

STYLE GUIDE FOR
JOURNALISTS

The following house style is the kind of thing that applies in many UK newsrooms. Other rules are available. See Chapter 12 for links to a range of other style guides plus discussion of the language of journalism and recommendations for further reading.

A

a or an before h?

If the h is silent, as in hour, use an; otherwise use a, as in a hero.

abbreviations

Shortened versions of words such as doctor (Dr) or Labour (Lab) do not need full stops, nor do initials such as GP, BBC or MP (which should be upper case with no spaces). Explain all but the most famous abbreviations either by spelling out: National Union of Students (NUS); or by description: the transport union RMT. If the initials are commonly spoken as a word (such as Nato) they form an *acronym*. Abbreviations such as *can't* or *that's* are increasingly common in today's media but some still frown on them unless they are in direct quotes.

accommodation

Double c and double m. If in doubt, think double room.

acronyms

A word formed by using the initial letters of other words, as in Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation). Explain all but the most famous like this: train drivers' union Aslef; or Acas, the arbitration service.

Act

Upper case in the full name of an act, as in the Official Secrets Act.

addresses

Most addresses in news articles such as court cases just give the street, not the number. But if giving the full address for contact details, write it as follows: South Yorkshire Police, 999 Letsby Avenue, Sheffield S9 1XX.

adrenalin

Prefer to adrenaline.

advice, advise

Advice (noun) is what you ask for or give. Advise (verb) is the act of giving it.

adviser

Prefer to advisor.

affect

Not to be confused with *effect*. To affect is to change. Such a change may have effects.

ageing

Not aging.

ages

Marcus Rashford, 24; or 24-year-old Marcus Rashford; or Rashford is 24 years old.

Aids

Prefer to AIDS.

A-levels

Hyphen and lower case l.

all right

Prefer two words unless you are quoting a title such as *The Kids Are Alright*.

Alzheimer's disease

Upper case A, lower case d, and note the apostrophe.

among

Prefer to amongst.

ampersand (&)

Use in company names when the company does: Marks & Spencer. Otherwise avoid.

and

You may begin sentences with the word *and*. But not every sentence, please.

apostrophes

Use an apostrophe to show that something has been left out of a word (eg *don't*, short for *do not*) and to mark the possessive (eg *John's foot*). Plural nouns such as children and people take a singular apostrophe (eg *children's games*, *people's princess*).

armed forces

Lower case.

Army

Upper case A if referring to *the* (ie British) Army. Army ranks can be abbreviated as follows: Lieutenant General (Lt Gen); Major General (Maj Gen); Brigadier (Brig); Colonel (Col); Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col); Major (Maj); Captain (Capt); Lieutenant (Lt); 2nd Lieutenant (2nd Lt); Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM); Warrant Officer (WO); Company Sergeant Major (CSM); Sergeant (Sgt); Corporal (Cpl); Lance Corporal (L Cpl); Private (Pte). Do not abbreviate Field Marshall or General.

asylum seeker

Two words, no hyphen. And try to remember that there is no such thing as an "illegal asylum seeker", whatever the internet warriors or that bloke down the pub would have you believe.

B

backbenches

One word, as in backbencher.

bail, bale

Somebody might be on police *bail*, and a cricket player will be familiar with *bails*. But a boat could be *baled* out, and a pilot could *bale out* of an aeroplane.

BAME

An abbreviation applied to black, Asian and minority ethnic people and communities that, depending on the context, might need to be spelled out in full in the first mention in a story. However, it is increasingly common in mainstream publications without being spelled out even on first use. Do not use if what you mean is black people or people of colour, because some BAME people are white. If the story concerns a more specific section of the population, such as black people, or Chinese people, then it would usually be more useful to say so, unless a wider point is being made. Although the term is often pronounced as the word *bame*, BAME is preferred in text.

Bank of England

Upper case B and E. Subsequently prefer the Bank, not BoE.

bank holiday

Lower case.

banknote

One word.

barbecue

Not Bar-B-Q, BBQ or barbie, please.

Barclays Bank

Upper case Bs, no apostrophe.

bare, bear

Often confused. *Bare* means unclothed, unadorned, just sufficient, and to reveal; *bear* means to carry, to produce or give birth, and a furry animal.

Barnard Castle

Not Barnard's Castle.

begs the question

Probably best avoided because even the experts seem to disagree about what it means.

biannual

Means twice a year. Often confused with *biennial* (every two years) so probably best avoided.

Bible

Upper case. But biblical is lower case.

bikini body

Really? No.

billion

One thousand millions. Write the word in full (£1.4 billion) except in headlines (£1.4bn).

birthplace

One word.

boffins

This word lives on as journalese for scientists and other researchers, but it really shouldn't, should it? However, if scientists use the b-word about one another as a term of endearment, that's probably allowed.

Boxing day

Upper case B, lower case d.

breach

Means to break through or to break a promise or rule. Not to be confused with *breech*, which is either part of a gun or something to do with short trousers.

breastfeeding

One word.

brownfield

One word.

brussels sprouts

Lower case, no apostrophe.

BSE

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, but not normally any need to spell out. You may refer to it additionally as "mad cow disease".

Budget

Upper case B if this is *the* Budget set by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, otherwise lower case.

but

You may begin sentences with the word *but*. But not too many.

byelection

Prefer one word.

bylaw

Prefer one word.

bypass

Prefer one word.



cabinet, shadow cabinet

Lower case

caesarean section

Lower case.

canvas, canvass

Tents are made of *canvas*, whereas politicians may *canvass* for support.

capitals

UK media now use upper case letters far more sparingly than they did even just a few years ago. Clarity and consistency can sometimes be at odds with each other, in which case clarity should be allowed to win.

cappuccino

Lower case with a double p and double c. If in doubt, think double shot.

Caribbean

One r and two bbs.

cashmere

A fabric, not to be confused with *Kashmir* in the Indian subcontinent.

cemetery

Not cemetry or cemetary.

censor

Means to suppress and should not be confused with *censure*, meaning to criticise harshly.

centre

Not center. Remember, *this* style guide is for a UK publication.

century

Lower case, with numbers, as in 9th century or 21st century.

chairman, chairwoman

Prefer chairman if it's a man, chairwoman if it's a woman, and chair if it is simply a position (eg The committee's first job will be to elect a chair). Lower case.

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Upper case C and E. Subsequent mentions: the Chancellor.

Channel tunnel

Upper case C, lower case t.

cheddar, cheshire cheese

Lower case.

Chief Constable

Upper case Cs for a particular Chief Constable, lower case for a meeting of chief constables.

Christian

Upper case C, though unchristian is lower case.

Christmas day

Upper case C, lower case d.



CLICHÉ ALERTS

A cliché alert should go off in your head if you are thinking of using any of the following:

a big ask
a bridge too far
absolute scenes
acid test
after the Lord Mayor's show
any time soon
a question mark hangs over
as so-and-so looks on (in picture captions)
at the end of the day
avoid like the plague
baby-faced assassin
back to square one
baptism of fire
battle of wills
between a rock and a hard place
bitter end
blaze of glory
bombshell
brutal murder
bubbly character
budding (in stories about young people)
bull in a china shop
burning issue
chickens coming home to roost
chiefs (or top chiefs)
closure (as prerequisite for moving on)
clutch defeat (or victory) from the jaws of victory (or defeat)
cold comfort
crack troops
cut her/his teeth
cyberspace
descended on (if you just mean people turned up)
does what it says on the tin
double down on
down to the wire
drop-dead gorgeous
drugs paraphernalia
early doors
eggcellent, eggxciting and so on (in stories about Easter)
elephant in the room
End of. (If followed by a full stop)
enigmatic
enormity
eye-popping
eye-watering
Fact. (If used as a one word sentence)
fairytale ending
fairytale romance
fears are growing
first the good news...
fit for purpose
flash in the pan
flaunts her assets (or curves)
flushed with success (in stories about toilets)
frail pensioners
gammon
genuine six-pointer
go figure
gobsmacked
goes without saying
going forward
hardworking families
high-level summit
high-speed chase
his/her indecision was final
hit the ground running
hopes were dashed
horns of a dilemma
humiliating U-turn
I have to say

iconic
interesting to note
in the coming days and weeks
(or weeks and months)
ironically
is in our DNA
is the new black
is the new rock'n'roll
is the next *Fleabag*
it has to be said
it remains to be seen
jaw-dropping
kept himself to himself
kick-start
last but not least
leave no stone unturned
legend
level playing field
LOL
major hurdle
mass exodus
mega
meteoric rise
morning after the night before
move on (following closure)
must-win
named and shamed
national treasure
nothing will ever be the same
again
OMG
only time will tell
personal demons
pillar of the community

plucky
probe
purrfect (in stories about cats)
pushing the envelope
quiet confidence
raced to the scene
raft of measures
ramp up
reached out (if you just mean
tried to contact)
revellers
rich tapestry
rich vein of form
ring of steel
ripe old age of
roaring 20s
rolled back the years
romped
sea change
Simple as. (If followed by a full
stop)
slams shut (in stories about the
football transfer window)
snowflakes (if you mean people
rather than snow)
speculation was rife
sprightly
stakeholders
step change
step up to the plate
storm in a D-cup (in stories
about bras or breasts)
strut their stuff
sweet smell of success

SW19 (in tennis stories)
take the bull by the horns
taken its toll
the devil is in the detail
the jury is still out
the last taboo
the new normal
the silent killer
the small matter of
the woke brigade
thinking outside the box
to be fair
to die for
too close to call
too soon to tell
took to Twitter
top-level summit
torrid time
tragic mum (or tot, or whoever)
tsunami (except when it actually
is one)
tucking into festive fare (in
photo captions during
December)
unfriend
untimely death
unveils
up in arms
uptick
veritable feast
wake-up call
war of words
wardrobe malfunction
who knew?

You can add any others you have spotted below:

churches

Full name, upper case, eg Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church; then Sacred Heart, or just the church if it is the only one mentioned in the story.

Citizens Advice

Upper case, no apostrophe. They no longer add bureau at the end, although their collective body is still the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

city centre

Two words, no hyphen.

CJD

Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, but not normally any need to spell out. You may refer to it additionally as “the human form of BSE”.

clichés

Clichés are hard to avoid completely, they change over time and they sometimes convey just the right meaning in a minimum of words. Keeble (2001a: 117) advises reporters to avoid saying that so-and-so is “fighting for her life” when a hospital reports her condition as “critical”, on the grounds that it is a cliché. Maybe it is, but isn’t critical also a cliché? At least fighting for her life gets a bit closer to the drama of such situations. As a rule of thumb (cliché alert!), whenever you are tempted to use a cliché in your copy, stop and ask yourself if it really is the best way of expressing precisely what you want to say. Some particularly tired words and phrases are listed in the box on pages 256–257, but you’ve probably got your own pet hates (is that also a cliché?), so feel free to add your own.

climate emergency

Use in preference to climate change for first mention, at least, as it better conveys the seriousness of the situation we are in. Climate crisis can also be used.

company names

Use spellings, upper or lower case letters, and apostrophes as the companies do themselves, even if they are ungrammatical or annoying.

conman, conwoman

Both one word.

connection

Not connexion.

Conservative party

Upper case C, lower case p. *Conservatives* and *Tories* are also acceptable. The Conservative party is singular; Conservatives are plural.

Continent

Upper case C only if you are referring to *the* Continent, ie mainland Europe.

convince

You convince someone *of* the fact; you do not convince someone to do something, you *persuade* them.

co-operate, co-operative, Co-op

With a hyphen because that’s how it’s pronounced. Lower case unless it’s *the* Co-op.

coronavirus

Lower case c. Not the China or Chinese virus.

Coroner’s Court

Bradford Coroner’s Court, with upper case and apostrophe. But lower case if general, eg “The hearing will take place in a coroner’s court”.

council leader

Lower case.

councillors

Lower case for councillors in general, but upper case for titles of individual councillors. Some newsrooms prefer Coun, others prefer Cllr. Let’s go for Coun.

councils

Upper case on first use – Sheffield City Council – then just the council if it is the only one referred to in the story. The council *is* rather than the council *are*. Cabinets, committees, panels and boards can all be in lower case.

couple

Plural, so prefer the couple *are* planning a holiday, not *is*.

Covid-19

Upper case C and a hyphen. Not the China virus, nor Chinese virus.

Crown Prosecution Service

Upper case first letters. May subsequently be abbreviated to CPS.

curate's egg

Does not mean a bit good and a bit bad, because an egg that is good in parts is still rotten. But why are you even thinking of using this phrase at all?



dashes

Two dashes may be used – as in this example – to mark a parenthesis. One dash may also be used to introduce an explanation, add emphasis, or mark a surprise. But avoid littering your copy with too many dashes.

dates

Prefer February 29, or February 29 2024. Not February 29th; nor 29 February; nor February 29, 2024.

day-to-day

Hyphenated.

D-day

Just the one upper case D, plus a hyphen.

decades

1980s, 1990s, 2000s, 2010s, 2020s with no apostrophe. Swinging 60s is acceptable only if used ironically (and sparingly). Some prefer noughties for the 2000s; others ban it. Think long and hard before resorting to using the *roaring 20s* to describe the 2020s.

decimate

Means to kill or remove a tenth of the population – not to defeat utterly or to have a big win over your opponents. However, even some pedants have now admitted utter defeat on this one.

defuse

Means to render harmless or to reduce tension. Often confused with *diffuse*, meaning spread about.

disabled people

Not *the disabled* or *the handicapped*, please.

discreet

Means circumspect and should not be confused with *discrete*, meaning separate.

disinterested

Means impartial, but is often confused with *uninterested*, meaning bored or not interested. Even a disinterested journalist ought to be very interested.

Doctor

Abbreviate to Dr without a full stop.

dominatrix

The plural is dominatrices, as any journalist who covered the case of Max Mosley v News Group Newspapers Ltd would be able to confirm.

dots

Use three dots (ellipsis) to indicate that something has been omitted when quoting a document; also if you want to indicate that more could be said on the subject, eg “But that’s another story...”.

double-decker bus

Not double-deck.

drink driving

Not drunk driving. Court reports should include the actual measurements and a comparison with relevant legal limits, which in most of the UK are: 80 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood (but the limit is just 50 milligrams in Scotland); 35 micrograms of alcohol in 100 millilitres of breath (22 in Scotland); or 107 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of urine (67 in Scotland).

drug driving

Check the latest legal limits here: www.gov.uk/government/collections/drug-driving#table-of-drugs-and-limits

E

earring

No hyphen.

Earth

This planet’s name takes an upper case E.

east

Lower case e if it is a description (east Leeds) or a direction (head east), but upper case E if it is the name of a region or a county (the North-East).

E.coli

Upper case E, lower case c, with a full stop and no space.

e-commerce

Hyphenated, lower case. But doesn’t most commerce involve e-commerce now?

ecstasy

Lower case. Write Es only if you are quoting somebody.

Edinburgh

Not borough. *See also Middlesbrough and Scarborough.*

eg

Means for example. Lower case, no full stops.

email

No hyphen.

enclose

Not inclose.

epicentre

This really means the point on Earth directly *above* an earthquake or underground explosion, but is frequently misused as if it means the centre of something. If you mean the centre, what’s wrong with just saying the centre?

euro

Lower case for the currency. For the plural, prefer euros.

exclamation marks

Known in the trade as “screamers”, these are found by the dozen in the work of amateur journalists and editors of parish newsletters. They should generally be avoided except in titles, when quoting somebody shouting at the top of their voice, or when someone genuinely exclaims (“Ouch!”). They should certainly not be used to signal that something is supposed to be funny!

exhaustive

Means comprehensive, but is often confused with *exhausted*, meaning tired.

-exit

As in Grexit, Brexit, Megxit and even Legsit; can we please now give it a rest?

expense

Not expence.

eyewitness

One word, but what's wrong with witness?

F

fairy tale

One word, but make sure you are not using it in a clichéd way.

fast food

Two words, no hyphen.

fewer

Means smaller in number so you can count 'em, eg fewer hours of sunshine, fewer people. Should not be (but often is) confused with *less*, which means to a smaller degree, eg less sunshine, less money.

firefighter

Prefer to fireman.

first, second

Not firstly, secondly.

first aid

Lower case.

flaunt

Means to show off or display something, but is often confused with *flout*, meaning to disobey contemptuously.

focused

Prefer to focussed.

foot and mouth disease

Lower case, no hyphens.

fulsome

Means excessive or insincere, so *fulsome praise* means excessive praise rather than generous praise. Often misused and/or misunderstood, so ask yourself if it really is the best word to convey your precise meaning.

G

GCSE, GCSEs

Upper case, no full stops, and the plural takes a lower case s.

general election

Lower case.

gentlemen's agreement

Not gentleman's agreement. But *verbal agreement* might be less sexist, unless you are referring specifically to men in top hats.

getaway

One word (as in getaway car).

God

Upper case if you are using it as a name, lower case for gods in general.

government

Lower case.

government departments

Prefer upper case for formal names, like this: Department for Work and Pensions; Ministry of Justice. Use lower case for descriptions, as in environment department or justice ministry.

graffiti

Two ffs, one t.

green belt

Two words, lower case, no hyphen.

green paper

Lower case.

greenfield

Prefer one word.

Greens

Upper case for the Green party, lower case for the wider green movement and for the food that you should eat up.

gunman

One word.

Gypsy

Upper case. Prefer to Gipsy.

H

half

Prefer half-a-dozen, half-past, half-price, halfway, two-and-a-half.

hardcore

One word.

headteacher

Prefer one word.

heaven/hell

Both lower case.

height

We may be well into the 21st century but most UK newsrooms still tend to give people's heights in feet and inches (6ft 1in). Other heights (eg buildings) are more likely to be given in metres (12.25m) or centimetres (25cm).

hello

Not hallo or hullo.

heyday

Not hayday or heydey.

hiccup

Prefer to hiccough.

high street

Lower case if referring to general shopping but upper case if it is the name of an actual street.

hijack

One word.

his, hers

No apostrophe.

hi-tech

Hyphenated. A bit of a cliché by now.

hitman

One word.

housewife

Unless you are reporting on somebody who has married a house, or a retrospective on the 1950s, find a better description.

humour

Not humor.

hyphens

Many words begin life as two words, become hyphenated, and end up as one word – but rushing in too soon can create confusion. Check individual entries and in other cases be guided by current media practice, by pronunciation, and by the need for clarity.



ie

Means that is to say. Lower case, no full stops.

in order to

An over-used phrase that can often be removed from copy without affecting meaning.

income support, income tax

Lower case.

infinitives

Avoid split infinitives when they may confuse, when they may sound inelegant, or when working for a boss who will fire you on the spot for using one. But as Raymond Chandler boldly told one of his editors: “When I split an infinitive, God damn it, I split it so it will stay split” (Chandler, 1984: 77).

inner-city

Hyphenated.

inquests

A coroner *records* a verdict. A coroner’s jury *returns* a verdict.

inquiry, inquiries

Prefer to enquiry, enquiries.

internet

Lower case.

ise

Prefer to ize, eg organise.

its, it’s

There is no apostrophe in the phrase *its death*, meaning the dog’s death, just as there is no apostrophe in the phrase *her death*. The apostrophe is introduced when *it’s* is short for *it is*. It’s that simple.



jack russell

Lower case for the dog (but upper case for the former wicketkeeper).

jail

Prefer to gaol.

jibe

Prefer to gibe.

jobcentre, jobseeker's allowance

Lower case.

judgement

Prefer to judgment.

judges

Full name and title for the first mention, eg *Judge Roger Scott*; then *Judge Scott* or *the judge*. High Court judges are known as Justice, as in *Mr Justice Henriques*; then *the judge* or the full version – not Judge Henriques. Recorders (part-time judges) are known as *the recorder Mrs Mary Smith*. Full-time magistrates who used to be known as stipendiary magistrates are now district judges (magistrates courts). Find out more about judicial roles here: www.judiciary.uk/about-the-judiciary/who-are-the-judiciary/judicial-roles/judges/

Junior

Abbreviate to Jr without a full stop.

K

kick-off

Hyphenated.

kilogram, kilometre, kilowatt

Abbreviate as kg, km, kw.

knockout

Prefer one word.

Koran

Upper case, prefer to Quran.

L

Labour party

Upper case L, lower case p. Subsequent mentions: Labour. Both are singular.

labour

Not labor.

lamp-post

Hyphenated.

landmine

One word.

lay, lie

He was *laying* the table while she was *lying* on the bed.

layby

One word.

lead, led

Leeds Rhinos *lead* the table now, but Huddersfield Giants *led* at the start of the season.

less

Means to a smaller degree, eg less sunshine, less money. Should not be confused with *fewer*, which means smaller in number, eg fewer hours of sunshine, fewer people.

LGBT

An abbreviation applied to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, communities and issues that, depending on the context, might need to be spelled out in full in the first mention in a story. However, its use is increasingly common in mainstream publications without being spelled out even on first use. Q is sometimes added at the end, for queer, but not all gay people are comfortable with reclaiming that term. As further letters and symbols get added, see *The ABCs of LGBTQIA+* here: www.nytimes.com/2018/06/21/style/lgbtq-gender-language.html

liaison

Not liason.

Liberal Democrats

Upper case L and D. She is a Liberal Democrat (singular). She is a member of the Liberal Democrats (plural). May also be abbreviated to Lib Dems.

licence

You need to buy a TV licence (noun). You will then be *licensed* (verb) to own a TV.

linchpin

Prefer to lynchpin.

lists

Introduce a list with a colon: separate elements with semicolons; end with a full stop.

literally

I'll literally explode if I see another example of this word being used inappropriately. No I won't, but please

restrict use of "literally" to convey a literal (exact, basic) meaning.

Lloyds Bank

No apostrophe.

loathe

A verb meaning to hate, not to be confused with loth, meaning reluctant.

Lord's

Note the apostrophe in the name of the cricket ground (but not in the House of Lords).

lottery

Lower case.

M

mankind

Use only if you intend to exclude females, otherwise use humankind, humanity, or people.

Marks & Spencer

Subsequently M&S.

Mayor

Upper case when referring to a particular person (eg "Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham"), but lower case when referring to the job of mayor in general.

McDonald's

Upper case M and D, plus an apostrophe.

measurements

For long distances, use miles; for people's heights, use feet and inches; for people's weights, use stones and pounds; for drinks, use pints; otherwise, use metric measurements.

media

Plural (the *media are*), not singular.

medieval

Prefer to *mediaeval*.

memento

Not *momento*.

mentally handicapped

Do not use. Prefer person "with learning difficulties".

mentally ill

Refer to "mentally ill people" or someone "with mental illness" rather than to "*the* mentally ill".

mic

Abbreviation for microphone. Prefer to *mike*.

midday

One word, no hyphen.

Middlesbrough

Not borough. *See also Edinburgh and Scarborough.*

midweek

One word.

mileage

Not *milage*.

million

One thousand thousands. Write in full (£1.4 million) except in headlines (£1.4m).

miniskirt

One word. Or short skirt, two words.

minuscule

Not *miniscule*.

Miss, Mr, Mrs, Ms

Courtesy titles are now usually used only for subsequent mentions in news reports, so John Smith becomes Mr Smith after the first time. The exception is court reporting, for which many organisations refer to defendants by their surname alone (Smith) while others reserve that discourtesy only for those who have been found (or have pleaded) guilty. Some publications have now abandoned courtesy titles altogether.

misuse

One word, no hyphen.

Morrison's

Not *Morrison's*.

Mosques

Full name, upper case, eg Drummond Road Mosque. Then: *the mosque*.

mph

Lower case, no full stops, as in 20mph.

MPs

No apostrophe.

Muslim

Prefer to *Moslem*.

N

names

Always check the spelling and use both first and family name on first mention. Do not use initials except in those rare circumstances where somebody famous is known by their initials (eg OJ Simpson), in which case there are no full stops.

national lottery

Lower case.

nationwide

One word.

Nazism

Prefer to Naziism.

nearby

One word.

nightclub

One word. But does anybody still call them that?

no one

Two words, no hyphen.

north

Lower case n if it is a description (north Leeds) or a direction (head north), but upper case N if it is the name of a county or a region (North Yorkshire, the North-East).

north-south divide

Lower case, connected by a dash (en-rule).

numbers

One to nine inclusive should be spelled out; 10 to 999,999 should be given in numbers, with commas to

mark thousands; then 2 million, 4.5 billion. Exceptions: percentages, where even 1% to 9% take the number; speeds will also be expressed in numbers, eg 5mph; temperatures take numbers, eg 30C (85F); sports scores will have numbers, eg 2-1; but numbers at the beginning of a sentence will normally be spelled out, eg “Seventeen England fans were arrested last night...”

O

off-licence

Hyphenated.

Ofsted, Ofcom

Just an upper case O.

oh!

Not O!

OK

If OK is OK then okay is not.

O-levels

Note the lower case l and the hyphen.

online

One word.

P

parkrun

Lower case.

parliament

Lower case.

passerby

One word. Plural: passersby.

pensioner

Not OAP.

per

Prefer £20,000 a year to *per year* or *per annum*.

percentages

Use %. Some prefer percent, per cent or even pc, but % is easier to see at a glance that it refers to a percentage. Be consistent.

persuade

See convince.

place names

Use an official website, an atlas, a gazetteer or an A–Z to check spellings. Never guess or assume.

play-off

Prefer two words, hyphenated.

plc

Lower case.

police

South Yorkshire Police, then the police. Also lower case for the police in general. Note that police are plural, while police force (or service) is singular, so “police *are* investigating...” but “the South Yorkshire force *is* short of money”. Police ranks can be abbreviated as follows: Chief Superintendent (Chief Supt); Superintendent (Supt); Chief Inspector (Chief Insp); Inspector (Insp); Detective Inspector (Det Insp); Detective Sergeant (Det

Sgt); Sergeant (Sgt); Detective Constable (DC); Constable (PC). Do not use WPC. Do not abbreviate Chief Constable, Deputy Chief Constable or Assistant Chief Constable – write it in full at first, then Mr or Ms.

postgraduate

One word.

postmodern

One word, lower case.

post mortem

Lower case, two words, no hyphen; and you should always refer to a *post mortem examination*.

Prime Minister

Upper case P and M.

principal

The first in rank or importance, who may or may not believe in certain *principles*.

prodigal

Means recklessly wasteful, not simply someone who returns.

programme

Not program, unless it is a computer program.

prostitutes

Not vice-girls, please. Increasingly, news media prefer the term sex workers. Be aware that child prostitute is a misnomer because if the person concerned is below the age of consent they cannot legally consent to prostitute themselves – they are a victim of sexual abuse or exploitation.

protester

Prefer to protestor.

Q

queuing

Prefer to queueing.

quotes

As a guideline, use double quote marks unless there is a quote within a quote, which should have single quote marks; but note that many magazines in particular do the opposite. If a quote runs over more than one paragraph, open each paragraph with quote marks but close them only once, at the end of the full quote. Punctuation marks such as commas and full stops normally come inside quote marks when a full sentence is quoted but outside if just a phrase or partial sentence is quoted.

R

refute

Means to disprove, not to deny.

reported speech

Should be reported in the past tense.

restaurateur

Not restauranteur.

reviews

Always give full details of title, venue, when the run ends and so on, including certificates for films.

ring-road

Prefer lower case, hyphenated. Also: inner ring-road and outer ring-road.

riot

OK if it really is a riot, but do not use for a mere kerfuffle.

robbery

Means theft using force or the threat of force, and should not be confused with burglary or other forms of theft.

rock'n'roll

One word with two apostrophes.

Rolls-Royce

Upper case, hyphenated.

Royal Air Force

Prefer upper case, then the RAF. RAF ranks may be abbreviated as follows: Group Captain (Group Capt); Wing Commander (Wing Cmdr); Squadron Leader (SqN Ldr); Flight Lieutenant (Flight Lt); Warrant Officer (WO); Flight Sergeant (Flight Sgt); Sergeant (Sgt); Corporal (Cpl); Leading Aircraftman (LAC). Do not abbreviate Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Air Chief Marshal, Air Vice Marshal, Flying Officer, or Pilot Officer.

Royal Navy

Prefer upper case, then the Navy. Naval ranks may be abbreviated as follows: Lieutenant Commander (Lt Cmdr); Lieutenant (Lt); Sub Lieutenant (Sub Lt); Commissioned Warrant Officer (CWO); Warrant Officer (WO); Chief Petty Officer (CPO); Petty Officer (PO); Leading Seaman (LS); Able Seaman (AS); Ordinary Seaman (OS). Do not abbreviate Admiral, Vice Admiral, Rear Admiral, Commodore, Captain, Commander or Midshipman.

rugby

Always distinguish between rugby league and rugby union. Use of the term *rugger* for either code should probably be a sacking offence.



Safeway

Not Safeway's.

Sainsbury's

Not Sainsbury.

Scarborough

See also *Edinburgh* and *Middlesbrough*.

schizophrenia

This is a complicated illness so do not insult sufferers by using the term lazily to mean somebody who appears either undecided or inconsistent.

school names

As in Bracken Edge primary school.

scrapheap

One word.

seasons

As in autumn, winter and so on, lower case.

Secretaries of State

Prefer upper case titles, as in *Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi*, but the trend is for the caps to go, rather like those who hold such posts.

Senior

Abbreviate to Sr without a full stop.

September 11

Preferred to 11th or 9/11.

shear, sheer

It will be *sheer* luck if you manage to *shear* the wool off that sheep.

Siamese twins

The preferred term is now conjoined twins.

sit, sat

He was *sitting* on the left until the teacher *sat* him in the middle. You may write that he sat on the left; do not write that he *was* sat on the left, unless he was placed there by a third party.

slither, sliver

Snakes slither across the ground, so if you mean a very thin amount of something (like cake, or hope), use sliver.

soccer

This term should be banned because, in the UK at least, it is hated by most people who play or watch the game. Say *football* instead.

south

Lower case s if it is a description (south Leeds) or a direction (head south), but upper case S if it is the name of a region or a county (the South-West or South Yorkshire).

spokesman, spokeswoman

The former if it is a man, the latter if it is a woman, and spokesperson if it is neither (eg an emailed statement) or is unclear.

standing, stood

She was *standing* at the back until the photographer *stood* her at the front. You may write that she stood at the back; do not write that she *was* stood at the back, unless by a third party.

stationary, stationery

With an *a* it means not moving, with an *e* it means writing materials (think "e for envelope").

staycation

Use only for a holiday spent *at home*. A holiday elsewhere is still a holiday, even if it does not involve overseas travel.

streetwise

One word.

swearwords

Swearwords can offend many people for little purpose, especially outside direct quotes. Stop and think before using, and be aware that different publications can have *very* different attitudes, with tabloid newspapers being among the most prudish (with the exception of the *Sunday Sport*, if that counts). Incidentally, if arranging a live audio interview, be careful about inviting a representative of the West Kent Hunt or a Culture Secretary named Jeremy Hunt, as BBC journalists Nicky Campbell and James Naughtie can testify.

T

targeted

Not targetted.

taskforce

One word.

temperatures

Prefer celsius with fahrenheit in brackets: 7C (45F).

Tesco

Not Tesco's.

that or which?

That defines, which informs. This is the style guide *that* is included in this book. This book, *which* is published by SAGE, includes a style guide.

theirs

No apostrophe.

times

Use am and pm, not hundred hours. Some editors will not allow 12 noon or 12 midnight because what other noon or midnight are there? Just noon and midnight will normally suffice.

tonne

Prefer to ton unless instructed otherwise, but be aware that they are different. A tonne (1t) is 1,000kg or 2,204.621b; a ton is 2,2401b.

trademarks™

Take great care with these, and use an alternative unless you do mean the specific product in question. So, if you mean any ballpoint pen, don't write Biro.

trillion

A thousand billion; that is, a million million. Write the word in full (£1.4 trillion) except in headlines (£1.4tn).

tsar

Not czar.

T-shirt

Prefer to tee-shirt.

U

under way

That *under way* should be written as two words was drummed into journalists of a certain vintage, so if I write it as two words and an editor changes it to one, a small part of me dies inside. I have no idea why, to be honest, but I am not alone. Don't say you weren't warned.

unique

Something is either unique or it is not. It cannot be very unique.

universities

Like this: Sheffield Hallam University or the University of Sheffield. Then just the university. Be aware that the Johns Hopkins University is often in the news and is almost as often named incorrectly.

U-turn

Upper case U, lower case t, connected by a hyphen.



Valentine's day

Prefer upper case V, lower case d, and note the apostrophe.

VAT

Upper case, no need to spell out any more.

versus

Prefer a lower case v for Warrington Wolves v Saint Helens. Not vs.



Wall's

Note the apostrophe.

Walmart

No longer Wal-Mart.

wander, wonder

You may *wander* from place to place while others *wonder* why you don't settle down.

war

Prefer lower case, eg Iraq war, apart from the First World War and Second World War.

web, website, world wide web

All lower case.

weights

A common rule is to still give people's weights in stones and pounds (12st 31b) even if other weights are in tonnes (17t), kilograms (36kg), grams (75g) or milligrams (12mg).

welfare state

Lower case.

west

Lower case w if it is a description (west Leeds) or a direction (head west), but upper case W if it is the name of a region or a county (the North-West, West Yorkshire).

whatsoever

One word.

wheelchair-bound

Few people are strapped into a wheelchair for 24 hours a day, so this should be banned in favour of saying someone *uses a wheelchair*, is a *wheelchair user*, or was *in a wheelchair* at the time in question.

wheelie bin

Not wheely bin.

whereabouts

Are plural.

while

Not whilst.

whiskey, whisky

Whiskey is for Irish and *whisky* for Scotch.

wifi

No hyphen.

withhold

Not withold.

workmen

Use only for describing a specific group of workers who are indeed all men, otherwise prefer workers.

World Trade Centre

Not Center.

wriggle room

Prefer to wiggle room.

wrongdoing

One word.

X

x-ray

Lower case, hyphenated.

Y

yo-yo

Lower case, hyphenated.

yorkshire pudding, yorkshire terrier

Lower case.

yours

No apostrophe.

Z

zero

Plural zeros, not zeroes.

zigzag

One word, no hyphen.