, but use roman (plain text) for commonly used words that have been introduced to English, such as café or déjà vu.

Use italics for names of books, newspapers, plays, songs, theatre productions and artworks, eg 'Film producer Deborah Forter has produced a film, *The Golden Compass*, based on the book *Northern Lights* by author Philip Pullman.' Chapters within a book would be in quotation marks, not italics.

Numbers

- Numeral or word? As a general rule, spell out from one to nine; then use numerals from 10 to 999,999, eg three rabbits, 15 rabbits, 561 rabbits. In titles or headlines you can use the number for brevity.
- **But** for sums of money and units of measurement (eg centimetres, kilograms, tonnes, miles per hour) always use numerals, eg 6 tonnes, 3 metres, 0.3 kilograms and 7%.
- Spell out million, billion and trillion in full but in headlines, use m, bn or tn, eg 'US stock market loses \$5bn overnight'.
- If using a number at the start of a sentence, spell it out in full, eg 'Eighteen people were arrested in the town centre today, according to official sources.' Avoid using numbers larger than 20 at the beginning of a sentence.
- In a headline where the number starts the sentence, use the figure, eg '18 arrested in town centre.'
- For numbers 1,000 and above, insert a comma, eg 2,300; 153,261; 1,072,578.

Fractions: Spell out common fractions eg 'New research from Leeds indicates that two-thirds of all Britons are pessimistic about the state of the economy.'

Telephone numbers: 0113 343 8481 or 38481. Use the international dialling code for the UK, when necessary.

Percentages: Use % symbol rather than per cent.

From an accessibility standpoint, while italics may be used to highlight *words* or *short phrases*, try to avoid using them to highlight whole sentences or blocks of text, as they make text more difficult to read.

The internationally recognised form for phone numbers is to follow the 4-3-4 formula in terms of spacing. If you are only talking to an internal audience it is acceptable to use the last 5 digits only.

54321



FORMATTING TEXT ON THE PAGE

AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

RATIONALE

Dates: The correct format is 14 February 2009. Do not use 14th Feb 2009, February 14 2009, 14/02/2009 or 02/14/2009. If short of space, 14 Feb 09 is acceptable.

Centuries: 20th century, or in the 1st and 2nd centuries.

Times: Write times in the format: 8am - 5.30pm or 8am to 5.30pm, not 8:00a.m.-17:30p.m.

Periods of time: Our standard format is '5 - 7 January', but include the month if the period of time is spread across different months, eg '5 January - 18 February'. Alternatively you can write this as 'from 5 January to 18 February'.

Metric vs imperial: We use metric measures (eg kilograms, kilos, metres), but miles and pints are an acceptable alternative to kilometres and millilitres.

Temperatures: Use Celsius rather than centigrade, represented by °C. (They mean the same thing but Celsius is more modern, eg 23°C.)

Quotation marks

For direct reported speech use a colon followed by double quotation marks. For example, Dr Smith said: "We believe this is a business with real potential for future success."

When you have quotes within a quote, use double and then single quote marks. For example, "He was the most brilliant lecturer I've ever had. I'll never forget the day he told us to 'stop talking and get on with your work', although he had a twinkle in his eye at the time," said John.

If a quote comprises a full sentence, the full stop or comma should come before the closing quote. For example, "We hope this research will lead to a potential new drug therapy for breast cancer that could be on the market within 10 years," said Dr Smith.

Use double quotation marks where there is a partial quote. For example, critics have called the play "an absolute triumph" and "the best piece of theatre I've seen this year."

Although it seems neater just to use C on its own, a capital C is a "coulomb" used to denote electrical charge.

°C



Spelling

When writing on a computer, use UK version of spellcheck not the American version which is usually the default. In words where -ise and -ize are both possible, use the UK version -ise.

Access to the *Oxford English Dictionary* online (*OED*) is free to University staff and it is the dictionary that is most regularly updated.

Take care not to confuse words that sound the same but have different spellings depending on meaning or alternative American spellings. Check words such as; affect / effect; enquiry / inquiry; principle / principal; compliment / complement; stationary / stationery; led / lead; adviser / advisor. If in doubt – check with the *OED*.

We recommend you use a professional proofreader. The Print and Copy Bureau can put you in touch with one.

Tone and style

- The purpose is to give clear instructions or to make a case.
- Avoid bureaucratic language and jargon.
- Use language at an appropriate level – the key to good writing is to think of ALL the audiences who will read it and adjust accordingly. You don't have to use simple words, just appropriate, everyday English.
- Use 'you' and 'we' (as if you were speaking to the person in front of you).
- Keep your sentences short – usually not more than 25 words long.
- Where possible use the active not passive (passive can be confusing and long-winded, active is more immediate and demands more of a response) eg 'The professor will present his case for treatment' rather than 'The case for treatment will be presented by the professor.'
- Be logical and consistent in the way you set out information.
- Signpost clearly rather than duplicate information.
- Use bullet points to help the reader to see the structure of what you are saying.
- Avoid exclamation marks.

The University generally uses the *OED* and Professor Clive Upton from the School of English is the pronunciation consultant.

However, the *OED* uses -ize and co-ordinate, which we are not adopting.

AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Website addresses/URLs

- Make sure website addresses are clear and neatly presented eg **engineering.leeds.ac.uk**
- Never include the final forward slash at the end of the address.
- University websites are now using the format **subjectarea.leeds.ac.uk** and this is a standard being adopted for new sites. There is no need to include https:// at the start of URLs.
- Try to avoid publishing a very long URL. Where possible link to a homepage or if necessary, use a 'friendly URL'.
- Don't use a full stop at the end of a sentence that finishes with a URL or an email address.
- Remember that capital letters can make a difference in a URL.
- Don't use spaces or a mixture of cases – they should all be lower case when you have the opportunity to create your own URL. [If you're publishing someone else's website address, and it can't be changed, then you need to be mindful of the fact that you can't just replace a capital letter with a lower-case letter, as the URL might not work.]

Also, if you are publishing a website address, email or phone number always test it to make sure it's correct.

Writing copy for people to read on screen

Some points to consider:

- Writing for the internet is very different from writing for print.
- 79% of users scan the page instead of reading word-for-word.
- Reading from computer screens is 25% slower than from paper.
- Web content should have 50% of the word count of its paper equivalent.
- People are impatient when reading on the internet, so don't put up any road-blocks to easy reading.



Further guidance

Jargon and acronym guide

Identity management

Design framework

Oxford English Dictionary

Plain English

The Guardian Style Guide

Guide to Punctuation, Larry Trask

Pocket Fowler's Modern English Usage

The English Style Book: A Guide to the Writing of Scholarly English

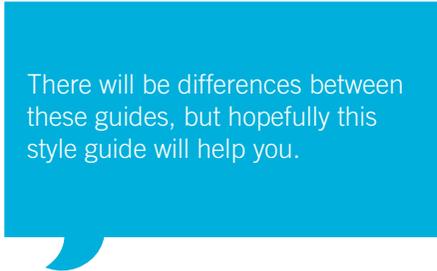
Oxford Reference Online

Fowler's Modern English Usage (book)

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (book)

Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation, Lynne Truss (book)

[SDDU offer courses](#) on business writing skills, report writing, scientific writing for research staff, writing for the web, writing press releases, writing proposals for grant funding and writing up your research for publication.



There will be differences between these guides, but hopefully this style guide will help you.

SECTION 2

**MAKING YOUR PUBLICITY
MATERIALS ACCESSIBLE**

This section includes guidance and links to advice for a range of different media, including printed materials, websites and film. The principles behind this advice can help many people in the University's diverse community.

Why does all our work need to be accessible?

- **It's fair** – people should get information that is accessible to them. Access to information enables all of us to make decisions and lead independent lives.
- **It's the law** – we have a legal duty to meet the information needs of everyone, including disabled people who are covered by the Equality Act 2010. This means offering an alternative where font size is less than 12 point or if there is reversed out text.
- **It makes sense** – if you are spending your time producing written or printed materials, you want people to be able to read them. When you are producing materials aimed at large numbers of current or prospective students or staff members, if you are not following some basic guidelines a proportion of your target audience will find this difficult.

Adjustments are often simple and these tips will help.

Printed publications

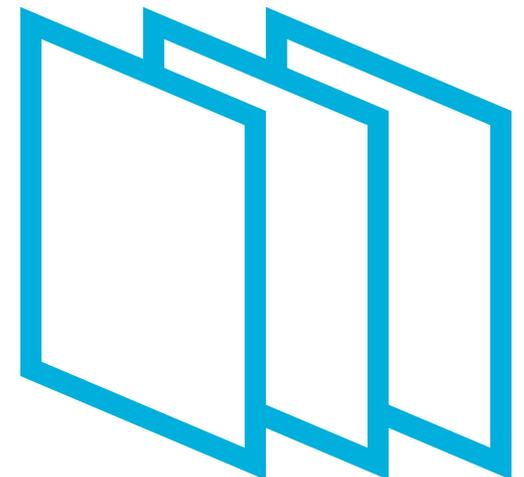
Use the check list below in planning your publication. If the information is also going to be available online give the website address in the publication in an accessible form (ideally black type on a white background in bold 14 point sans serif font such as Arial).

Content, text to include

An access statement inviting requests for information in alternative formats should be clearly visible on either the outside front or back cover. This should include contact details (ideally phone with the international dialling code, email, Typetalk and postal address). For example:

Alternative formats

If you require any of the information contained in this publication in an alternative format eg Braille, large print or audio, please email xxx or phone xxx



Accessible design

- Simple and uncluttered layout. Avoid placing text on top of complex imagery.
- Use a clear, sans serif font such as Arial (ideally 12 point or above)
- avoid italics and block capitals
- use plain English – see www.plainenglish.co.uk
- align text to the left and avoid using justified text
- use high contrast colours. (When using white type on a dark background, make sure the background is dark enough so that the type stands out – it can help to make the type bold and increase the font size by one or two points.)
- avoid glossy or patterned paper
- ensure forms give enough space for responses

Websites

There are guidelines for this available at: www.leeds.ac.uk/accessibility



For events

- Give a range of contact options for the organisers including phone, fax, email, post and Typetalk.
- Ask guests about specific requirements, including diet if you are offering refreshments, eg The Faculty/School of [Name] is committed to meeting the access requirements of those taking part in this event. Please let us know if you have any specific requirements (including dietary requirements) in relation to this event. If it would be helpful to discuss this further, please contact [name], telephone number, fax number, Typetalk number, email address.
- Invite guests to ask for information in alternative formats – they may need only part of it.
- Check your venue is accessible and be aware of accessible entry routes and other facilities such as induction loops/infra-red systems for people with a hearing impairment.
- Consider booking specialist support (such as sign language interpreters or other forms of personal assistance) for major events.

EVENTS

Further guidance

We are giving accessibility guidance to all the University's framework designers for print and web. The IT web team can also offer advice on websites.

If you have any questions about accessibility and equality issues, please contact:

Equality Service. Telephone 0113 343 3927, email equality@leeds.ac.uk or visit www.equality.leeds.ac.uk

Other useful links

Guidance on making your written and printed materials accessible is available at:

<http://www.equality.leeds.ac.uk/for-staff/good-practice-guidance/making-your-written-and-printed-information-accessible>

RNIB's 'See it right' guide and checklist

www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicWebsite/public_seeitright.hcsp

Our website accessibility statement is available at:

www.leeds.ac.uk/accessibility

The University is committed to being WCAG 2.0 compliant.

www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20

MORE