## The University of Sheffield Editorial Style Guide

Last updated August 2010

This style guide is a reference tool for University staff and freelance copyeditors. It outlines the English standard for all University publications, web and print, including brochures, prospectuses, reports, and the media.

You may disagree with some of the rules. Where this is the case, please use our version to maintain consistency. If you have any questions about the guide, or suggestions for additions and amendments please email us: marketing@sheffield.ac.uk

#### Other useful writing guides

Writing for the web:

www.sheffield.ac.uk/marcoms/guidelines/web/writing4web

The Plain English Campaign has a free guide to writing in plain English: www.plainenglish.co.uk/plainenglishguide.html

### A

### A Level

Not hyphenated. Use an upper case L.

#### Abbreviations

Abbreviations should not be used. Abbreviated terms commonly used within the University may not be understood outside it, especially by prospective international students.

February not Feb.
Tuesday not Tues.
postgraduate certificate not PgCert (apart from in course titles)
Professor not Prof

#### **Exceptions:**

Mr Mrs Dr (note that there is no full stop)

See also Acronyms and Contractions

### Accents

Use accents on foreign words, unless the word has been anglicised, for example cafe, fiance.

## Exceptions:

Précis

Exposé (to distinguish from expose)

#### Access

When giving directions, always include information about disabled access. See *Equal opportunities* 

### Acronyms and initials

Phrases or titles abbreviated to acronyms or initials must be written out in full the first time they are used, followed by the short version in brackets. Thereafter, the abbreviation can be used.

The School of East Asian Studies (SEAS) offers four-year language-based courses in Japanese, Korean and Chinese. SEAS undergraduates can choose...

Exceptions to the rule are acronyms better known than what they stand for, such as BBC or NATO.

If you are writing for the web, acronyms should be written in full with the short version in brackets the first time they are used on **each** web page.

See also Abbreviations and Contractions

### Addresses

In documents, publications and on University stationery, addresses should always be arranged vertically. Never make an address part of a sentence or paragraph of text.

Building numbers that cover a range (196–198) should be separated by an en-dash with no spaces. See *en-dash*.

Where the address is in a city or major town, do not include the county.

If you are writing for an international audience, the country should follow the town or city and postcode on a new line. In the case of University addresses, always use United Kingdom, rather than England.

The University of Sheffield Western Bank Sheffield S10 2TN United Kingdom

In the case of department addresses, put the department name before the University:

The Institute for Lifelong Learning The University of Sheffield 196–198 West Street Sheffield S1 4ET

### Some important details:

- no full stops at the end of addresses
- no comma between the number and the street name
- do not abbreviate Road, Street or Avenue
- postcode should appear after the town or city on the same line
- · no comma between town/county and postcode

### **Mailing out**

When creating address labels or typing letters for use with window envelopes, all the following guidelines apply **except** that the postcode should be on the last line, separate from the town or city.

## Ampersand (&)

In running text, use the word *and* instead, especially when writing for the web. Ampersands are sometimes used in the vertical arrangement of titles and department names for design purposes. See *Our Visual Identity Guide* for details.

### And/or

Try to avoid. Check that you can't use simply one or the other. Alternatively, rewrite the sentence. The same applies to **his/her.** 

## Apostrophes (')

Apostrophes are used to denote **possession** or **omissions** in words and phrases.

#### **Possession**

Where an object or objects belong to one person or thing, the apostrophe goes before the s:

The University's halls of residence

Where an object or objects belong to more than one person or thing, then the apostrophe goes after the s:

The graduates' certificates will be kept in departmental offices

Singular nouns ending in s are treated no differently and 's should still be added:

The class's teacher was absent from the room

Generally speaking, the rule also applies to proper nouns ending in s:

Rolf Harris's portrait of the Queen

Exceptions are proper nouns such as Jesus, Moses or Greek names ending in es:

Achilles' heel was killing him Euripides' bus pass had expired

Certain other names ending in s can look and sound awkward when an extra s is applied. In such cases it is acceptable to omit the additional s provided your approach is consistent throughout the publication or document.

Dickens' *Great Expectations* Welles' *Citizen Kane* 

Plurals of nouns omit the s after the apostrophe:

The classes' timetables were confused

Where plural nouns that don't end in s are used – children, women, sheep – the apostrophe goes before the s:

The women's minibus runs until 11pm

The one exception to this rule is its:

The book was old, its cover was in tatters

See also it's or its

#### **Omission**

Apostrophes are also used to show that letters are missed out of a word or phrase, usually to make it easier to pronounce.

I'll – I will they're – they are

See also Contractions

### Where not to use apostrophes

Never use an apostrophe to form a plural with numbers and letters:

1990s not 1990's Three As at A Level, not three A's at A Level CDs not CD's

Never use an apostrophe when its is used in the possessive sense:

The University is conveniently located; its main buildings are all within 10 minutes of the tram stop.

## Asterisks\*

Sometimes used in running text to refer the reader to an important footnote. The practice does not lend itself to writing for the web where the footnote in question may not be immediately apparent. In print, overuse of this device can lead to confusion for the reader.

\*Should not be used for other purposes, for instance to denote an omission or to present bullet points.

В

#### -based

Hyphenated when combined with another word to form an adjective:

work-based study

### **Brackets**

Avoid where possible. In marketing copy, use en-dashes to indicate parentheses.

## **Bullet points**

Rules governing the use of bullet points can seem complex and even contradictory. To keep things simple, the most important things to remember are

- don't overuse them
- try to keep lists and points short
- be consistent

Put another way, if you can get your points into a clear sentence or paragraph then do so. If you need to use a list of bullet points, pick a style and stick with it.

Lists are usually introduced with a brief sentence or clause. If the items in your list flow naturally from this sentence, there is no need to use a colon.

The open day programme includes

- visits to academic departments
- talks
- accommodation visits
- self-guided tours
- videos

If the items on your list can't be made to flow naturally from an introduction, use a colon. If your list is introduced by a phrase such as *for instance* or *for example*, use a colon. For example:

The urban regeneration research cluster is principally concerned with three areas:

- Housing as a medium for the physical and social regeneration of urban areas.
- The role of property in urban regeneration.
- Urban and regional policy, local governance and urban regeneration.

As the first and second examples illustrate, a list that completes or flows from an introduction doesn't need full stops after each point. However, if your points are longer you can use internal punctuation.

The third example illustrates that when points are self-contained sentences you should begin each point with an initial capital and end with a full stop.

#### Too many bullets

Generally speaking, bullet points are most effective at a maximum one line of text per point. In print, a list of bullet points running unbroken down a whole page is uninviting. A list of that length on the web might also have a negative effect. Try to break the monotony by presenting information in different ways.

The one medium that permits excessive use of bullet points is the Powerpoint presentation. As with print and online publications, however, each individual list and point should be kept as short as possible. A template for Powerpoint presentations can be downloaded from the Marketing website.

### A final point

- Don't be tempted to use diamonds, arrows or other symbols as bullet points.
- > They can cause confusion and make your page look cluttered.
- A simple black dot is all you need.

## Capital letters

Proper nouns, official titles and course titles use initial capitals when written in full.

Vice-Chancellor Keith Burnett BA(Honours) History

When referring to such titles in running text or using a word such as *history* in a generic sense, don't use an initial capital.

The University is about to appoint a new vice-chancellor Applicants must study history at A Level

Programme is not capitalised unless it is part of a full course title.

Honours Degree Programme in Computer Science. This programme covers units in...

Department names use initial capitals, but the word department always uses lower-case d, unless it begins a sentence.

The Department of English Literature
Our department has an excellent reputation.

When referring to the University of Sheffield, as *the University* use an initial capital. When referring to *a university* use all lower case.

Small words (in, at, of, the, and, on) are never capitalised even in titles.

The Hound of the Baskervilles My Life as a Dog

See also Course titles and Headings and titles.

## Careers adviser

not careers advisor but careers advisory service

### Centuries

See Dates and times and Numbers.

### Colon (:)

Colons are used to indicate the beginning of lists in sentences:

Research topics include: gender and politics in France, French cinema, twentieth-century literature.

Colons can also be used to separate statements in a sentence, when the second statement explains the first:

The Department of Chemistry has some of the best facilities in the country: its recently refurbished laboratories are state-of-the-art.

Never follow a colon with a dash (:-)

#### Comma

The building houses computers, seminar rooms and a library.

In a simple sentence like the above there is no need for a comma before *and*. In a longer sentence with more complex clauses it is often better to use a comma after *and*:

The visitors had a great time looking at the new facilities, having lunch in the cafe and walking in the park.

## Compliment or complement

You pay someone a compliment. You have a full complement of students.

A book review may be *complimentary*. Two types of medical treatment or two colours can be *complementary*.

## Comprise or compose

The parts *compose* (make up) the whole. The whole *comprises* (includes) the parts. The whole is *composed* of the parts. Never use is *comprised* of, although *consists* of is correct.

### Computer-aided

Hyphenated when used as an adjective as in computer-aided design.

### Contact details

If a telephone number is given there should also be an email address. Fax numbers and web addresses are optional but strongly recommended.

Telephone numbers should always follow the format *0114 XXX XXXX*. Never put the area code in brackets.

If the publication or web page is for an international audience, then the telephone number should follow the format +44 (0)114 XXX XXXX.

#### Contractions

A contraction results from letters being missed out; an abbreviation is a shortened version. Mr is a contraction of M-iste-r. Full stops are not used in contractions, abbreviations or acronyms.

Contracted words, for example 'you'll' for you will and 'we'll' for we will are acceptable in the right context. When writing for a student/prospective student audience, such contractions can help establish a friendly, informal tone. Use sparingly.

See also Abbreviations and Acronyms

#### Course titles

The correct way to write a course title is *BA(Honours) History* or *BA(Hons) History*. Note there is no space between *BA* and *(Honours)*.

#### **Award abbreviations**

A Level (not hyphenated)	GCSE
BA(Honours)	PgCert
BEng(Honours)	PgDip
BSc(Honours)	MA
MPhil	PhD

See also Capital letters.

**Dashes** 

See En-dash.

### Dates and times

Use 25 July, not July 25 or 25th July. Omit the day of the week and year, unless needed for clarity, in which case write out the year in full:

2001

To express an academic year, or range of years, use the following format:

2000–01, *or* 2001–2002, using an en-dash *not* 2000-1 *or* 2000/1

Use am and pm, not the 24-hour clock. Use full stops not colons as separators.

9.30am not 09:30 11.30pm not 23:30 12 noon 12 midnight

Note there is no space between the number and am or pm.

Centuries are written as nineteenth century (noun) or twentieth-century literature (adjective).

Avoid vague time references (*will be online soon*) and relative time references (*last year*, *next year*). Time references need to be specific if they are to be of use to the reader.

See also Numbers.

Degree class

First, 2:1, 2:2, 3rd. Use *First*, never *1st*. Use a capital when referring to *a First*, but lower case for *first-class* degree. Never use *first degree*, as this can be confused with an undergraduate degree.

She was awarded a First in biology He was awarded a 2:1 in English She was awarded a first-class degree in chemistry

### Department names

Department has a capital D when it is part of the department's title:

Welcome to the Department of Automatic Control and Systems Engineering.

When referring to the department, use a lower-case d.

The academic staff in the department are friendly and approachable.

Use the same rule when referring to schools.

Welcome to the Management School. The school has an excellent record.

If you use an acronym for your department or school, such as ACSE or SEAS, always make sure you also write it out in full the first time you use it in a text.

 $\mathbf{E}$ 

#### Eg

No full stop. Use a comma before.

We offer part-time courses in a range of subjects, eg computing, languages and the environment

Like *ie, ergo* and *et al, eg* is rarely used outside of formal academic writing. In marketing copy, eg can often be replaced by *including* or *for example*.

We offer part-time courses in a range of subjects, including computing, languages and the environment

## Ellipsis (...)

Ellipsis marks indicate a pause in speaking or an omission of one or more words. Ellipsis marks should not be used unless they are part of a direct quotation.

### **Email**

Not hyphenated. When referring to a University email address in print or online, always write *sheffield* in full, not *shef*.

If an email address comes at the end of a sentence it should not be followed by a full stop. This

avoids any confusion about whether the full stop is part of the address. Other e-words such as *e-commerce* and *e-learning* should be hyphenated.

Email links in online documents should be the email address.

Send enquiries to <a href="mailto:admissions@sheffield.ac.uk">admissions@sheffield.ac.uk</a> not
Send enquiries to the <a href="mailto:admissions">admissions@sheffield.ac.uk</a> not

See also Web addresses.

## En-dash (–)

Longer than a hyphen. Has a different function.

Use an en-dash without spaces when there is a distinction in meaning between two words:

Labour-Liberal alliance

and to replace to in numerical phrases:

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people aged 55–60 pages 25–30
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Use a pair of en-dashes with spaces in the same way that you'd use brackets to indicate parentheses:

Four of the halls – Earnshaw, Halifax, Sorby and Stephenson – are close to one another.

### Equal opportunities

The University operates a comprehensive equal opportunities policy, and is committed to eliminating all forms of unfair discrimination. Take care when describing or addressing different groups of people in print or on the web. For example:

- deaf people or the deaf community, not the deaf
- · people with disabilities, not disabled people
- wheelchair users, not people in wheelchairs
- people with AIDS not AIDS victims
- elderly people, not the elderly or old people
- lesbians and gay men and the gay community, not lesbians and gays, or gays

See also Gender-specific suffixes

Etc

No full stop.

Try to avoid – use including, include.

## Exclamation mark (!)

Avoid! Exclamation marks can appear especially patronising when addressing a young market. Marketing literature often overuses exclamation marks to disguise a poor writing style.

F

#### Fewer / less

Use fewer when the amounts can be quantified, less when they can't:

There are fewer than 10 places available

There is less milk than yesterday

#### **Fonts**

Our official Stephenson and Blake fonts are available for staff to download at: <a href="https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/marcoms/visualid/downloads/fonts">www.sheffield.ac.uk/marcoms/visualid/downloads/fonts</a>

When using our fonts, do not try to italicise bold text or set italics in bold. This will cause the font to display incorrectly. To highlight and emphasise text, use the true italic or bold versions of the fonts, increase the point size, or colour the text.

## Foreign words and expressions

These should always be italicised, unless the word or expression is anglicised or widely used.

Fin de siècle Schadenfreude Mise en scène Disce doce

### **Fractions**

A fraction that stands alone is written out and hyphenated, even when one of the numbers is higher than ten.

Two-thirds of the students
One-twentieth of the population

A fraction attached to a whole number should be written in numerals.

2 1/2 times per year

## **Fragments**

Contracted sentences are usually picked up by your spell-check as *Fragments*. Such sentences are acceptable in certain contexts, such as lists of bullet points, or entries in directory-style publications. The following sentence is a good example. Avoid overuse.

## Full stops

Try to split long sentences into shorter ones. Shorter sentences make text easier to read. Use one space, not two, after full stops.

G

## Gender-specific suffixes

Avoid the use of gender-specific suffixes such as -ess or -rix

Aviator *not* aviatrix Actor *not* actress Manager *not* manageress Comedian *not* comedienne Nurse *not* male nurse Chair *not* chairman

### Η

## Headings and titles

For page headings, headlines and sub-headings use an initial capital for the first word only. Never use all capital letters.

How to get a place at university
not
How To Get A Place At University
or
HOW TO GET A PLACE AT UNIVERSITY

For book, film, and journal article titles use initial capitals except for small words (in, at, of, the).

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

Book, film and journal article titles in body copy should be italicised.

Readers of Charles Dickens' Great Expectations.

### Headlines and links

The headline of a web page should always be the same as any links leading to that page. For instance, don't call your link *How to apply for a place* if the page it links to is headed *Information for prospective students*.

Headlines for magazine and newsletter articles, in print or online, should be kept as short as possible. If your headline runs over more than one line, you should probably try to cut it down.

### Helpdesk

One word.

#### Hyphen (-)

Hyphens can be used to join together two words to form an adjective. When the combination involves an adverb (words ending in *ly*) a hyphen is not used.

Note that in the fourth example below there's no need to place an additional hyphen after full.

Work-based learning
Full-time study
The course is broadly based
The course is completed through full and part-time study

### The following words are never hyphenated:

postgraduate worldwide nationwide milkround multidisciplinary multinational interpersonal ongoing cooperative teamwork

### Ι

#### ie

An abbreviation of the Latin *id est* meaning *that is*. As with *eg*, no full stop is necessary. Use a comma before. Try to avoid.

### Institution

Try not to use *institution* as a substitute for *university*, as it can cause confusion. The generic term is *higher education institution*, but this can appear over-formal and monolithic.

### Interesting

Interesting falls into the category of words that have lost their potency through overuse. In other words, anything that is described as interesting will certainly not arouse the interest of your readers.

### internet

Lower case initial.

Don't use world wide web to describe the internet.

## -ise or -ize

Use -ise rather than -ize in words such as organise, specialise and finalise. The only exception we can think of is capsize.

#### **Italics**

Italics are hard to read on screen. Try to avoid, unless referring to book titles or certain foreign words/terms. Try not to use italics for emphasis. See also *Fonts* 

#### It's or its

It's means it is.

The possessive its doesn't need an apostrophe:

The university has redesigned its logo.

### See also Apostrophes

## J

#### Jargon

If you're writing for prospective undergraduates, or for the University's staff magazine avoid

jargon, business-speak, corporate buzzwords – any terms that will only be understood by a select group. Marketing hyperbole should be avoided at all times.

Sometimes terms specific to the higher education sector, such as RAE or TQA, cannot be avoided. Write these terms out in full the first time they are used, followed by the acronym in brackets. Subsequently, you can refer to the acronym only.

#### Job titles

#### In the first instance use:

Vice-Chancellor Professor Keith Burnett said or Professor Keith Burnett, Vice-Chancellor, said

#### Subsequently, use:

Professor Burnett, or the vice-chancellor.

#### K

## Key (adjective)

Sometimes used as a loose equivalent to *important*. Avoid. Use a more precise term.

### L

## Latin plurals

Some are so common that we don't realise they are plurals: *alumni*, *data*, *criteria*. Some can sound pedantic and put the reader off.

fora – use forums formulae – use formulas syllabi – use syllabuses

See also Foreign words and expressions

### Liaise and liaison

Note the correct spelling. Some spell-checking functions get this wrong.

### M

#### Material

Avoid. Be more specific.

Course notes, reading lists and textbooks are provided at the start of the semester.

Course material is provided at the start of the semester.

### Media

Media is the plural of medium

The news media are, not is

### Multimedia

Only use multimedia when there are more than two media.

N

### Numbers

Zero to nine are written as words and 10 onwards in figures, unless a sentence begins with a number over 10:

Sixty-five million years ago, Sheffield was home to dinosaurs.

Other exceptions are numbers that have technical significance or need to stand out for quick comprehension, such as: tables, statistics, money, times, ratios and academic grades.

Where a number from one to nine is part of a phrase or title that you didn't create, stick with the convention.

Key Stage 2

Write out the names of foreign currencies except in tables: *yen*, *francs*, *dollars*. No capital letters. If dollars are other than US, this needs to be stated: *New Zealand dollars* or *NZ dollars*.

## Numbers (continued)

For larger numbers, use the following formats:

2,000 £1 million 10,000 1 billion 100,000 1 million

See also Dates and times and Ranges (numerical).

 $\mathbf{O}$ 

Р

## Paragraphs

Use one line return in between paragraphs. Don't indent at the beginning of paragraphs.

Keep paragraphs short, especially when writing for the web. If you are writing for a student audience, bear in mind that large blocks of text are offputting and will probably not be read.

#### Part-time

Hyphenated.

#### Passive verbs

Avoid using passive verbs as they result in a vague, over-formal tone and are not suitable for marketing literature.

The professor **will present** her research at the conference. *not* 

Research will be presented by the professor at the conference.

## Per cent

Write out in full as two words, not one symbol (%). Symbols (&, %) can look untidy in large blocks of text. Tables with numbers can use %. Percentage remains one word.

### Per day

Also per year, per month and so on. Try to avoid the colloquial a year, a month, a day.

### Plain English

Aim to be as clear and concise as possible. Using plain English does not mean you are dumbing down your text. It just means delivering your message in the clearest way possible. Don't forget that often you are writing for a mixed audience — English may not be the first language of many of your readers.

### **Platitudes**

Avoid using platitudes, for example:

The University welcomes international students.

The above sentence should be replaced with evidence that the University provides a welcoming environment.

## Postgraduate

One word, not hyphenated.

### Punctuation

See Ampersand, Brackets, Comma, Colon, En-dash, Full stop, Hyphen, Question mark, Semi-colon. For advice on punctuating quotes see Quotation marks..

Q

### Question mark (?)

Not needed in such requests as:

Could you please send me an application form.

### **Quotation marks**

When quoting exactly what someone has said – direct speech – use full quotation marks ("). For quotes within quotes use single quotation marks (inverted commas), placing a comma before the reported speech.

"Our Students' Union provides a range of services." "He said. 'I don't think so' and he left."

In running text, don't be tempted to apply inverted commas to colloquial terms, clichéd phrases or technical jargon:

Our Students' Union runs a number of 'cool' club nights.

If the phrase is colloquial or clichéd, try to replace it. If it's a technical term that won't be widely understood among your audience, you should either explain it or take it out. If the phrase really is a direct quote, make sure the source is explicit in the text and punctuate as above.

When referring to other publications by their titles, use italics rather than inverted commas:

Our department is ranked among the UK top ten by The Times Good University Guide.

 $\mathbf{R}$ 

### Ranges (numerical)

children aged 12–16 or children aged from 12 to 16 not children aged from 12–16

#### -related

Hyphenated when used as an adjective in work-related study, but the course is work related.

## Redundancy

Try to avoid words which add nothing to the meaning of your sentence. You could end up with a redundant expression such as:

You can register now, or **alternatively** wait until July. Pip is the **chief** protagonist of *Great Expectations*.

See also Tautology.

 $\mathbf{S}$ 

### Semicolon (;)

Use to separate two related ideas in a sentence.

In 2005, the University introduced several new courses; a list of the courses can be found on the website.

Use semicolons to distinguish phrases listed after a colon if commas will not do the job clearly. The following example is taken from the 2006 postgraduate prospectus:

"Units are usually chosen from: Advanced Study and Research Methods; Computer Aided Architectural Design; Climate Sensitive Environmental Design."

### **Spaces**

There should never be more than one space in succession in word-processed text. Not even after a full stop.

## Split infinitives

Split infinitives are not always bad grammar. Trying to avoid splitting infinitives can often result in an overly formal tone, or a messy sentence. As a rule, choose the option that sounds the least stuffy.

## Students' Union

Note the apostrophe. The full, official title is The University of Sheffield Union of Students. It is also known as Sheffield Students' Union. Never abbreviate to 'Union'.

 $\mathbf{T}$ 

## Tautology (grammatical)

A fault in style – particularly in marketing copy where there is the temptation to over-emphasise – which can be defined as saying the same thing twice.

Significant landmark. Added bonus.

See also Redundancy.

Telephone numbers See Contact details.

#### Time

See Dates and times.

TI

### Undergraduate

One word, not hyphenated, lower-case initial.

### University

When referring to the University of Sheffield as the University use an initial capital. When referring to  $\alpha$  university use all lower case.

#### URLs

Technical term for Web addresses. Avoid use.

V

#### Vice-Chancellor

Two words, hyphenated.

W

### Web addresses

Sheffield addresses should start with www, omitting the http://

www.sheffield.ac.uk

Always type sheffield in full. Never use the shortened www.shef.ac.uk version.

If a web address comes at the end of a sentence it should not be followed by a full stop. This avoids any confusion about whether the full stop is part of the address.

When writing a web address in an online document, always make it into a hyperlink rather than plain text, so the link can easily be followed.

Within a text, web addresses should ideally be presented on a separate line, and highlighted for clarity. In print publications, designed in-house or by an approved agency, web addresses are underlined so addresses containing underscores should be avoided if possible.

Very rarely, a web address may be too long to fit on one line due to the set column width of a publication, and has to be continued on a second line. If no shorter alternative link is available, this is acceptable. Take care not to split any one element of the address over two lines.

## Web page

Two separate words, no hyphen.

#### website

One word, the w is lower case unless it begins a sentence.

# ize-ise

Use s instead for words ending in –ize and  $\,$  -ization.

Organise, *not* organize Organisation, *not* organization