# Content style guide

Good content is essential to ensuring we communicate effectively with our audiences. This style guide provides information that will help ensure that research councils produce clear, consistent and user-friendly content.

The style guide was produced following a review of all existing research council style guidelines. It applies to all content, including online and printed content.

For items not included in this guide we recommend referring to the following style guides:

- GOV.UK style guide

- *Guardian* style guide

If you would like to suggest a change or addition to the style guide please contact: ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉

## Before you start producing content

- Ensure that there is an actual need for any content you plan to produce
- Ensure that all web content has a logical place in your organisation's website structure
- Don't duplicate content that already exists

## General principles for producing good content

- Write for your audience, not your organisation
- Always write in plain English and avoid using jargon
- Use active language, not passive language
- Be clear and concise - don't include any unnecessary text or clutter
- Use clear and descriptive page and heading titles
- Use headings to divide your content into logical chunks
- Keep titles and headings as short as possible
- Use bullet points for lists, rather than long sentences
- Use bold to emphasise key words and phrases

- Check that your content is accurate, for example are all names, dates, titles and links correct
- Proofread your content before you submit it for publishing

## Common style issues

- Minimise the use of abbreviations and acronyms. Spell out an abbreviation or acronym the first time you use it on a page and insert the abbreviation in brackets directly after it. Only use the abbreviation or acronym thereafter on that page.
- Use capital letters sparingly. Lower case is preferable for most text.
- Use the following format for dates: 13 November 2017.
- Use the 24-hour clock for times, for example 18:39.
- Don't use hyphens unless you really need to.
- Use clear, descriptive and short titles for links. Don't use vague titles like 'click here'.

# A

## Abbreviations and acronyms

Minimise the use of abbreviations and acronyms.

Spell out an abbreviation or acronym the first time you use it on a page and insert the abbreviation in brackets directly after it, for example Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)

Only use the abbreviation or acronym thereafter on that page. Don't use an acronym if you're not going to use it again later in the page.

Don't spell out abbreviations or acronyms that are well known and used more widely than the full name, for example BBC and UK.

Do not use full stops in abbreviations or acronyms, and don't put spaces between the letters, for example BBC, not B.B.C or B B C.

When using the plural form of an abbreviation or acronym, add a lower case s without an apostrophe, for example CDs and PDFs.

## Acknowledgment

Don't include an e before 'ment'. Don't use acknowledgement.

## Active voice

Use the active voice rather than the passive voice. This makes content livelier and clearer.

For example, use 'our website includes many new features, rather than 'many new features are included on the website'.

For more information on the active voice see the [Plain English Campaign's writing guidance](#).

## Addresses

See Email addresses, Postal addresses, Website names and addresses.

## AIDS

Use all capital letters.

## And or ampersand

You should normally use and rather than &, unless & is part of a formal title or an organisation's name, for example the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust.

There may be occasions where & needs to be used due to space restrictions, for example in graphs and charts or in website navigation titles.

An & can also sometimes be used to aid readability, for example saying 'the finance and information and computing departments' is confusing and reads better as 'the finance & information and computing departments'.

## B

### Biannual and biennial

Avoid using as they can confuse.

Biannual means twice a year. Biennial means every second year.

### bioscience

No hyphen.

### Bold

See Emphasis.

### Brackets

Use brackets sparingly.

You should normally use (round brackets). However, there may be occasions where you need to use [square brackets], for example in quotes.

It is often better to use commas rather than brackets. Brackets can look more cluttered than commas.

**Example**

- Commas: In Birmingham, the largest city in the region, population growth is not...
- Brackets: In Birmingham (the largest city in the region) population growth is not...

If a whole sentence is within brackets, put the full stop inside the brackets.

## Brexit

Use a capital B.

## Bullet points

Use **bullet points** to make lists easier to read.

Make sure that:

- your bullet points are short and snappy
- you always use a lead-in sentence with a colon (:) at the end of it
- the bullets make sense running on from the lead-in line
- you use a lower case letter at the start of each bullet
- you keep your bullet points as short as possible – try not to use more than one or two sentences
- you don't put or, and, a comma or semicolon (;) at the end of a bullet point
- you include a full stop after the last bullet point.

See also Numbered lists.

# C

## Capitalisation

Use capital letters sparingly. They break the flow of text and decrease the readability of content.

Lower case is usually preferable but use initial capitals for:

- official titles and names: Queen Elizabeth, President Barack Obama
- job titles when referring to an individual's title: John Brown, Head of Digital
- university and organisation titles: University of Exeter, Environment Agency (use the Universities UK members list to find the correct titles for institutions)
- government departments: Department of Health
- publication titles: *The Wind in the Willows*
- proper names or titles: Jurassic, Iron Age, the Thames Barrier
- titles of projects, centres and institutes funded by research councils: RCUK Energy Research Centre
- days and months: Monday, 20 April
- defined geographical places: Germany, Dublin, the Middle East
- Parliament

Don't capitalise:

- government
- professions: Dr Jones has been a doctor for 12 years
- seasons, for example winter
- boards, committees, centres, institutes and agencies, unless referring to a specific entity and using its full title, for example the MRC Centre for Neuromuscular Diseases are in London.
- science disciplines or areas: sociology, experimental medicine
- document types, for example NERC publishes an annual report once a year

Chair

Not Chairman, Chairlady or Chairperson.

## Clichés

Avoid using clichés. Examples of clichés include:

- holy grail
- paradigm shift
- low hanging fruit
- think outside the box.

## Colons

Use colons to indicate the beginning of lists in sentences or to introduce the items in a bulleted list. Bulleted lists often work better than lists in sentences.

For example, topics of interest include: climate change, population growth and recycling.

## Commas

Use commas to break up long sentences, but only use them for natural breaks in the text.

Use commas to separate a sequence of items, for example: red, yellow, blue and pink.

Do not use commas:

- in dates
- after question marks
- before 'and' at the end of a sequence of items (the Oxford comma), unless it helps make the sentence clearer.

## Compass points

Use lower case (north, south, east, west) unless part of a defined geographical place, for example South London or the Middle East.

Use hyphens between the quarters, for example: north-east.

## Contact details

See Email addresses, Postal addresses and Telephone numbers.

## Co-fund

Hyphenated.

## Cooperate

No hyphen.

## Coordinate

No hyphen.

## Copyright

Ensure that the copyright for content is not breached.

For non-original content, ensure that you have the written permission of the content owner to publish the content.

Ensure that you have the correct copyright permissions for any images you use.

## Countries

Great Britain refers to England, Scotland and Wales (not Northern Ireland).

The United Kingdom refers to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Use UK instead of writing out United Kingdom in full.

Britain can be used as convenient shorthand for Great Britain.

Use British rather than UK as an adjective, for example: British citizens.

Use an initial capital letter for all country titles, for example Poland.

## Currency

See Money.

## Cyberbullying and cybersecurity

One word. No hyphen.

# D

## Dashes

Avoid using en and em dashes whenever possible as they can be hard to configure correctly on web pages. Parentheses (round brackets) are often a better solution than dashes.

Use ordinary dashes for hyphens. See Hyphens.

## Dates

Use the following format for dates:

- 5 January 2011 (not 05)
- 17 February 2012 (not 17<sup>th</sup> or 17th)

Don't include the day of the week, for example don't say Monday 5 January 2017.

You can use the dd/mm/yyyy date format in tables and graphs when space is limited.

Use the following styles for years:

- 2010-11 for academic, calendar and financial years; if necessary you can include 'financial year' with the year, for example 'the 2010-11 financial year'
- 2010-2014 for year ranges, but you can also say 2010 to 2014 or between 2010 and 2014
- 1990s, with no apostrophe before the s
- 21st century, with a lower case c

## Days

Use uppercase initial letters for days of the week, for example Monday.

Always write days out in full, for example use Monday, not Mon.

Use 'to' when expressing a period of days, for example Monday to Friday.

Don't use days of the week when referring to specific dates or events.

## Diseases

Use the following format for these diseases (note the specific uses of upper and lower case):

- Down's syndrome
- Alzheimer's disease

- Parkinson's disease
- type 2 diabetes

## Documents

Keep document sizes as small as possible. Larger documents can take longer to download.

Help reduce file sizes by:

- not including unnecessary images
- using web-friendly (rather than high resolution) versions of images
- optimising PDFs for web viewing (your digital team can provide more information on this).

Make sure you use the correct fonts for your organisation in all documents. See Fonts.

## Drug names

Use ® or ™ with drug trade names, for example Nurofen® is a trade name.

Use lower case for generic drug titles such as ibuprofen.

# E

## Earth or earth

Use an initial cap when referring to the planet. Use lower case when referring to the ground or soil.

## Eg

Avoid using eg as it can be read as 'egg' by screen reading software. Use 'for example' or 'such as' instead.

## Email

Lower case, no hyphen.

## Email addresses

You should write email addresses in lower case, for example ███████████████ and ███████████████

## Emphasis

If you need to emphasise particular words or phrases, use **bold**. However, use bold sparingly or it will lose its impact.

Headings and bullets can often provide more effective ways of emphasising particular information in web content than bold.

Do not use underlining (can look like a link) or CAPITALS (they look like you are shouting).

*Italics* can be difficult to read and should only be used for certain types of words, see Italics.

## Enquiries or inquiries

For our purposes:

- **enquiries** are general questions or requests for information, for example email and telephone enquiries

- **inquiries** are formal requests for information, for example a government request for information.

## European Union

Use EU rather than the full title.

## Exclamation marks

Use exclamation marks sparingly and only when they are absolutely necessary.

You can use exclamation marks in some instances, for example:

- when they are part of a title such as Westward Ho!
- in more informal content such as blogs, opinion pieces and social media.

## F

## FAQs (frequently asked questions)

You should only create a list of FAQs when there is a clear need for them. They should only list questions that users are genuinely likely to ask.

Rather than create an FAQ list, it is sometimes possible (and preferable) to answer potential FAQs in relevant content pages.

When you create FAQs, you should provide your digital staff with a set of clear and well-written questions and answers.

## Focused

Only include one s.  Don't use focussed.

## Fonts

You should use Arial in any documents you produce for the web. For more information about typography please see our brand guidelines.

## Footnotes

Don't use footnotes on web pages unless they are absolutely necessary.

## Foreign words (including Latin)

Don't use non-English words and phrases unless there is no English alternative, for example use per year, not per annum.

Include any accents or other symbols on foreign words that have not yet been incorporated into English (these words should also be in italics).

Use accents or other symbols in foreign names and organisation titles as required, for example Chloë Murphy.

Don't use italics or accents for foreign words that have become anglicised through common use, for example ad hoc and status quo.

Use English plurals for Latin words, for example forums and consortiums.

Don't use eg or ie.

## Full stops

Only use one space after a full stop.

Do not use full stops in abbreviations and acronyms, for example use BBC not B.B.C.

Do not use full stops in headings or subheadings.

Do not use full stops in names, for example use AB Jones not A.B. Jones.

## Future Leaders Fellowships

UKRI's scheme is called (the) "Future Leaders Fellowships" (both "Leaders" and "Fellowships" are plural) and an individual researcher is a "Future Leaders Fellow".

# G

## Gender-free language

You should use gender-free language whenever possible, for example use staffing instead of manpower and police officer instead of policeman.

Never use 'his' to cover men and women; use 'his or her', or a different sentence construction.

## Genus and species designations (Latin names)

Italicise both genus and species.

Capitalise the genus name but not the species name.

After using the full name once, abbreviate the genus name.

### Examples

- *Sequoiadendron giganteum*
- *S. giganteum*

## Government or government

Always use lower case, even when specific, for example: UK government.

## Grant holder

Use 'grant holder' rather than 'award holder'.

All lower case and two separate words.

## Graphs and charts

If graphs or charts are required, it may be useful to also provide data tables to accompany them. This could help users understand the data.

You should use corporate colours and fonts in your charts where possible.

# H

## Headings

Use headings to aid readability and split content into chunks.

Make sure that all headings:

- follow a hierarchical structure: the top level heading on a page should use the H1 heading style and the next level headings should the H2 style, and so on.

- are clear, meaningful and descriptive: don't use vague titles like Introduction or Information
- make sense out of context, for example if someone arrives on a page from a Google search
- are as short as possible
- only include capital letters for the first letter of the first word, for example use News and media rather than News and Media
- only include acronyms that have been written out in full previously on the page or which are commonly understood.

Avoid using too many heading levels. Most content should require no more than three heading levels.

## Healthcare

One word. No hyphen.

## Higgs boson

Use a capital H and lower case b. No hyphen.

## Highlighting text

See Emphasis.

## Hyphens

Don't use hyphens unless you really have to.

Hyphenate:

- re- words starting with e, such as re-evaluate and re-establishing
- adjectives which are formed of more than one word: 70-year-old patient and NERC-funded

- to avoid ambiguity, for example little-used car and little used-car mean different things
- after prefixes such as anti- and pre-, for example anti-bullying and pre-teen
- when the same letters meet in certain adjacent words, for example high-handed
- compass points, for example north-east and south-west.

Don't hyphenate:

- reuse
- rearrange
- antibiotics
- predate
- email.

# I

## Ie

Avoid using ie as it can be misread by screen reading software. Try (re)writing content to avoid using it, or use an alternative such as 'meaning' or 'that is'.

## Images

Only use images which serve a useful purpose or which are relevant to the content.

Ensure that you are legally entitled to use any images you wish to publish. Images won't be published if you cannot prove that you have copyright permission to use them.

You should only provide good quality images to your digital team. The team may need to resize or crop images they receive to make them suitable for publishing.

For accessibility reasons, you must include descriptive alternative text (alt text) for any images that you add to the website. Examples of alt text for images could be:

- Sir David Attenborough launches NERC's new research vessel
- An elderly couple crossing the road

You can use JPEG (.jpg), GIF (.gif) or PNG (.png) formats for your images. However, JPEGs and PNGs work best in our Mura content management system. Don't use TIFF (.tiff) images.

## Interdisciplinary

Lower case, no hyphen.

## Internet

Lower case.

## Italics

Use italics sparingly as they can be difficult to read on screen.

You should only use italics for:

- publication titles: the *Guardian*
- the titles of films and television and radio programmes: BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme
- foreign words and phrases, including Latin names.

# J

## Jargon

Avoid using jargon. Always write in Plain English.

If you can't avoid using a word or phrase which could be perceived as jargon, explain what it means in plain English and limit its use.

## Je-S

Use Je-S, not JeS or any other variation.

## Job titles

Use initial capital letters for job titles: Chief Executive, Digital Officer.

Descriptions of a job or profession do not require capitals.

### Examples

- Director of Science Iain Gillespie was at the event; Iain Gillespie is a NERC director
- Some say Professor John Bond is the expert; John Bond is a professor of sports science.

## Joint-funded

Hyphenated.

## Judgment

Don't include an e before 'ment'. Don't use judgement.

# K

**Knowledge exchange and knowledge transfer**

Lower case, unless referring to a Knowledge Transfer Partnership.

# L

## Language

Our language and tone should be clear, expert and fresh.

We should use plain English and unstuffy, active language. We should avoid jargon, but we shouldn't dumb down our content.

Everything we write should be logical, active and confident. We say what we need to say clearly and concisely. We should use informative and simple words.

## large scale or large-scale

Use large scale as the noun and large-scale as the adjective.

## Latin

See foreign words and Genus.

## Links

Use clear, descriptive and short titles for all links. Do not use non-descriptive link titles like 'click here' or 'this page'.

Only include links that could be genuinely useful to users.

Ensure that link titles are the same or similar to the title of the page you are linking to.

Avoid putting too many in-line links in paragraphs as they break the flow of the text.

**External links**

For links to the homepage of an external site, use the organisation or website name in the link title, for example Wellcome Trust.

If you are deep-linking to a page within an external website, you should make it clear that you are linking to another site by including the organisation's name in the link text. For example, use one of the following formats:

- Wellcome Trust: international strategy
- International strategy (Wellcome Trust).

Ensure that external links don't open in a new window.

**Links to documents and files (downloads)**

Include a file type and size in any links to downloads, for example Word and PDF files. You must include the file type and size within the link text: New crime programme guidance notes (PDF, 895KB).

Always use the following format for kilobytes and megabytes:

- KB (not Kb, kb or any other variation)
- MB (not Mb, mb or any other variation).

You should:

- round up file sizes less than 1MB to whole KB, for example round up 81.6KB to 82Kb
- round up file sizes greater than 1MB to one decimal place, for example round up 4.57MB to 4.6MB
- use 2MB, not 2.0MB.

Ensure that all download links don't open in a new window.

## Long term or long-term

Use long term as the noun and long-term as the adjective, for example:

- this may not work in the long term
- this is a long-term strategy.

## Long-standing

Hyphenated.

# M

## Microorganisms

Lower case, no hyphen.

## Money

For amounts in sterling, use the pound sign (£) followed by all digits, for example £2.87 and £0.29.

For large amounts (millions or billions of pounds), use digits and words, separated by a space, for example £22 million and £4.2 billion. You can use the abbreviated version (£k, £m and £bn) in tables and graphs, for example £2.7m.

For euros and US dollars, you should put the symbol before the digits, for example $45 million, €12. When written out, the plural of euro is euros.

For other currencies, write out the currency title in full. If used more than once, put the standard abbreviation in brackets after the first mention of the currency and use the abbreviation thereafter, for example The prize was 10,000 Swiss francs (CHF), of which CHF 9,000 went to charity.

Do not use k to indicate thousands, but write out the zeros, for example £45,000.

## Moon or moon

Use a capital M for our Moon. Use lower case for all other moons.

## Multidisciplinary

No hyphen.

## Multilateral

No hyphen.

## Multinational

No hyphen.

# N

## Names

Use the full name (title, first name, second name), for example use Professor Emma Bradshaw, on first mention. Use the title and second name thereafter, for example use Professor Bradshaw.

Use English titles for foreign names, for example Mr Nicolas Sarkozy.

Do not shorten Professor to Prof.

## Nobel Prize

Use capital N and P.

## Numbered lists

Use a **numbered list** of steps when you want to guide users through a process.

You don't need a lead-in line for a numbered list, but make sure that:

1. You put a number at the start of each step.
2. You capitalise the first letter in each step because each step is a sentence.
3. You include a full stop at the end of each step.

## Numbers

Do not start sentences with numbers in digit form. You can use words if necessary, for example: Thirty-one papers were submitted.

**Numbers from one to nine**: write these numbers out in full (five people, eight kittens), unless they are followed by an abbreviated unit of measure, for example 3km.

**Numbers from 10 to 999**: use digits, for example 124 people.

**Numbers from 1,000 to 999,999**: use digits and commas, for example 33,293 people.

**Large numbers (one million or higher)**: use digits and words, and include a space between the number and the word, for example one million men, £2 million.

**Numbers used with units**: when you use the abbreviated version of units, use digits and don't include spaces, for example 13mm or 12kg. Include a space between the number and unit when you spell out the full version of a unit, for example 14 miles.

**Decimals**: use digits, and include a space between the number and subsequent words, for example 3.5 billion or 4.25 miles.

**Fractions:** use decimals or percentages instead of fractions. If you do use fractions, spell them out and hyphenate them, for example two-thirds of the people or one-fifth of applicants.

See also Percentages and Money.

# O

## Online

Lower case, no hyphen.

# P

## Page length and structure

Put the most interesting information towards the top of the page.

There is no limit on the number of words you can include on a web page. However, you should structure pages so that it is easy for users to find the information they are looking for. This is especially important on longer pages. You can aid usability by splitting content into defined sections, and by using elements like headings and bullets.

## Page titles

Use unique, descriptive and meaningful titles for all pages.

Keep page titles as concise as possible.

## Paragraphs

Aim for paragraph lengths of no more than three or four sentences. Web users like to be presented with small chunks of information.

However, too many very short paragraphs (of one or two lines) can also be hard to read. Vary the length of your paragraphs to make the content more interesting. Uniform content is hard to scan and looks boring.

Limit each paragraph to one subject or idea.

Use one line return between paragraphs.

## PDF

All upper case.

## Peer Review College

Use initial upper case.

## Percentages

Use %, not per cent or percent, for example 97%.

Always use figures for percentages, even if the number is smaller than 10, for example 3%.

Percentage is one word.

## PhD

Capital P, lower case h, capital D. No full stops.

## Plain English

Write in a clear and concise manner using everyday language where possible. All digital content should be easily understood by anyone who reads it.

Always try to use:

- short sentences
- the active voice
- words that are appropriate for the reader
- verbs rather than nouns, for example use 'you should apply' rather than 'you should submit an application'.

Eliminate:

- jargon and technical terms
- legal language (legalese)
- unnecessary information and words (clutter), such as welcome, under construction, check back regularly.

Use simple words when simple words will do.

Always ask yourself:

- do you understand the content you are producing?
- would your friends or family understand the content?

## Policymaker and policymaking

One word, no hyphen.

## Postal addresses

You should present postal addresses as:

- ESRC, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon, SN2 1UJ

or:

- ESRC Polaris House North Star Avenue Swindon SN2 1UJ

## Postdoctoral

One word.  All lower case. No hyphen.

## Postgraduate

One word.  All lower case. No hyphen.

## Publication titles

Use italics for the titles of reports, newspapers and books.

**Examples**

- the *Times*; the *Guardian* (note: 'the' is not italicised)

- *Societal implications of European enlargement*

Use italics sparingly as they can be difficult to read on screen. For long titles you should use single quotes rather than italics, for example 'Death, the phoenix and Pandora - end of life ships, chock-chocky furniture and the Bangladeshi middle class consumer'.

Use lower case for grant and output titles and don't italicise them.

# Q

## Quotes

Use double quotation marks ("…" ) for opening and closing quotes.

Use single quotation marks ('…') inside a quotation when it is already encased in double quotation marks.

Place punctuation marks (full stops and commas) inside the quotes for a complete quoted sentence; otherwise the full stop should be outside.

### Example

- "It's just the best thing since sliced bread." That's the verdict of a senior official.

Also use single quotes for pullouts and captions or when you need to place special emphasis on a word, perhaps signalling its ambiguity or unusualness.

### Example

The research specifically targeted 'empty-nesters' among the middle to older population.

# R

## Ranges

Include a dash or to between the numbers, for example 134-146 or four to five days.

You can also use 'between', for example between the ages of 12 and 17.

## References

Try to minimise the use of references in web copy as they can look cluttered and break the flow of text.

Use either of the following styles for references:

- Author name. *Publication/article title*, (publisher and year), page number
- *Publication/article title* - Author name(s), publisher and year, page number

**Examples**

- Herbert, James. *Creating the AHRC*, (OUP/British Academy, 2008), pp 45-56
- *Creating the AHRC* – J Herbert, AN Other, J Smith. *Nature*, pp 45-56

## Research councils

Always use initial capital letters for research council names. The correct titles are:

- Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
- Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)
- Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)
- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

- Medical Research Council (MRC)
- Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)
- Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC)

Don't use 'the' with research council acronyms, for example don't say 'the STFC'.

Never use 'the Council'.

Use 'research councils' (all lower case) when referring to research councils in general.

Always use the particular research council's acronym with the title of a programme or project. For example, the ESRC Violence Programme.

# S

## Search engine optimisation

High search rankings are never guaranteed but there are some simple things you can do to increase the chances of users finding your content in search engines.

- Always write high quality, consistent content.
- Frontload your content so that the most important information comes first. Include words and phrases (keywords) that people are likely to search for near the start of the page.
- Ensure that keywords are included throughout your text, but particularly in the opening paragraphs.
- Repeat keywords but don't overuse them and don't let them break the flow of your text.
- Use clear and descriptive page titles that include some of the keywords that your users might search for. Try to place keywords at the start of page titles. Keep titles brief and don't cram them too full of keywords.

- Break up your text using clear and descriptive headings. Include keywords within your headings whenever possible. This also helps readability. Try to include keywords at the start of your headings.
- Include links to other relevant content on your website, as well as on other sites. Always use clear and descriptive titles for your links, and include keywords in them.
- Use clear and descriptive alt text for all your images. Try to include keywords that help to describe the image, but remember that accessibility is more important than SEO.
- Minimise the use of PDFs and other documents. Use web pages instead.
- Update your content regularly.

## Seasons

All lower case: winter, spring, summer, autumn.

## Semicolons

Use semicolons sparingly. It is often better to use full stops or bulleted lists instead.

For example, this sentence would work better as a bulleted list:

> The organisation set out to answer some key questions: how to improve security; how to achieve more interaction between production processes; how to integrate new staff into the existing workforce; and how to improve overall productivity.

Never use semicolons at the end of list items in bulleted lists.

## Sentences

Keep sentences short and simple. You should aim for an average sentence length of about 15–20 words.

Break up long sentences into two or more separate sentences.

Sentences that contain lists of items can often be restructured as bullet points.

Vary the length of your sentences to make content appear less uniform. The occasional sentence with two, three or four words is perfectly acceptable.

## Singular and plural

Organisations such as individual research councils and government departments are singular, for example NERC is based in Swindon.

Use English plurals for Latin words, such as forums and consortiums.

## Slashes (or strokes)

Avoid using slashes (/). They are used to denote alternatives and generally mean 'or'. However, this symbol is much abused and is sometimes misinterpreted as meaning 'and' rather than 'or'.

Try to spell out the alternatives in full by using 'and' or 'or' to avoid confusing the reader.

### Example

Use rules and regulations rather than rules/regulations.

If you need to use a slash, don't include spaces, for example: weekend/holiday arrangements.

## Spacing

All text must be single-spaced. Don't use double spaces after full stops or elsewhere.

## Spelling

Always use British spelling rather than American spelling.

Take particular care to use '-ise' (and '-isation') rather than '-ize' (and '-ization') at the end of words, for example use:

- organise, not organize
- harmonisation, not harmonization
- standardise, not standardize.

Use the Concise Oxford Dictionary as the best reference for spelling.

Ensure that your spell checker in Word (and other programs) is set to check UK English. Always spell check your work before publishing it.

Be aware that spell checkers don't always identify all misspellings, particularly where a misspelt word can create a correctly spelt alternative word. For example, Word would not identify that you typed 'I often sue my local leisure centre' instead of 'I often use my local leisure centre'.

## Split infinitives

It's fine to use split infinitives, but they can sometimes be ugly.

## Subscript and superscript

Use subscript and superscript as required for scientific formulas and units, for example $m^3$.

Don't use superscript with th and st, for example use 12th meeting and 21st century.

Use $CO_2$ for carbon dioxide.

# T

## Tables

You should only use tables to display data (for example financial information or timetables), and they should never be used to design web page layouts.

Ensure that all tables have descriptive, bold column headers in the top row of cells.

## Telephone numbers

For most UK numbers, use a 5-6 format, for example 01452 123456.

For numbers beginning with 02, separate the first three numbers and use a 3-4-4 format, for example 020 1234 5678.

For other area codes, separate the numbers into a 4-3-4 format, for example 0113 123 4567.

For international numbers, include the country code in brackets after a +, then type out the rest of the number including the initial digit of the area code in brackets, for example +(353) (0) 1 456789; +(44) (0) 1793 123456.

For mobile numbers use this format: 07777 123456.

For non-standard numbers (for example 08 numbers) you should indicate the call charges, for example:

- Telephone: 0845 123456 (local call rate charges apply)
- Telephone: 0800 123456 (Freephone).

## Think tank

Two words. All lower case. No hyphen.

## Times

Use the 24-hour clock for times. You should:

- use a colon rather than a full stop, for example use 11:30, not 11.30
- use 'noon' rather than 12:00 for midday
- use 23:59 rather than 00:00
- use a hyphen when you want to display a time range: 11:30-14:00
- use a zero in front of times before 10:00, for example use 09:30, not 9:30.

## Titles and honours

Use the following format for titles (with no full stops):

- Mr John Davies
- Mrs Sonya Doyle
- Dr Julie Moore
- Professor David Watkins.

Use Professor rather than Prof.

You can use Ms if you do not know the marital status or title of a woman. However, it is often preferable to use no title in these cases, for example use Sonya Doyle rather than Ms Sonya Doyle.

Use Theresa May or Sir Bobby Charlton on first mention, thereafter Mrs May, Sir Bobby.

## Tone

See language.

## Twitter, tweet, tweeting

Initial upper case for Twitter. Use lower case for tweet and tweeting.

# U

## Underlining

Do not underline any words, as underlined words could be mistaken for hyperlinks.

## UKRI

Acronym for UK Research and Innovation.

## Units of measurement

Don't include a space between the digits and the abbreviation, for example use 13mm or 12kg. Be consistent and use the following formats:

- kg
- km
- KB (kilobytes)
- MB (megabytes).

## University and higher education institution titles

Use the Universities UK members list to find the correct titles for institutions.

## Up to date

Three separate words. No hyphen.

## US

For United States, not USA: no need to spell out, even at first mention; do not call it America, although its people are Americans.

## V

## Videos

Produce a clear title, description and caption for all videos. You should also provide a transcript if your research council requires you to do so.

## W

## We, us, our, you

Use words such as we, you and our as they help to make the content more engaging and active, particularly where they are used with active (rather than passive) verbs.

Always use we instead of 'the Council' or your research council's name, unless there are clear and specific reasons for not doing so, for example: we are pleased to announce that we have launched a new funding call.

## Web page

Two words.

## Website

One word. No hyphen.

## Website names and addresses

Don't display web addresses on web pages, for example use Google rather than www.google.com

If an address does need to be shown:

- always use lower case and never include http in the link text
- avoid publishing long URLs.

## Wellbeing

One word. No hyphen.