RSSB Style Guide 2014

Writing style

If in doubt…

If the RSSB style guide does not cover a specific subject consult:

1. An RSSB communications specialist

2. The New Oxford Style Manual (2012)

3. The Economist Style Guide

4. The Oxford Guide to Style (2002)

5. Fowler's Modern English Usage

The RSSB Style Guide is presented in sections; these are:

- Writing style
- Punctuation
- Grammar
- Spelling and word use
- Notes, footnotes, endnotes; bibliographies and references

Introduction

RSSB produces reports that are *'overly long, and poorly written'*.

The existence of the Internet has changed expectations about how easy it should be to find useful, usable information. This style guide proposes a radically different approach to writing than that which you may have been taught. It will support you in enhancing the quality of our written outputs, and make it far easier for our members to find and use the information they need. The more clearly you write, the more easily you will be understood.

People don't like having to read text that is rambling, boring, or full of clichés and jargon. What is more, they are unlikely to finish reading it.

Before you start to write you must think, plan, and collaborate. To write for your audience you must know what information they need and how they are going to use it.

Active voice

Active sentences always sound better than passive ones. 'Gordon Brown drove the train' is better than 'the train was driven by Gordon Brown'.

The passive voice – where actions are not described as having been done by a specific person or thing – was commonly used in scientific writing. The aim was to place emphasis on the action or outcome rather than the expert writing the paper.

Today the passive voice is often interpreted as being evasive, or intending to pass or avoid blame. Rather than emphasising the outcome, it may cast doubt on it, or on the expert(s) that have done the work.

Think about the tone of your writing. If it is too formal it is likely to annoy the reader; too casual and it will make you look unprofessional.

The simpler your writing style the more your reader will be able to concentrate on what you are saying. This means short words, sentences, and paragraphs.

This guide contains notes and guidance on grammar and confusing spellings. However, if you are unsure of spellings or hyphenation, use any Oxford dictionary, such as the Concise Oxford Dictionary, www.oxfordreference.com, or www.oxforddictionaries.com. For free guidance on using plain English, visit www.plainenglish.co.uk.

When you have finished writing your report, give it the Microsoft Word plain English test. This is a useful tool.

- In the menu bar click Review (Word 2010)
- In the Proofing section, click Spelling & Grammar
- In the Spelling & Grammar dialog box, click the Options button
- In the Word Options dialog box, select Proofing from the left hand menu
- Tick the box marked 'Show readability statistics'

Remember though, that it is only a computer program. Check your work!

Jargon and clarity

Use jargon sparingly, and only if you know that your reader will understand it. Just because you understand certain technical terms, it doesn't mean your reader or audience will. Keep words, sentences, and paragraphs short.

If you think you have written something confusing, then you probably have. Read your prose aloud to spot your error or, better still, ask someone else to have a look.

A

Abbreviations

When using abbreviations, such as TPWS, you should always spell out the words in full when you first mention them, if it will make it easier for some of your target audience to understand. Spell out the words in full, followed by the abbreviation in brackets. For example, The train was stopped by the Train Protection and Warning System (TPWS).

You can use abbreviations that are universally known without the full form. For example: the BBC, the NHS, and the TUC.

Do not use 'no' for number, or abbreviate billion, except where necessary in tables.

Other forms of abbreviation to avoid include those of Latin words (such as 'eg' and 'ie' instead of 'for example' and 'that is'. Do not use symbols such as '&' or '+' instead of 'and' except in table headings. Only use an ampersand where it is part of a recognised name or brand; such as 'Byfleet & New Haw' or 'Legal & General'

Avoid writing 'a.m.' and 'p.m.' by using the 24-hour clock.

Do not abbreviate professor to prof, or Father to fr. Addresses, such as road and avenue should also be spelt in full.

(see also: Government departments, and Latin, and Titles)

Acronyms

These are abbreviations which form words, such as Unesco (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus). Some are written with an initial capital only.

Do not use a lot of abbreviations and acronyms in your text, but if it is unavoidable, consider putting a glossary at the beginning of your document, or in an appendix, whichever seems more helpful. (See Appendices)

Do not invent new acronyms or abbreviations, especially for short-term or local initiatives.

Some acronyms use small letters (DfT), but don't use these unless you have to as they can be difficult for some readers to see.

Acts of Parliament

Write the names of acts of parliament in ordinary typeface (not italic) and use initial capitals for the main words. Don't give 'the' a capital letter, and there is no need to use brackets or a comma for the year or date of publication, for example, 'the Railways Act 2005'.

Adjectives and adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs describe other words. Adjectives describe nouns, for example: 'the red train' or 'the angry passenger'. Adverbs describe verbs, as in 'the train moved slowly' or 'the passenger waited patiently'.

Hyphens in compound adjectives

Adjectives formed of 2 or more words may need to be hyphenated to avoid confusion. For example:

- Up-to-date information
- State-of-the-art technology
- Commercial off-the-shelf equipment
- 17-year-old boys
- 23 4-car units

Hyphens in compound adverbs

In general, adverbs formed of 2 or more words that appear before the noun should be hyphenated. In a simple construction the same words may not need hyphenation if they appear after the noun. For example:

- The long-term plan is that we should …
- This plan will be implemented in the long term.

Common errors:

- A cross industry group is angry.
- A cross-industry group is drawn from across the industry.

Ampersands

Do not use the ampersand (&) in text unless it is part of an organisation's name or a document's official title.

Previously our logo included the text 'Rail Safety & Standards Board'. We now refer to the company as 'RSSB'. You only need to use the full company name when referring to it as a legal entity, when it should be 'Rail Safety and Standards Board Limited'.

Ampersands are used for station names such as Haddenham & Thame Parkway, and Byfleet & New Haw.

(See Logos)

Appendices

Appendices are useful for information that you do not want to appear in (the main part of) your document. They include items such as extracts from other documents (where these are necessary), glossaries and references. The singular form is appendix.

As follows:

The report identifies 11 recommendations as follows:

…'as follows' is not needed.

See the section on *Minimalism*.

B

Begs the question

This has a confusing number of meanings and is best avoided. It generally refers to a questionable assumption, not raising a further question.

Bibliography

A bibliography is a list of books, reports, articles, web pages, and speeches that you have referred to in your document. It generally appears at the back of, or as an appendix to, the main document.

RSSB uses the author-date reference system, also called the Harvard system. This provides the author's name and year of publication within parentheses in text, (Ritter 2002) and the full details at the end of the work.

For full details of how to use the Harvard system see *Notes, footnotes, endnotes; bibliographies and references*.

Bold

Use a **bold** font sparingly for emphasis.

Brevity

Brevity usually makes for greater clarity. Replace nouns with verbs wherever possible:

- make a decision = decide
- bring to an end = end
- have an ability to = can
- in regard to = regarding OR about
- at a later date = later
- at the present (moment in) time = now

Bullet points

Bullet points can be used to present lists or statements. Most people can only keep 5-7 items in their short-term memory at one time. This should guide how many items you put in a bulleted (unordered) list.

Start each item with a capital letter. If a list item is a self-contained sentence (includes a verb) end it with a full stop or question mark. Do not end items with commas or semi-colons.

The phrase introducing the points should always end with a colon.

For example:

The inquiry faced the following questions:

- Why didn't the driver stop at the signal?
- Why were safety procedures ignored?
- How quickly did the emergency services react?

If the items are single words or short phrases no final punctuation is needed.

Try to keep your statements short; about 12 words or less. If you are struggling with this, perhaps the information would be better presented as stand-alone paragraphs.

C

Capitals (upper case)

Use capitals for specific titles or people. The Association of Train Operating Companies uses leading capitals, but if you then refer to it as the association, this is lower case.

As a quick guide, the times when a capital letter must be used are:

- Names of people, places, trade names and institutions
- Days of the week and months
- Calendar days, like Christmas or Good Friday
- Political parties, Bills, Acts of Parliament (but not government)

- Specific groups, such as the Emergency Services Liaison Group
- Classes (of trains), Figures, and Tables – when referring to them by number

Do not use capitals for general nouns, for example, when talking about local authorities. When referring to the government always use a lower case g, but government departments, such as the Department of Health, should have leading capitals.

Use capitals for recognised and official place names, for example, North London, the North East.

AGM is in capitals, but 'annual meeting' is better.

(See also *Abbreviations*, *Government departments*, *House style*, and *Seasons* in the section *Spelling and word use*.)

Captions

If you are using tables or figures, including illustrations, graphs and maps, remember to include a caption. The caption should preferably have a number (Table 1, Figure 12 and so on), be in bold and placed above the table or below the figure that it refers to. For example:

Figure 4: Average CO_2 emissions by transport mode (grams per passenger/freight tonne kilometre)

If you are writing a caption for a picture it should be placed below and be in bold italics. If available, use the _FigureTitle or _FigureTitleBig paragraph formats. For tables use the _TableTitle format above the table.

When identifying people or things in a picture, do not write 'from left to right'. It is sufficient to write 'from left'. For example:

From left: Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Sir Ralph Wedgewood, Sir Peter Parker

Clichés, metaphors, and how to avoid them

There are thousands of clichés and metaphors. Try to avoid them all, including:

backlash, basically, beleaguered, blueprint, bombshell, bonanza, brainchild, chaos, charisma, clampdown, consensus, crackdown, crisis, crunch, drama/dramatic, escalate, facelift, hopefully, ironically, legendary, major, massive, mega-, nightmare, prestigious,

quantum leap, reportedly, shambles, shock, situation, trauma/traumatic, quite unique, calling time, just the ticket, making tracks, and steamed up.

There are also words which are seem smart but sound pompous. Try not to use:

'literally' – don't use it

'utilise' – use is simpler. Consider utilise to mean 'make efficient or effective use of'.

Contact details

For any document you are writing it is important to provide contact details for readers, whether delivered in print or electronically. Make sure these details are accurate, including a name, the correct telephone number and website address. In letters, your contact details will be placed under the logo. In a memo, put your contact details in the space provided on the standard memo form.

For emails, it is often helpful to use the Outlook facility to add a 'signature' at the end of all your emails automatically. This should show your name, job title, location, and phone and fax numbers. You can find out how to do this through the Word Help facility.

(See emails)

Contractions

Mr, Mrs, Rev, Dr do not take full stops. Generally, it is best to avoid contractions such as *don't* or *can't* in formal writing. You may occasionally find it helpful to use a contraction in less formal letters and in emails.

Don't use text-messaging abbreviations, such as 'AAMOF' (as a matter of fact) or 'FYI' (for your information) in any work correspondence.

D

Dates

These take the form 'day month year': 24 August 2009. Don't use 'st', 'nd', 'th'; or 'the' in front of a date.

For example, 'Firms were consulted on the 6th December 2003' is wrong. 'Firms were consulted on 6 December 2003' is right.

When recounting historical information consider the importance of a precise date. Several months on, does it matter that a meeting took place 'on 6 November 2012' or would 'in November 2012', or even 'late 2012', be close enough?

Years covering a period of 12 months are written 2013-14, financial years should be written as 2013/14.

Where there is a span of more than 1 year, use all 4 digits for both years, and link them with words, not hyphens. For example, 'Between 2001 and 2004, companies improved their performance.'

In tables, you can shorten the names of months to the first 3 letters. You can also show consecutive years in an abbreviated form as '02-03'; and here date ranges can use a dash.

For seasons, use lower case – spring, summer, autumn, winter. For decades, do not use '70s' or '80s', but '1970s', '1980s'. Remember not to use an apostrophe in plural dates. For centuries, use '20th century' rather than 'twentieth century', but always hyphenate if you are using it as an adjective – 'a 20th-century act of parliament'.

(See Seasons in *Spelling and word use*)

Decimals

Do not mix decimals and fractions in the same text.

Diversity

The golden rule here is to focus on people. Talk about young people, older/elderly people and people with (learning) disabilities (not the young, the elderly, the mentally handicapped, or the disabled).

Avoid terms that could be seen as sexist or gender specific, for example, use supervisor for foreman, police officer for policeman and fire fighter for fireman.

Avoid using 'man' as a verb. Work, staff, operate, cover, run, organise and guard are among the many neutral alternatives.

Use 'he or she' rather than 'he/she', 'she or he' or 'they'.

E

Emails

Keep these simple, short and clear. Use bulleted lists and keep paragraphs short. Structure your email as you would a letter.

When addressing your email:

- To: is the person you are writing to, and from whom you expect a response.
- CC: is for others who need to see the information in your email, but do not need to respond.
- BCC: is for those who need to see the information but you don't want others to be aware they have a copy.
- Always fill in the subject field.

Don't write about more than one subject. Separate topics should have separate emails.

Resist the temptation to use text messaging short cuts such as 'cu at 8'.

Begin with 'Dear,' and close with 'Best wishes', or similar. Don't use 'Hi,' unless you know the recipient well.

Your sign-off should appear in Arial (Auto) or black and contain your name, job title, company name and address and/or telephone number. It should not float across the screen, blink, or appear in rainbow shades.

If you are not available to receive and respond to incoming mail you should inform the sender of this and advise them when you will be next in the office. Give a phone number for the person they should contact in your absence.

Do not use block capitals. They give the impression you are shouting.

Think before you press the Send button. If you have written about an important or sensitive subject, it is better to be delayed and have the right tone, than to be speedy and create more problems.

Be polite, and do not send or forward threatening, abusive, or unlawful messages. Don't send confidential or sensitive ones either. The internet is not secure. Email can potentially be used as evidence of contract or corporate agreement, even if this is not your intention. A disclaimer doesn't necessarily mean you are not liable for any statements you make in an email.

Emails can be identified as being posted from RSSB.

If your attachments are larger than 20Mb they will not be transmitted. Zip large files.

When you have concluded your business via email, remember to thank your correspondent, especially if it is the first time you have contacted them.

Try to acknowledge the emails you get, even if you can't give a detailed response.

And finally, we can all make the mistake of sending too many emails. Consider whether you might be better to speak to the recipient.

(See Contact Details)

F

Fact that

Avoid phrases like 'owing to the fact that'. 'Because' is much simpler.

Figures

(See captions and dates).

Footnotes and endnotes

A footnote is not the same as a reference. It adds a note or comment on the text that will provide greater context and improve understanding for some readers. They should be kept to a minimum.

Instead of a footnote, try to include the information in the main body of your text, perhaps putting the explanatory information in brackets. If you have a lot of text that you do not want in the main document, or the information is not necessary for an immediate understanding of the subject, consider using an appendix or an endnote.

Footnotes and endnotes can be inserted using existing MS Word functionality. From the References ribbon or menu, select Insert Footnote[1] or Insert Endnote.

Font

Use 10-point Arial for body text in all Word documents, with 14-point line spacing. This font style and size has proven to be acceptable to

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[1] A footnote inserted using the functionality in Word 2010.

most RSSB audiences. This is the format that many RSSB templates use.

Where you know that you may have a higher than normal proportion of readers with a visual impairment, 12-point text with 16-point line spacing may be more appropriate.

Formats

If your document is to be printed, the less formatting you apply, the better. Do not use columns or try to make the document look like a printed document. Keep it simple – avoid using text boxes, borders, headers, coloured fonts and so on. Ask whether figures, tables or other visual material (including Excel spreadsheets) should be provided separately.

Full stops

Mr, Mrs, Rev, Dr do not take full stops. A group of three full stops, known as an ellipsis, can be used to show an omission. You would generally do this if you were shortening a report. For example, 'The train, with five first class carriages, left Euston' could be contracted to 'The train … left Euston'.

For more details, see *Full points* in the *Punctuation* section.

G

Government departments

When referring to a government department you should capitalise the main words. For example:

- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)
- Department of Health (DH)
- Department for Transport (DfT)
- Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)
- Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR)
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
- HM Treasury (the Treasury)
- Scotland Office
- Department for International Development (DfID)
- Ministry of Defence (MoD)
- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)
- Cabinet Office

When referring to the government do not capitalise the word.

H

Headings

Headings and (sub-headings) should be short and describe the material that follows. Use the formats in the template. Do not include abbreviations in headings. Write headings in sentence case and only capitalise proper nouns.

House style

Wrong	Right
automatic warning system	Automatic Warning System
class 66	Class 66
(the) Company	(the) company
Company Procedures	company procedures
(the) Formal Inquiry	formal inquiry
(the) house of commons	(the) House of Commons
(the) Industry	(the) industry
Ladbroke Grove formal inquiry	Ladbroke Grove Formal Inquiry
Level Crossing	level crossing
Overhead Line Equipment	overhead line equipment
Parliament	parliament
Network Rail Managed Infrastructure	Network Rail managed infrastructure
Railway Group safety plan	Railway Group Safety Plan
Railway Group standard	Railway Group Standard
rule book	Rule Book
Train Operating Company	train operating company
Train Driver	train driver
train protection and warning system	Train Protection and Warning System

type 4 diesel-electric locomotive Type 4 diesel-electric locomotive

Website website

Working Group working group

Hyperlinks

If you prepare a document electronically that you later print out, it is a good idea to remove the hyperlinks for the printed version. This is because they will show up as underlining, and sometimes this can hide certain characters, especially the underscore (_), which is commonly used in website addresses.

Hyphens

Use hyphens in:

Fractions (three-quarters) and other number compounds (twenty-one) where numerals are not used.

Most words beginning in prefixes such as ex, anti, ante, non and neo but not those beginning with re or pre unless the hyphen separates the same letter (reorganisation but pre-eminent).

Avoiding ambiguity – 'a little used car' is not the same as 'a little-used car', and 're-cover' means to provide with a new cover, while 'recover means to regain.

Compound adjectives, such as 'county-wide' but not when the first word is an adverb ending in 'ly', such as 'locally managed'.

Compound nouns formed with prepositions, such as 'stand-by' or with a single capital 'X-ray'.

Remember that words which are hyphenated when used together as a compound adjective are not hyphenated when used as nouns. For example, 'The Council prepared high-quality accounts' and 'The Council's accounts were prepared to a high quality' are both correct.

'Air-conditioner' and 'air-conditioning' are hyphenated. 'Benchmark' 'centrepiece', and 'contract out' are not.

(See *Adjectives and adverbs* in this section, and *Dashes* in the *Punctuation* section.)

I

Italics

Use italics (Emphasis) for titles of books and publications (but not for titles of articles in journals and individual chapters in books) and for cross-referenced sections in this and other documents.

J

Jargon

Avoid using jargon in your documents and instead substitute plain English that can be understood by all. You will achieve clarity by using shorter sentences, simple words, and active rather than passive constructions.

(See Plain English)

K

k

Avoid as an expression for 1,000, except as part of a recognised abbreviation such as kVA.

(See *Numbers* and *Abbreviations*)

L

Latin

Writing in plain English means avoiding obscure Latin (or Greek) words, especially Latin abbreviations, where you can. The following Latin terms and abbreviations should be replaced with the full English version.

Latin	Plain English
a priori	theoretically (oxforddictionaries.com defines the adjective as: Relating to or denoting reasoning or knowledge which proceeds from theoretical deduction rather than from observation or experience)
eg	for example
ie	that is

etc	and so on, OR and the rest
no	number
per annum	each year
pro forma	form
via	through, by

Many everyday Latin words, such as criteria, data and memorandum are, of course, fine to use. Avoid Latin plurals, such as fora, consortia, and memoranda. Just use the more common English form – forums, consortiums, and memorandums. However, the singular of criteria is criterion.

(see *Abbreviations*)

Logos

Do not attempt to reproduce RSSB logos in your documents. If you are using the logo of another organisation in your document, check with the organisation that you have permission to use it. The organisation may also want to see how and where the logo is used.

M

Minimalism

To simplify the task of reading, use only as many words as you need to effectively convey your message.

The report identifies 11 recommendations ~~as follows~~:

At ~~the~~ present ~~moment in time~~…Or, even, 'now'.

Monetary values

Use numbers for most monetary values, for example, £6,000 not £6 thousand or £6k. For sums of 1 million or over, use £1m or £6.5m. Do not abbreviate 'billion', which is one thousand million; write '£6 billion'.

In sentences, use words, not hyphens, to show a range of monetary values. For example, 'In two years, the amount of money awarded rose from £5,000 to £6,000'; or, '…the amount awarded will be between £5,000 and £6,000'.

When describing ranges of figures that are not part of a sentence; such as in lists or tables, you can use a dash rather than a word. For example: 5,000-6,000 or 5m-6m. In table headings, use '£000' for to show the figures are in thousands of pounds, or '£m' for millions of pounds.

Try not to start a sentence with a number, including a monetary value, but if you do, write it out in full.

(See *Abbreviations* and *Numbers*)

MPs

Scottish Parliament members are abbreviated MSPs; AMs for the Welsh Assembly; MLAs for Northern Ireland Assembly. Cap A for Assembly at second mention in Wales and Northern Ireland; cap P for Parliament in Scotland and England.

N

National Statistics

This was formed in June 2000 and incorporates the Office for National Statistics: be careful not to confuse the two. The head of the new agency is the National Statistician; the agency watchdog is the Statistics Commission.

(See Office for National Statistics)

Numbers

In text, write all numbers as numerals, except when the number must appear at the start of a sentence. As examples:

- Over the past 3 years there have been 14, 9, and 6 deaths respectively.
- Twenty-five signals were passed at danger last month.

Numerals are always used in percentages (for example, 2%), and for page references.

Million should be shortened to 'm'. However, billion should be written out in full. For example: £60m, but £60 billion. In charts and tables billion can be abbreviated to 'bn' (for example: £1bn).

(See *Abbreviations*, *Monetary values*, and *Percentages*)

O

Ordered lists

There may be times when you need a sub-list. Try to avoid this, as it can become complicated. But, it it is really necessary, you should use:

Numbered items (1, 2, 3) for the main points

Lower case alphas for second level items - the sub-points of the main points.

Lower case Roman numbering (i,ii,iii) for third level sub-points.

Example:

1. The priorities were reviewed at the board's November meeting.

2. The targets for safety were achieved.

3. Awareness of necessary measures had been increased.

4. The number of incidents had fallen slightly. This may be because of:

   a) Fewer engineering works

   b) Increased efficiency in implementing safety measures including:

      i. More frequent training

      ii. Longer time spent training

5. Plans had been put in place to measure the effectiveness of the service.

6. Funding for staff training had been increased.

P

Page numbering

It is helpful to include page numbers in all documents. If your template does not have a defined page number, set up the footer in Word to put page numbers in the centre at the bottom of the page.

Ideally use a template that already has page numbers defined.

Paragraphs

Keep paragraphs as brief as possible. Start a new paragraph when you say something new.

Percentages

Use the % symbol rather than 'per cent'; so, 20%.

Do not write '%age' in place of 'percentage'. Don't use percentage as a substitute for 'many' as in, 'a large percentage of people'; write 'many people', or 'a lot of'.

(see *Numbers*)

Q

Quotation marks

Use single quotes for speech, and double ones for 'quotes within quotes'. For example: 'He told me, "I was there," and I believed him,' said Sir Peter.

However, this example would look much neater if you used reported speech. 'He told me he was there and I believed him,' said Sir Peter.

Do not use quotes on phrases in general text. He said he was driving an 'unusual' train has just as much meaning without quotes.

Document titles do not take quotes – these should be italicised.

If you need to quote from another document or from a speech, double-check to make sure you have reproduced the words exactly, including any spelling or punctuation that is used. Also make sure you say where the quote is from.

For short quotes of fewer than 12 words, put quote marks around the words.

> *Longer quotes should be presented in a separate paragraph, using the Quotation paragraph format. This is indented from the main text and italicised. Do not use quote marks around the text.*

If you have a quote that extends over more than one paragraph, the correct style is to begin each new paragraph with a quote mark, without closing marks, until you get to the last word, where you insert the closing quote mark.

R

Rail Regulator

Refer to as the 'Office of the Rail Regulator', its official title.

References

RSSB uses the Harvard (name date) referencing system.

In your text a document should be referred to when something cited by you that is attributable to another author in another document (whether published or not). For example: It is believed that the use of white space in documents makes technical details less daunting and more approachable for the non-expert audience (Davey 2010).

In the reference section of your document you should cite the references in full:

Author (even when this is an organisation or government department), title (italics for books, non-italics in single quotation marks for articles or chapter titles, followed by the book or journal title in italics), publisher (not if it is a journal), place (if not the UK), date of publication, page number(s).

For example:

Audit Commission, *Improving School Buildings: Asset Management Planning in LEAs and Schools*, Audit Commission, 2003.

For fuller details of the Harvard referencing system see the *Notes, footnotes, endnotes, bibliographies, and references* section.

Roman numerals

These don't usually take full stops, for example: Elizabeth II, Article XVI, Part II, Psalm xxiii.

S

Scientific measures

Write out the measure at first use, with the abbreviation in brackets. Then refer to in its short form. The abbreviation takes no point and no 's' in the plural; for example: 14km, not 14kms.

Some basic international units and their abbreviations are: metre (m); gram (g); litre (l); ampere (A); volt (V); watt (W); note also kilowatt-hour (kWh). Only abbreviate mile to m in mph and mpg; and gallon to g in mpg (otherwise gal). Beware of using m for million or for miles in any scientific context when it might be taken for metres.

Scientific names

When using Latin terminology, use an upper case lead for the first (generic) word, and lower case with the second word (specific); for example *Homo sapiens*. Put the whole term in italics.

(see Latin)

Sentences

To keep the reader's attention, vary the length of sentences, but don't make them too long. All sentences should have a verb. In terms of structure, avoid starting sentences with dull, meaningless or weak beginnings such as 'There is'.

Instead of: 'There is a possibility that performance reviews may be delayed', try: 'Performance reviews may be delayed.'

And, 'There are many reasons why we should delay the announcement', should be: 'We should delay the announcement for these reasons: (and then specify what those reasons are). Try to avoid using words like many, several or various, as they are not concrete.

The Plain English Campaign recommends a maximum of 15 to 20 words in a sentence. And no more than 3 clauses or phrases in each one.

Shall/should

Good practice is that 'shall' and 'should' go with the first person singular and plural (I shall, we shall), 'will' and 'would' with the others ('he will', 'they will'). 'Shall' with second and third person singular and plural ('you' and 'they') has a slightly more emphatic meaning than 'will'.

Also consider that 'shall' and 'will' are used to indicate that something is mandatory. 'Should' and 'would' suggest that something may be permissive or optional.

Singular/plural

Generally speaking this is an issue of choice, but one that you should apply consistently. Technically, 'data are', 'none was', 'the board is' and the 'government is' are correct. 'None' is a contraction of 'not one'.

Majority and minority can be 'is' or 'are' depending on the sense. In certain contexts the 'public is'; but although correct, can sound awkward. Try turning the construction around, for example, 'members of the public are'.

Slam-door trains

Is hyphenated.

Sources

You should provide sources for case studies, figures, charts and diagrams, and any quoted or paraphrased material. Sources for text material should be given by following the Harvard referencing system (See *Notes, footnotes, endnotes; bibliographies and references*).

Spelling

Be consistent and use an authoritative British English dictionary. Where 'ise' and 'ize' are alternative endings, use 'ise'. See http://dictionary.cambridge.org/and www.oxfordreference.com for more information.

(See House Style)

Split infinitives

An infinitive is the root form of a verb, for example 'to be' or 'to do' or 'to go'. Although there is in grammatical rule about not splitting infinites, there are some readers who will be so alienated if you do, that it is not worth taking the risk.

Try to avoid splitting infinitives. Generally you should only use the technique in quotations such as: 'To boldly go…'.

Statistics

Check any data or numbers in tables to make sure they are accurate. If you have rounded figures up or down, say so in the notes to the table.

In text, don't mix figures and numbers. If there is a mixture, use figures throughout.

(See Numbers)

Spacing

Use single that is about 140% of the font size. A single space is used after a full stop.

Speech marks

(See Quotations)

T

Times

Use the 24-hour clock, for example 10:23 not 10.23 am, and 16:30 not 4.30 pm. Use colons between the hours and minutes.

Titles

When writing the title of a document or publication use italics and upper case the first letter of significant words. Document titles do not take quotes – these should be italicized and capped up. Job titles should always be written with lower case letters when referring to what a person does: Len Porter, RSSB's chief executive, will attend the meeting next week.

But if Len Porter were sending a letter, he would sign off Len Porter, Chief Executive.

Titles such as Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms, Doctor, Bishop, Archbishop, Lord, Lady, Prince, Archdeacon, Monsignor, Professor, are have an initial capital letter before a name. For example, Professor Bob Brown; but if then referred to without his name, would become the professor.

U

V

W