



*Lewis-Barned & Associates*

# Editorial Style Guide

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COMMUNICATIONS

## Introduction

When we think about the most respected brands in the world one thing they appear to have in common is their uncommon ability to communicate with investors, consumers and employees. This competency has many facets including the clarity, consistency and tone of voice that ensure audiences, readers and consumers 'sit up and pay attention'.

As demand for our own specialist writing services grows year on year it's clear that our clients are those businesses willing to invest in good writing in the same way as they also invest in good design, quality office buildings and hiring talented people. In short, they have decided that the written word remains a mighty weapon in the battle for market share, employee engagement and good public relations.

## A guide to better writing

Editorial style guides protect your brand from the poor writing habits of others and help to ensure greater consistency across all written communications.

A style guide sets out 'rules' to be adopted by all writers producing copy for an organisation. Amongst *many* other conventions, the rules typically define the following:

- The spellings of certain words
- When and what to capitalise
- What style of bullet points to use
- How to set out headings, numbers, lists, tables etc
- Internet terms
- Inverted commas
- Italics
- Line endings

A style guide that is well communicated, searchable and easily accessible can help everyone to write more consistently *and* so improves the professionalism and credibility of any business.

This short guide will provide 'model solutions' to *some* of the issues that managers face when drafting business documents. However, in twenty pages we don't pretend to be able to solve every niggle or doubt.

## **About Lewis-Barned & Associates**

We are a small team of talented freelance copywriters for online, web and print media. Our clients include leading agencies and some of the world's most respected organisations. We write mainly for clients in the health, lifestyle and luxury goods and services industries.

If you would like us to help you take your written communications to the next level please contact Suzi or David at Lewis-Barned & Associates on 01444 811292.

## Abbreviations

An abbreviation is a shortening of a word or phrase. The first time you introduce an abbreviation write the word or phrase in full followed by the abbreviation in brackets. In later references use the abbreviation alone. If in doubt, explain.

### Dos and don'ts

- Always use an abbreviation when it is much better known than the full word or phrase, eg NGO, HIV, DNA, WHO
- Do consider whether using an abbreviation could confuse your audience. If in doubt, spell it out
- Don't use full stops if the abbreviation is better known without, eg UK, USA
- Don't use full stops for initials and names but do use spaces, eg P G Wodehouse, J K Rowling
- Do check whether the organisation has full stops in the title and use their own punctuation

## Acronyms

An acronym is an abbreviation formed from the first letter of each word in a name or phrase. As a general rule, every letter of an acronym is capitalised and there are no full stops in between the letters.

### Dos and don'ts

- Don't use acronyms unless they are necessary
- Don't make up new acronyms
- Don't overuse acronyms
- Don't introduce an acronym in the document without spelling it out in full in the first instance. Use the full name or phrase with the acronym in each new section – don't assume that the reader has necessarily read previous sections. If in doubt, explain.

## Active and passive voices

In the active voice, the subject is the person or thing that performs an action. In the passive voice the object becomes the subject of the sentence.

Always use the active voice: it is more direct and dynamic.

## Examples

### The active voice

Regulators have translated their framework into seven different languages.

### The passive voice

This framework has been translated into seven different languages by the regulators.

## Addresses

### Dos and don'ts

- Do write addresses in full
- Do use figures in addresses as opposed to spelling out the number
- Do use an initial capital letter for the building, street, town and country name
- Do put address information on separate lines. If this is not possible, always use a comma to separate information, eg Glenmore, Deanland Road
- Don't put a comma before the postcode if it sits on the same line as the town/city
- Don't put commas at the end of each line
- Don't use abbreviations in addresses as someone may struggle to understand your meaning

## Ampersand

An ampersand (&) is used to represent the word 'and'. It is often used in titles, product names, department names and geographic locations.

### Dos and don'ts

- Do use when they are part of the name of a company, eg Lewis-Barned & Associates
- Do use them in constituencies, when two names are joined to form one unit, eg Mergers & Acquisitions
- Do use them in certain abbreviations and contractions, eg R&D
- Don't be tempted to use ampersands to abbreviate the word 'and' in general usage

## An (use of)

An is the form of A used before vowel sounds.

### Dos and Don'ts

- Do use an before words that begin with a vowel sound, eg an umbrella, an MP
- Do use an before words that begin with an h if the h is silent, eg an hour or an honorary degree
- Do use an before the word historical. This is an exception to the rule

## Apostrophes

The apostrophe is the punctuation mark which often causes people the most problems.

The apostrophe has two main uses:

To show possession (that someone or something belongs to another) and to show that one or more letters have been omitted (a contraction).

### To show possession:

- If the name or noun is singular, add an apostrophe (') then 's' to the word, eg today, we are recognised as one of the world's leading FMCG companies
- If the name or noun is singular and already ends in 's' add an apostrophe then 's' to the word, eg boss's, Charles's, Jones's
- If the name or noun is plural and does not end in 's', add an apostrophe then 's', eg the men's cloakroom was next to the conference room
- If the name or noun is plural and ends in 's', add an apostrophe (') after the 's', eg naturally, the foreign governments' cases in the US are even more remote, involving health care systems in foreign countries which are subject to diverse foreign regulatory systems.

There is one exception to the rule. When its means 'of it' there is no apostrophe. The rule is: it's = it is; its = of it.

### To show that one or more letters have been omitted:

When we are speaking we often cut short certain sounds, running words together. For example, did not becomes didn't, will not becomes won't. When we write these words, we use an apostrophe to show that a letter is missing.

## **Dos and don'ts**

Don't use an apostrophe to make a plural and don't add an apostrophe to decades. Write 1990s not 1990's.

For more information see the Numbers section.

## **Brackets**

Brackets are used in pairs to indicate that the words enclosed are not essential to the meaning of the sentence but provide additional information, an explanation, an afterthought, or clarification. The information contained within the brackets is referred to as parenthesis.

## **Dos and don'ts**

- Do put the full stop inside if a whole sentence is within brackets
- Do put the full stop outside if only part of the sentence is in brackets
- Do use square brackets to introduce a sub section within brackets
- Don't overuse brackets in your writing as it can distract your audience

## **Bullet points and numbering**

Bullet points provide structure and draw attention to key facts. They make it easy for the reader to find and follow information.

Use a bulleted list if each item in the list is of equal importance. Use a numbered list if each item is ranked in sequence or in order of priority.

## **Dos and don'ts**

- Do use bullet points when you want to compile a list where each item has equal importance
- Do use numbering when you want to outline a logical or prioritised sequence of events
- Do be consistent with your formatting of bullets in a document
- Do use a colon (:) at the end of the sentence prior to starting the bulleted or numbered list
- Do use an initial capital letter for the first word of each item in the list
- Don't use bullet points for lists of less than three items as they can be expressed better in a full sentence
- Decide whether to use semi-colons at the end of bullet points or not and then be consistent

- Decide whether to put a full-stop at the end of the last item in the list and then be consistent

## Capital letters

Also known as an upper case letter, the primary use of the capital letter is to denote the start of a sentence.

It is also used for:

- Proper names and brand names
- Name of a place, institution or event
- Name of departments, treaties or acts
- Titles of publications
- The pronoun I
- Days of the week
- Months of the year
- Historical periods
- Religions, religious terms and festivals
- Names of languages
- Nationalities or ethnic groups

### Dos and don'ts

- Do use capital letters for proper names, eg job titles, publication titles, names of places, organisations, institutions and standards
- Do use an initial capital letter for the first word of a heading, but use lowercase in all subsequent words
- Do use an initial capital letter at the beginning of each sentence
- Do use capital letters when writing acronyms (not small caps)
- Don't write whole sentences in capital letters: *IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO READ AND IS NOT SEEN AS PROFESSIONAL*
- Don't use capital letters when referring generally to organisations or bodies, e.g. we are calling on governments. However, use capital letters if you are referring to a specific organisation or body, eg the British Government

## Captions

A caption is a short description used to accompany an image or photograph. It connects the photograph or image to the copy surrounding it.

## **Dos and don'ts**

- Do incorporate the four Ws to communicate the essential facts of the image: who? what? where? and when?
- Do add quotes, descriptions and additional information to enrich your caption
- Don't put a full stop at the end of a caption
- Don't forget to identify people in a picture by their names

## **Colons**

The colon (:) is a punctuation mark used to separate parts of a sentence. You should use colons for the following:

- To introduce a list
- To indicate that what follows is an explanation or elaboration of what precedes it, eg we aim to achieve this by optimising our most important assets: our people and our brands;
- To introduce a sentence that is an entire quotation, eg she said: "It can't succeed without the commitment of the whole team"
- To link contrasting statements, eg he cooked: she ate

## **Dos and don'ts**

- Do follow a colon with a space
- Don't put a space before a colon
- Don't follow a colon with a hyphen or a dash

## **Commas**

The comma (,) is the most flexible and versatile of all punctuation. It is used to:

- Divide a long sentence into smaller parts to make it easier to read
- Separate items in a list, eg we are ethical, responsible and successful
- Introduce and/or end a piece of direct speech, eg "My team works extremely hard," he claimed
- Add additional information and understanding to the adjoining statement (see also Brackets)
- Express a number that has four or more digits within it, eg 6,000kg

## Dos and don'ts

- Do follow a comma with a space
- Don't precede a comma with a space
- Don't use a comma to indicate a pause for breath
- Don't put commas after question marks, even if they are separated by quotation marks, eg "May I accompany you to the meeting?" he asked
- Don't put a comma before the word and in a list unless the preceding item also contains the word and, eg Marketing, Global and Regional Sales, and Customer Service teams gathered together

## Companies Act

References to the Companies Act should be styled as follows:

*Section 447 of the Companies Act 1985*

## Compounds

A compound word is a word which is formed from two (or more) other words. Words that form a compound can be written separately, linked with a hyphen or joined together. There are no set rules, each example of a compound should be judged separately. To be sure you are writing your compound correctly refer to a dictionary.

## Dos and don'ts

- Do remember that when you merge two words together you will change the meaning of the word
- Do be consistent in the way you write compound words in a publication
- Don't create new compounds

## Examples

We work to ensure that these grades are available **long-term** to keep the tastes of our products consistent.

This will be one of the few **websites** from a leading global consumer goods company that does not advertise or sell its brands. See also hyphens.

## Currencies

See Numbers.

## Dashes

The long dash, also called the em dash, is used to introduce an explanation, amplification, paraphrase, particularisation or correction of what immediately precedes it. The short dash, also called the en dash, is sometimes used between numbers, eg *1-5*. It is often confused with the hyphen which is used to join words together.

### Dos and don'ts

- Do use dashes in pairs to add meaning or explanation (see also Brackets and Comma)
- Don't use more than one pair of dashes per sentence and ideally not more than one pair per paragraph
- Do use the dash to introduce something that develops or is an example of what has gone before
- Do use the dash to illustrate sequences
- Do include a space before and after the dash
- Don't confuse the role of the dash with that of the hyphen as they serve very different purposes
- Do use an em dash (type two hyphens on the keyboard) to distinguish them from hyphens

## Dates

An often forgotten but hugely important fact is that numerical dates are not universally recognised. Take for example the date 02/03/06; this will be read as 02 March in the UK and 03 February in the USA. Therefore it is imperative to write dates consistently, in the format DD Month YYYY.

### Dos and don'ts

- Do separate the name and number of the day with a comma, when used together, eg Monday, 22 July 2006
- Do begin the day of a week with an initial capital letter
- Do use a hyphen without spacing when referring to a span across two calendar years, eg This will run through 2006-07

- Do separate two financial years with a “/”, eg Budgetary year 2006/07
- Do write particular decades as ‘sixties’, ‘1960s’ or ‘60s’ – there is no need to use an apostrophe
- Don’t write from 2006-07; instead write in 2006-07 or from 2006 to 2007
- Don’t write between 2006-07, instead write in 2006-07, between 2006 and 2007 or from 2006 to 2007
- Don’t use numerical dates, eg 02/03/09
- Don’t use ‘th’, ‘st’, ‘nd’ after the number, eg 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2009

## Ellipses

An ellipsis is a symbol (...) which is used to indicate an omission from a sentence, a word or phrase. The missing matter may be a single word, things that are not considered important or an unfinished thought (especially in a quotation). Use a space then three dots, with no space between each dot ...

### Dos and don’ts

- Do remember that if the ellipsis occurs at the end of the sentence, you should start the next word with an initial capital letter
- Don’t use an ellipsis if the user could be confused about the meaning
- Don’t use an initial capital letter for the word following the ellipsis if it occurs in the middle of a sentence.

## Figures

See Numbers.

## Foreign words and phrases

Don’t use foreign words and phrases unless there is no English alternative. For example, “Monthly reporting has become common practice among the team” is preferable to “Monthly reporting has become *de rigueur* among the team”.

## Dos and don'ts

- Do put a translation of the foreign word in brackets after the first usage
- Don't use an untranslated foreign word or statement if it might confuse, annoy, frustrate or insult your readers
- Do italicise foreign words and phrases when being used, unless they have become part of everyday English. Below are some examples of foreign words that have become anglicized and can therefore be written in normal font:

ad hoc

apartheid

a propos

avant-garde

bona fide

bourgeois

café

de facto

elite

en masse, en route

in situ

machismo

post mortem

raison d'être

status quo

vice versa

vis-à-vis

## Fragments

Fragments are incomplete sentences. They usually look like sentences, in that they start with an initial capital letter and end with a full stop but they do not constitute a correct sentence. A sentence should consist of a subject (person or thing) and a verb (a doing word).

Fragments are sometimes used by journalists for emphasis and they are often used in headings, eg *Welcome to Lewis-Barned & Associates* or *Click here to access our sites around the world*.

Don't use fragments in the body text of a document. To correct a fragment you should connect it to another sentence or add in the missing sentence parts.

## Full stops

Full stops (.) indicate the end of a sentence. Use full-stops to keep sentences short and easy to read.

A full stop can also be used after abbreviations, in email addresses and to mark the end of a group of words that, although not a sentence, are complete in themselves.

For more information on the correct length of sentences and positioning of full stops see the [sentence length](#) section.

### Dos and don'ts

- Do try and vary the length of your sentences as this will add clarity and interest
- Do use a full stop before 'however'. For example, "He ran many miles while training for the marathon. However, he still wasn't fast enough to complete the race within the time allowed."
- Do use a full-stop within a bracket if the bracket contains a full sentence
- Don't use commas instead of full stops, as this can lead to long and clumsy sentences.

## Hyphens

Hyphens are used to join words together to create compound words and prevent misunderstanding. The [dash](#), on the other hand, is used to introduce an explanation, amplification, paraphrase, particularisation or correction of what immediately precedes it.

Use hyphens for words that:

- Begin with **anti**, **non** and **neo**, eg non-disclosure
- Become unmanageably long with the addition of a prefix, eg inter-departmental
- Are adjectives formed from two or more words, eg value-added tax, state-of-the-art
- To avoid ambiguities, eg a little-used PC *vs* a little used-PC;
- To separate identical letters, eg *pre-eminent*, *pre-empt*. Exceptions include *override*, *overrule*, *underrate*, *withhold*
- For nouns formed from prepositional verbs, eg *build-up*, *round-up*, *get-together*

### Dos and don'ts

- Do hyphen numbers less than one hundred where necessary, eg twenty-three
- Don't place a hyphen after an adverb that ends in 'ly', eg fully-qualified

- Don't use hyphens after already, least, less, most *and* very
- Don't use hyphens if you can insert the word 'and' between the two words

## ie, eg, etc

These are abbreviations and are defined as follows:

- eg – example – *exempli grati*
- ie – that is - *id est*
- etc – and so forth - *et cetera*

For more formal types of writing, you should avoid using abbreviations.

## Dos and don'ts

- Do make sure you know the difference between ie and eg. *ie* provides an explanation whereas *eg* provides an example
- Do ensure that they are lower case and preceded by a comma, dash or brackets
- Don't use them unnecessarily. Try to use alternative words such as 'for example', for eg; 'in other words' for ie; and 'among others' instead of etc

## Internet terms

Again be consistent in the treatment of internet terms:

- email
- internet and website
- the Web
- online
- homepage
- search engine
- web addresses – some web addresses begin with *http* and some *https*. You do not need to write *http*, but for web addresses that begin with *https*, you should write them in full
- email addresses – when they appear at the end of a sentence, you should punctuate with a full stop, as normal

## Inverted commas

See Quotation marks.

## Italics

*Italics* are a typographic effect used for emphasis and contrast. They are used to indicate titles, examples, a foreign word or phrase and to identify a word or extract. Remember to put appropriate accents and diacritical marks on all foreign words in italics except those that have become part of the English language.

### Dos and don'ts

- Do use them to add emphasis to words in a sentence
- Do use them to reference words being talked about, as an alternative to using single quotes
- Don't overuse italics throughout a formal business document, as they will no longer have emphasis

## Jargon and business terminology

Jargon is a specialised or technical language used by a particular group.

Jargon should be avoided. Business terminology and technical terms have their place within the proper context, but in most instances the simplest form of expression is the best.

### Dos and don'ts

- Do use accepted business or technical terminology (see below) in your written communication but always explain each term if you believe your audience is likely to be unfamiliar with it
- Don't use foreign words and phrases unless there is no English alternative
- Don't use jargon in external communications unless it is unavoidable

## Line endings

Never break lines between the following:

£39....million

15...per cent (although you can split per...cent)

Telephone numbers

Dates

People's names

### **Dos and don't's**

Do try to avoid splitting brand names and company names if possible.

## **Lists**

See Bullets and numbering.

## **Measurement**

See Numbers.

## **Money**

See Numbers.

## **Months**

See Capital Letters or Dates.

## **Names and titles**

It shows professionalism and courtesy to address people in the correct manner. You should be consistent when writing first names, surnames and academic and professional titles.

Use a person's first and second name for the first mention in a document, then the first name throughout the rest of the document. Don't use Mr, Mrs, Ms or Miss.

### **Dos and don't's**

- Do write people's names starting with a capital letter
- Do use the person's academic title if they have one
- Do write job titles starting with capital letters

- When referring to someone's job role in the main body of a document, it should be written in lower case

## Numbers

### Dos and don'ts

- Do spell out numbers, up to and including ten, but use figures for numbers from 11 onwards
- Don't use upper case *M* for million. In tables £million becomes £m
- Do use 60p (not pence)
- Do use figures for page and note references, eg page 55 note 21
- Do use figures when writing percentages, eg 4 per cent; in tables or headlines per cent becomes %
- Do distinguish between dollar currencies as in US\$, AS\$ or CAN\$. Place the currency first, as in DM6
- The country should begin in upper case but the currency should begin in lower case, eg Japanese yen, South African rand
- Do display the currency symbol and up to a maximum of two decimal places, eg £25.00
- Do employ figures for statistics, money, weight, measurements and ages, eg 20kg
- Do use commas to break up thousands (000's), eg 10,000
- Don't use more than one currency symbol at a time, eg €3.50c
- Don't start a sentence with a figure
- Don't put a space between figures and abbreviated measurements or percentages, eg not 5 mm but 5mm
- Don't use *B* for billion, as it has different meanings in different countries. Simply spell the word billion in full. In tables "billion" becomes *b*

## Ordinals

Ordinals are numbers that are used when items need to be put in order, *eg first, second, third, 17<sup>th</sup>*. In formal business documentation ordinal numbers below ten must be spelt out in full, ie *first, second* and *third*. Do not use ordinals to express dates, eg he arrived on the fifth of November use 5 November.

## Paragraphs

A paragraph contains a number of sentences and good practice dictates that it describes one specific idea or theme.

When writing paragraphs, try to structure sentences in the following order:

- First sentence: introduces the topic or idea
- Middle sentences: explain and support the idea by giving examples
- Final sentence: summarises the sentences and provide a link to the next paragraph

### **Dos and don'ts**

- Do keep paragraphs short, preferably between seven and nine lines. Try not to exceed 15 lines
- Do plan paragraphs so that you have a start, middle and end to them
- Do use new paragraphs to explain each new topic or idea

## **Per cent**

Per cent or its symbol (%) is a number equal to 1/100 or 0.01. However, a percentage may be a number greater than 100, eg *200% of a number refers to twice the original number*. Figures are always used, not words.

You should always spell out the words in full, rather than substitute the symbol, except in tables and spreadsheets. The correct form is to use two separate words, ie per cent. However we use one word when referring to percentage.

### **Dos and don'ts**

- Do spell out per cent, unless you are writing it in spreadsheets or tables
- Don't put a space between the number and the % sign, eg 20 %
- Don't write %age. It should always be numerical or written in full (percentage)

## **Place names**

### **Dos and don'ts**

- Do use an initial capital letter for definite geographical places, regions, areas and countries, eg The Hague, Africa Middle East region, Germany
- Do write the universally accepted name for a place, eg Rome instead of Roma
- Do remember to use lower case for east, west, north, south, central, eastern and western except when it forms part of a name, eg North Korea, South Africa, West End

- Do remember that in clearly defined areas, such as North, Central and South America, Central, South, East and South-East Asia, initial capitals should be used
- Do use initial capitals for particular buildings
- Do use lower case for province, county, river, state, city when not strictly part of the name, eg the Limpopo river, New York state, Cabanas province. There are recognisable exceptions: the River Thames, Mississippi River, Kuwait City

## Quotation marks

Quotation marks capture direct speech and are used in pairs, at the beginning and end of the quote.

There are two types of quotation marks: single quotes (') and double quotes ("). As a rule always use double quotation marks for quoted speech and single quotes to highlight a word or phrase or indicate a quote within a quote. A colon should go before a quote.

### Example

The Chairman said: "Investors are returning to quality stocks, seen as 'defensive.'"

### Dos and don'ts

- Do remember that if a sentence ends with a full stop or question mark, you should put the punctuation before the final quotation mark, eg The Chairman said: "There is more to our strategy than creating growth, vital though that undoubtedly is."
- Do remember that if the quote does not include any punctuation, the closing quotation marks should go before any punctuation marks that the sentence requires, eg "it is now time to leave", he said
- Do understand that when a quote is broken off and resumed after such words as he said, you only use punctuation within the quotation marks if it is a natural place in the quote to do so, eg "If I may draw your attention to the chart on the right," he said, "I think it will help you understand the concept." In this case the comma after right and the full stop after concept belong to the quotation and are therefore placed before the inverted commas;
- Do remember that if the words quoted would not naturally have punctuation at the point where they are broken, the punctuation should go outside the quotation marks, eg "the delegates are here", she said, "we must go and present."
- Don't include any words within the quotation marks that are not in the original quote.

## Semicolons

The semicolon (;) has two main uses. It is used to link closely related clauses or to separate items in a list that already contain commas.

“Semicolons should be used to mark a pause longer than a comma and shorter than a full stop. Don't overdo them.” Economist Style Guide.

### Examples

Integrity is also the opposite of fragility; it means being seen as unified and soundly constructed, a well run business with systems and operations that work well.

For example, most legal systems do not offer the possibility of punitive damages; do not have a system of class actions; and do not allow lawyers to earn huge amounts of money.

## Sentence length

A sentence should be concise and to the point for clarity and readability. As a general rule, a sentence should be between 15 and 20 words and should not exceed 25 words.

## Titles of people and status

See Names and titles.

## Titles of publications

When referring to the title of a publication, the name should be placed in initial capital letters and does not normally need to be italicised.

### Examples

Social Report 2009/10

Annual Review and Summary Financial Statement 2009

## Words that can be easily confused

There are a number of words in the English language that are easily confused. The table below highlights some of the most common ones.

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accept	to agree to take or undertake; to receive willingly; to believe; to consent
except	to exclude or leave out; other than

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advice	( <i>n.</i> ) suggestion; counsel
advise	( <i>v.</i> ) to give advice

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affect	( <i>v.</i> ) to change; to shape; to influence
effect	( <i>v.</i> ) to bring about; to cause something to happen
	( <i>n.</i> ) result; outcome

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all ready	completely prepared ('all is ready')
already	beforehand; in the past; by this time

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alternate	( <i>v.</i> ) to occur in a successive manner; to act or proceed by turns; to move regularly back and forth between two places, conditions, actions, etc.
	( <i>adj.</i> ) happening or following in turns
	( <i>n.</i> ) a person acting in place of another; a substitute
alternative	( <i>n.</i> ) a choice between or among mutually exclusive possibilities
	( <i>adj.</i> ) existing outside traditional or established systems

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any body	one indiscriminate dead person
anybody	any one person (usually interchangeable with <i>anyone</i> )

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any more	use when "any" could be removed and the meaning would be preserved
anymore	no longer

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any one	a specific person (use if substituting <i>anybody</i> doesn't work; also use if followed by <i>of</i> or if followed by any single object)
anyone	any person (use if you can substitute <i>anybody</i> )

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any way	meaning 'any method'. Use when you don't mean "in any case"
anyway	in any case

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beside	by the side of; next to
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besides	in addition to
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Biennial	means once every two years.
Biannual	can mean twice a year or once every two years.
canvas	tent
canvass	solicit votes
cancel	prevent publication
censure	criticise
cite	( <i>v.</i> ) to make reference to a specific source
sight	( <i>n.</i> ) vision or view
site	( <i>n.</i> ) a location (eg on the Internet; or eg a construction site)
complement	to make complete, go well with, enhance
compliment	to flatter or praise
continual	repeated at frequent intervals
continuous	uninterrupted
council	( <i>n.</i> ) an official group or committee; a governing or deliberative body
councillor	( <i>n.</i> ) a council member
counsel	( <i>v.</i> ) to give advice or guidance ( <i>n.</i> ) advice or guidance ( <i>n.</i> ) one who advises, especially a lawyer who gives legal advice
counsellor	( <i>n.</i> ) one who counsels or advises ( <i>n.</i> ) a term of address for a lawyer acting as <i>counsel</i>
consul	( <i>n.</i> ) an official representative of a foreign country's interests; an emissary
desperate	reckless out of despair or urgency
disparate	dissimilar, different
disburse	to pay out
disinterested	free from bias, objective;
uninterested	not taking an interest
disperse	to scatter
discreet	cautious; guarded in conduct; respectful of propriety
discrete	separate; distinct; disconnected
ensure	make certain
insure	against risk
assure	life

imply	to suggest (a <i>speaker</i> implies something)
infer	to draw a conclusion (a <i>listener</i> infers something)
insure	to guarantee life or property against risk (as with an insurance policy)
ensure	to make sure or certain of something
licence	(n) a permit from an authority; freedom to behave without constraint
license	(v) grant a licence; authorise
practice	(n) application or use of a plan; premises of a profession, e.g. doctor or lawyer; the action of practising
practise	(v) perform or exercise repeatedly; to be engaged in (a profession); observe the teaching (of a particular religion)
principal	( <i>adj.</i> ) most important; major ( <i>n.</i> ) school administrator
principle	( <i>n.</i> ) rule; standard; law; belief
rise	to go up or get up
raise	to bring something up (and it's always followed by whatever is being brought up)
stationary	in a fixed spot or position
stationery	letter-writing paper
While/whilst	use while

## Words and phrases that lack meaning

Words that lack meaning can confuse the reader and add no value to the topic being discussed. For example, words such as 'proactive' (not a good word – try 'active' or 'energetic').

If in doubt – cut it out.

as well as, not moreover

plus, not in addition to

built-in, not intrinsic

this time, not this time around

cuts, not cutbacks

record, not track record

bought, not bought up

sold, not sold off

priority, not top priority  
probably, not most probably  
Active or energetic, not proactive  
Avoid using more importantly

## Tricky words and phrases

adaptation, not adaption  
acknowledgment not acknowledgement  
adviser, not advisor (or at least settle on one form of the spelling)  
affinity with not to or for  
ageing not aging  
ahead of - avoid, use 'before' or 'in advance of'  
all right is right; alright is not all right  
alternative - strictly a choice between two courses of action; if there are more than two, use option or choice may be preferred  
amid not amidst  
appendix, pl. appendices  
as to - there is usually a more appropriate preposition  
both - unnecessary in most sentences that contain 'and'; both men and women says no more than men and women and takes longer; if you use it, it is plural e.g. both women had been shopping  
benefited/benefiting – although these can be spelt with two 't's use one  
budget/budgeting – although these can be spelt with two 't's use one  
cafe - no accent  
city - in Britain a town that has been granted a charter by the Crown; it usually has a cathedral  
compare to/with - the former means liken to, the latter to make a comparison so unless you are specifically likening someone or something to someone or something else, use compare with. For example: *John compared himself to his father because he believed he was like his father; I might compare him with his brother to assess their relative merits.*  
complete or finish is better than finalise  
comprise - to consist of; *comprise of* is wrong  
connection, not connexion  
consortium, plural consortiums  
consult - not consult with  
convince/persuade - having convinced James of the facts, John persuaded him to go along to the meeting  
cripple/crippled - offensive and outdated; do not use  
currencies - have you covered? If not, we can  
currently - now is usually preferable, if needed at all

cutbacks - avoid, cuts will do  
cyberspace  
data - takes a singular verb (like agenda); though strictly a plural, no one ever uses agendum or datum  
defensible  
debatable  
defuse  
developing countries - use in preference to 'third world'  
different from or to, not different than  
discernible, not discernable  
discolour, but discoloration  
dispatch, not despatch  
disk (computers), not disc  
dissociate/dissociation not disassociate/disassociation  
drunkenness  
embargo - plural embargoes  
embarrass, embarrassment  
enforce, enforceable  
enrol, enrolling, enrolment  
every day - noun and adverb: it happens every day  
everyday - adjective - an everyday mistake  
fed up with, not fed up of  
finalise/finalised - avoid, use complete, completed or finish/finished  
focus, focused, focusing  
forever - continually: he is forever biting his nails; for ever - for always - I will love you for ever.  
formula - plural formulas but formulae in scientific context  
Formula One - motor racing  
fortuitous - by chance, accidental; not by good fortune, lucky  
fulfil, fulfilling, fulfilment  
fundraiser, fundraising  
gases - plural of gas, not gasses  
gender - never use 'his' to cover men and women. Use 'his or her' or a different construction, For example, *a teacher who shouts at his/her pupils is not fit to do the job* could be rewritten *teachers who shout at their pupils are not fit to do their jobs.*  
glamorous, not glamorous  
Great Britain - England, Wales and Scotland; if you want to include Northern Ireland use Britain or the UK  
halfway  
handicapped - do not use to refer to people with disabilities or learning difficulties  
hi-tech

homepage  
humour, humorist, humorous  
immigrate - to arrive in a country; emigrate - to leave one  
immune to, not immune from  
impracticable - impossible, it cannot be done; impractical - possible in theory but not workable at the moment  
infer/imply - to infer is to deduce something from evidence; to imply is to hint at something (and wait for someone to infer it)  
inquiry not enquiry  
install, instalment  
instil, instilled, instilling followed by into  
into but on to  
-ise not -ize at end of word, eg specialise, maximise  
judgment when describing a judge's verdict otherwise judgement, (eg he displayed sound judgement)  
later - often redundant since context will inform reader: "They will meet this month" rather than "They will meet later this month"  
lay off - does not mean sack or make redundant, but to send workers home on half pay as there is temporary lack of demand for their product  
learned not learnt unless you are writing old fashioned poetry  
less/fewer - less means smaller in quantity, e.g. less money; fewer means smaller in number, e.g. fewer coins  
letdown, let-up - nouns  
let down, let up - verbs  
liaison  
like/as if - never use like to mean as if: it looks as if he's finished not it looks like he's finished  
like/such as - like excludes; such as includes: Cities like Manchester are wonderful suggests the writer has in mind, say, Sheffield or Birmingham; she actually means cities such as Manchester  
major - overused - avoid except in military context  
meet, met - not meet with, met with  
mega - horrible, do not use  
memento, plural mementoes  
memorandum, plural memorandums  
midday  
midweek  
mileage  
misuse, misused - no hyphen  
multicultural, multimedia, multimillion but multi-ethnic  
nearby - one word  
nevertheless but none the less

new, now - often redundant  
none- it is a (persistent) myth that 'none' has to take a singular verb but plural is acceptable and often sounds more natural, e.g. 'none of the current squad are good enough to play in the Premiership'  
none the, but nevertheless  
nosy not nose  
noticeboard  
notebook, notepaper  
offhand, offside but off-licence  
OK is OK; okay is not  
ongoing - prefer continuous or continual  
online  
on to but into  
outgrow, outgun, outmanoeuvre, outpatient  
over, not overly  
overestimate, overstate - be careful that you don't mean underestimate or understate  
overrule  
paralleled  
passerby plural passersby  
password  
payback, payday, payout  
persons - no, they are people!  
phenomenon, plural phenomena  
phone - no apostrophe  
photocopy  
pipeline  
placename  
postcode  
postgraduates  
postmodern, postmodernist  
practice, noun; practise, verb  
pre-eminent  
presently - means soon, not at present  
press, the - singular  
preventive - not preventative  
profile - a noun not a verb  
program (computer) otherwise programme  
prophecy - noun; prophesy - verb  
pros and cons  
protest against, over or about

protester not protestor  
publicly not publically  
purchase as a noun, perhaps, but use buy as a verb  
Queen, the - if it is necessary to say so, she is Her Majesty or HM but never HRH  
queueing not queuing  
raft - something you float on; do not say 'a raft of measures' which is a cliché  
railway, railway station not train station  
raincoat, rainfall, rainproof  
rarefy, rarefied  
rateable  
reafforestation not reforestation  
recent - avoid: if the date is relevant, use it  
referendum, plural referendums  
re-form - to form again; reform - to change for the better  
reopen  
repellant - noun; repellent - adjective  
replaceable  
report - use report on or inquiry into but not report into  
restaurateur, not restaurateur  
retail price index (RPI) normally no need to spell it out  
sacrilegious, not sacreligious  
special - usually redundant  
spelled/spelt - she spelled it out for him: "the word is spelt like this."  
spoiled/spoilt - she spoiled her son; he was a spoilt brat  
spokesman, spokeswoman - preferable to spokesperson  
swap, not swop  
talk to, not talk with  
temperatures - 30C (85F) i.e. celsius with fahrenheit in brackets on first mention but don't bother to convert temperature changes  
theirs - no apostrophe  
Titles - do not italicise or put in quotes. Words in titles take initial caps except for a, and, for, from, in, of, the, two except when they are the first word, e.g. A Tale of Two Cities  
Tonne, not ton  
try to - never try and  
turnover - noun; turn over - verb  
21st century  
underage  
underestimate, understate  
under way not underway  
up to date - but in an up-to-date fashion

very - usually very redundant

veto, vetoes, vetoed, vetoing

weight - in kilograms with imperial conversion, eg 65kg (10st 2lb)

wellbeing

Xmas - avoid; use Christmas

yours - no apostrophe

zero - plural zeros

zigzag - no hyphen

**Sources and references:**

[www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com)

The Guardian Style Guide