

Style Guide

**Version 2.0**

# Introduction

## What is it for?

This guide sets out the rules for tone of voice, style, and use of language including the punctuation, spelling and formatting to be used in all our print and digital publications.

The guide aims to address the most common queries that arise when producing copy for the University. The aim is to achieve consistency across all areas of the University. Our spelling guidelines are based on the Oxford English Dictionary

## Who is it for?

It should be used by all University staff, external suppliers, and freelance copy-editors.

## How is it compiled?

The guide is compiled by the Publications Team within Global Marketing and Student Recruitment. It is revised periodically to take account of changes in conventions and usage, as well as to adapt to the changing needs of the University, its staff and its students.

We are happy to consider suggestions, additions and amendments. If you have any language or style queries that are not addressed here, please let us know by sending an email to [pubstaff@aber.ac.uk](about:blank)

# House style

## Accessibility

When writing for the website, please ensure that you refer to the [Digital Accessibility Guidance for Staff](https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/accessibility/guidance-staff/) which will help you to ensure that our web pages are accessible to as many people as possible.

You might also want to refer to [Fair Access by Design](https://www.qualificationswales.org/media/4739/fair-access-by-design.pdf), which was produced jointly by the qualifications regulators in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Approvals

Departments should consult this document when developing copy, If you are developing copy for prospective students and/or applicants of the University, you can contact the Publications team for guidance: [pubstaff@aber.ac.uk](mailto:pubstaff@aber.ac.uk)

Any copy written for alumni and/or donors can be passed to the Development & Alumni Relations team: [alumni@aber.ac.uk](about:blank)

## Bilingual considerations

### Within Wales

If you’re writing targeted mailings (electronic or print) please ensure that you contact the person in their language of choice (if known). If you do not know the language preference of the person, produce bilingual materials.

Our [Welsh Language Standards](about:blank) provide a brief description of the standards staff must comply with. For guidance on style and grammar when writing in Welsh, have a look at the Welsh Government’s [Welsh language style guide](https://gov.wales/welsh-language-style-guide-yr-arddulliadur) (Yr Arddulliadur).

### Outside of Wales

Produce English materials for circulation outside of Wales, unless you are certain the audience in mind speaks Welsh as a first language.

### Translation and proofreading

You can send a translation request to the translation unit within the Centre for Welsh Language Services via the [online system](https://myadmin.aber.ac.uk/f?p=300). Alternatively, you can draft your own Welsh copy and request that the translation unit proofreads it.

If you have any questions about any of the copy processes or requirements in this guide, contact the Publications team: [pubstaff@aber.ac.uk](mailto:pubstaff@aber.ac.uk)

## Medium

Be mindful of the fact that people read copy on screen and in print in very different ways. This will have an impact on the way you write.

Here are a few basic rules:

Print advertising (eg poster, exhibition materials)

* Make sure that messages are clear and concise.
* Use short, punchy statements.
* Use bullets wherever possible to break up your copy.
* Avoid clichés and jargon.
* Focus on making key words, benefits and calls to action stand out.

Web

While readers are happy to read long sections of copy in print, they tend to scan it on screen. In general:

* reduce your web copy by 50 per cent compared to print copy; keep paragraphs short (about three to five lines of text) and try to cover just one point in each
* avoid long pages of text that requires your reader to scroll continuously
* break up the text with clear, meaningful subheadings and bulleted lists
* keep your copy objective, rather than overtly promotional
* always include information on what to do next by providing contact details, web links or an instruction
* make each page comprehensive without the need to refer to other pages on the site
* put the most important message at the top of the page and key information and action words at the beginning of sentences where possible.

### Promotional literature (eg prospectuses, leaflets)

You can adopt a more natural flow of language in promotional literature, but use paragraphs, bullet points, subheadings, charts, tables and so on to break up the text and hold the reader’s attention. In general:

* keep a consistent format throughout the document where possible (eg each page has a heading, a bulleted list and two body paragraphs)
* consider your document format when writing your copy (eg a postcard will obviously need much shorter paragraphs than an A4 booklet)
* include calls to action and links to further information consistently
* use clear subheadings to signpost your reader to the information they need
* consider other ways to present your information which may have more impact than plain running text (eg tables, charts, case studies, profiles and bulleted lists).

## Writing style

There are a few hard and fast rules for writing copy that is both easy to read and inspires action. Here’s a summary of the basics.

### Think about what you’re trying to say

All messages should be aligned with our [Values and Core Objectives](about:blank). Take a few moments to digest the main points and then just let the ideas flow. You can organise them later.

### Think about your audience

Effective copywriting is all about making a connection with your audience and establishing a rapport. Be clear, welcoming and empathetic by following these rules:

* Address the reader as ‘you’.
* Use inclusive language where you can – ‘we’ rather than ‘the University’.
* Think about what the audience wants and how to meet their needs.
* Put warmth into your writing and aim to be open and supportive.
* Try reading it out loud to see if you’ve hit the right tone.

### Keep it simple

Nobody has time to navigate reams of copy, so focus on your message and get to the point quickly. Stick to short sentences and avoid waffle and repetition.

### Use [Plain English](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides.html)

Write how you would speak, choosing shorter, more modern words instead of lengthy, dated alternatives, eg ‘buy’ instead of ‘purchase’, ‘before’ rather than ‘prior to’.

### Create a clear structure

Split your copy into manageable paragraphs which each focus on one idea. Sentences and paragraphs can and should vary in length: this will help to keep readers engaged, and lets you focus on delivering your message as clearly and efficiently as possible.

When planning your writing, use headings, subheadings and notes to plan what you’re going to say and the order in which you’re going to say it.

### Use headings and subheadings

Headlines for chapters, pages, subsections and paragraphs create a narrative. These act as signposts for busy readers and means they’ll probably absorb the majority of the messages, even at a glance.

Heading and subheadings are a great way to ‘signpost’ information, but they can be used to provide information too. Compare the following examples:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Signposting** | **Informing** |
| How to apply | Apply online |
| Deadline | The deadline for applications is 31 August |

This is a great way to ‘front-load’ information, and works especially well when your message is simple and straightforward.

### Edit, edit, edit

Editing is as important as writing itself. Aim to be concise, but don’t cut it back so far that the language has no personality.

### Use the active voice

The active voice is more direct and personal, which means that readers understand the meaning more quickly. Compare the following examples:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Passive** | **Active** |
| The students were welcomed by the Vice-Chancellor. | The Vice-Chancellor welcomed the students. |
| Your letter will be replied to in due course. | We’ll reply as soon as we can. |

The active voice:

* makes writing more concise and efficient
* easy easier to read (and write!)
* helps prevent grammatical mistakes.

### Think about how you use data

Use market research data only if relevant. Some data can be helpful, eg database reports, surveys, or transcripts of focus groups but, if possible, go and find someone in your target group and meet them in person. Figure out what they want and how we can meet that need. When you start to write, you’ll have a huge advantage.

### Lead with the benefits

Empathise with the reader and write with their needs in mind. Focus on the benefits, not just the features or services we offer, and put what you think is the key benefit for your audience first. Make it a heading if possible.

### Avoid clichés

Copy full of clichés suggests that the writer is lazy and lacking in original thought. It reduces personality in copy and tends to make the reader switch off. Here are some examples of clichés you might be tempted to use:

address the issue

all things considered

blue-sky thinking

ballpark figure

behind the scenes

chain reaction

deliver best practice

each and very

experts agree

from start to finish

golden opportunity

when all is said and done

### Always provide tools for the next step

Remove any guesswork and make it easy for the reader to do what ultimately you want them to – whether that’s attend an open day, make an enquiry or apply to the University.

# Word list and common terms

## A

### @

This should only be used in an email address or Twitter username and never to represent the word ‘at’.

### abbreviations and acronyms

* Use **Aberystwyth** for prospective students who don’t have a knowledge of the area, but the shortened ‘**Aber**’ is an option for current students, alumni and donors.
* The first time you use an abbreviation or acronym explain it in full on each page unless it is well known, eg UK or BBC. Thereafter, refer to it by initials.
* Do not use an unfamiliar acronym if you’re not going to use it again later in the text; just use the long version.
* Do not abbreviate Professor to ‘Prof’ unless absolutely necessary.
* Use ‘please respond/reply’ rather than RSVP.
* Use p22 for a single page number reference, or pp8-9 when referring to multiple pages. In continuous prose use ‘the article appeared on page five’, ‘the Vice-Chancellor referred to pages 60-62 of the annual report’.

### accents and diacritics

A loanword is a word adopted from another language without translation, such as café, karaoke and entrepreneur. Microsoft Word’s UK English dictionary will autocorrect certain words with accents or other diacritical marks, like café, cliché, façade and naïve. When this happens, allow the change to stand.

### accolades and rankings

Here are some of the commonly used rankings, and how to present their names:

* The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2020
* National Student Satisfaction survey (NSS) 2019
* WHATUNI? STUDENT CHOICE Awards 2019
* *The Guardian* University Guide
* TEF Gold

You can find the latest rankings on the [Why Aberystwyth?](https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/why-aber/) page.

### alumnus/alumni

Alumnus is singular; alumni is plural.

### ampersand (&)

Use ‘and’ rather than an ‘&’ unless part of a department or brand name, eg the Department of English & Creative Language.

### apostrophes

Use ‘s to indicate possession after single nouns and after plural nouns that do not end in s. Use the apostrophe alone after plural nouns ending in s, eg Students’ Union.

* Do not use an apostrophe in possessive pronouns – note the difference between ‘it’s raining’ (a contraction of the phrase ‘it is raining’) and ‘the University and its partners’ (a possessive meaning ‘belonging to it’).
* Do not use the ‘greengrocer’s apostrophe’ (eg lettuce’s instead of lettuces) when writing plural nouns.

## B

### bold

* You can use bold to explain what field a user needs to fill in on a form, or what button they need to select. For example: ‘**Apply Now**.’
* Do not use bold to emphasise words or phrases. Instead, front-load sentences or use headings or bullets.

### bullet points

We usually use bullet points between paragraphs of text and in this case:

* use a lead-in sentence followed by a colon
* make sure that each point reads correctly from the introductory phrase
* write consistently and do not mix the style of bullet points
* use lower case at the start of each bullet, unless you are referring to a place name, degree name, or some other phrase that would usually start with a capital letter
* do not use full stops within bullet points – instead use commas or semicolons to expand, or start a new bullet point
* use end punctuation in the last bullet point.

Where you use bullet points after a heading, use the following example as a guide:

**Using bullet points as a heading**

* Start each point with a capital letter.
* Finish with a full stop.
* Keep it short (no more than one sentence).

## C

### capitals

Never use BLOCK CAPITALS for large amounts of text as it can be difficult to read.

Capitalise:

* the ‘U’ when using the University’s full title and when referring to the University specifically, but use a lower case ‘u’ when referring to universities in general, and do not use a capital ‘T’ for ‘the’ University of Aberystwyth unless it comes at the beginning of a sentence
* formal titles of office holders (note: Vice-Chancellor is hyphenated)
* formal award titles, but not subjects
* faculties, departments, institutes and schools
* names of groups and directorates, for example University Executive Group
* titles of specific acts or bills: Employment Rights Act 1996 or Constitution Reform Group’s Act of Union Bill (but use ‘the act’ or ‘the bill’ after the first time you use the full title)
* names of specific, named university or government schemes known to people outside, for example Year in Employment Scheme, EU Settlement Scheme

### contractions

* Non-negative contractions such as ‘they’ve’ and ‘we’ll’ are acceptable but avoid using ‘should’ve’, ‘could’ve’, ‘would’ve’ as these are hard to read.
* Negative contractions such as ‘don’t’ and ‘can’t’ should be avoided. Evidence suggests that users misread these and risk making the wrong decisions.

## D

### data

Treat as a singular noun, eg the data is stored on a secure server. Note that data is always plural in Welsh.

### dates and times

* Use upper case for months; no ‘th’ or ‘st’ and no comma between the month and year, eg 14 September 2020.
* Do not abbreviate the month or year.
* If you are including days, write out the day in full and without punctuation.
* Use ‘to’ (not hyphens or dashes) in date ranges, eg academic year 2020 to 2021; Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, 15 June to 24 July.
* When referring to today (as in a news article) include the date: ‘The Vice-Chancellor announced today (14 June 2020) that…’
* Academic and financial years are elided with a slash /, eg 2020/21.
* Use the 12-hour clock, using a full stop to separate hours and minutes, eg 10.00am; 3.15pm.
* Use numerals for durations, eg 15 minutes or 1 hour and words for periods of time like half an hour; mix these when appropriate, eg 2 and a half hours.

### degrees and degree classes

* Bachelors degree; Masters degree.
* Do not capitalise ‘degree’, eg Honours degree.
* Describe taught degrees and diplomas as ‘courses’ in market-facing promotional copy.
* Use abbreviations, eg BA rather than Bachelor of Arts, BSc rather than Bachelor of Science.
* No full stops, eg MA (Hons).
* Use colons to separate degree classes, eg 2:1; 2:2.

### department

Lower case except when in the title, eg Department of Computer Science.

**Correct titles for our academic departments:**

Aberystwyth Business School

Aberystwyth School of Veterinary Science

Department of Computer Science

Department of English and Creative Writing

Department of Geography and Earth Sciences

Department of History and Welsh History

Department of Information Studies

Department of International Politics

Department of Law and Criminology

Department of Mathematics

Department of Modern Languages

Department of Physics

Department of Psychology  
Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies

Department of Welsh and Celtic Studies

Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences - IBERS in short

International English Centre

Learn Welsh

Lifelong Learning

School of Art

School of Education

### disabled people

Use ‘disabled people’ and never ‘the disabled’.

## E

### e-

* In most cases, these phrases will be lower case and hyphenated, eg e-learning, e-book.
* Do not use at the beginning of a sentence but if it can’t be avoided, capitalise only the ‘e’ and not the letter after the hyphen, eg Conference on e-learning 2019 (preferable) E-learning Conference 2019 (acceptable).

### the Earth

Upper case for the Earth, Planet Earth and Earth sciences, with lower case for ‘the’.

### eg, etc and ie

* Do not use full stops.
* Avoid etc if possible, and use ‘for example’ or ‘such as’ or ‘like’ or ‘including’. Never use etc at the end of a list starting with these words.
* Avoid ie, which is not always well understood, and rewrite sentences or use an alternative such as ‘meaning’ or ‘that is’.

### email and email addresses

* Write email as one word. Note that there is a hyphen in the Welsh (e-bost).
* Write email addresses in full, in lower case and as active links, and do not include any other words in the link.

### Europe-related terms

* Use European Commission in full to distinguish from the European Community.
* Avoid using European Economic Area (EEA) as it is not widely understood, and say ‘the EU, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein’.
* When rules covering the EEA also cover Switzerland, say ‘the EU, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein’.
* European Union vs European Community: use EU when talking about EU member states, eg EU countries, EU businesses, goods exported from the EU; use EC when talking about EC directives, EC Sales List.
* Write euros, the euro in lower case.

## F

### faculties

Faculties should not be mentioned to external audiences. We are marketing courses, so the academic department should be referenced and not the faculty within which the department sits.

### fewer

Fewer refers to number; less to quantity, eg fewer than 20 people; fewer than eight departments; I had less than £5; less than half the population.

### Freshers’ Week

Not Fresher’s Week.

## G

### gender-specific suffixes

Avoid the use of suffixes such as -ess: use actor not actress; manager not manageress; chair notchairman.

### government

Write in lower case, unless referring to a specific government, eg the Welsh Government.

## H

### headings and titles

Follow the conventional way of using capital letters (sentence case) for report titles, headings and subheadings. Never use all capital letters.

Do not use a full stop at the end of headings, eg

**Upcoming events and open days**

**Apply for 2020 study**

Put the most important word at the front when you use headings to break up text.

Avoid mixing questions and statements in headings. Be consistent.

### honours

Lower case.

### however

It is usually used at the beginning of a sentence, and is followed by a comma.

However, if you would like to discuss your accommodation requirements further, please contact the Accommodation Office.

But it can also be used in the middle of a sentence, with commas either side.

Students should ensure, however, that they are available to take the resit exams.

Or it can be used at the end, after a comma.

The point was valid, however…

### hyphens

When two words are put together to form an adjective and come before a noun, a hyphen is usually used, eg first-year student, three-year course. This does not apply when the first word ends in -ly.

We also use a hyphen for co-operation, cross-curricular and en-suite.

For further guidance, have a look at the Plain English Campaign’s [advice](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/using-hyphens.html).

## I

### infer/imply

To infer is to deduce something from evidence; to imply is to hint at something (and wait for someone to infer it). The speaker implies; the listener infers.

### institution

Avoid this. If you mean University, say University. If you mean something else, say what that is.

### internet

Use lower case.

### italics

Avoid italics on the web. They can be very hard to read on screen.

## L

### Latin plurals

Use common Latin plurals such as alumni, data, criteria. Avoid those that are not widely used, since they sound pompous.

## M

### material

Avoid this term when referring to course materials. Be specific and refer to reading lists, textbooks, course notes and so on.

### money

* Use numerals for cash amounts, eg £600. Use commas to clarify figures of four digits or higher (as in **numbers**).
* Do not use decimals unless pence are included, eg £15, but £22.50 and do not use £0.xx million for amounts less than £1 million.
* Spell out million and billion in full wherever possible, eg £7 million. Use mn and bn as an abbreviation only if necessary.
* Currency symbols should always come before the figure, eg £167.
* Write out foreign currencies such as dollars, euros, yen (no initial capitals) except where they appear in a table.

## N

### names and addresses

* When writing postal addresses without punctuation in a block of text, display as follows:

Aberystwyth University  
Aberystwyth   
UK   
SY23 3DD

* Where an address is written as run-on text, punctuate with commas for clarity, eg Aberystwyth University, Aberystwyth, UK, SY23 3DD.
* Do not include ‘http://’ when writing web addresses unless it is a requirement (eg https:// for secure addresses).
* Use initial capitals for official building names.

### NB

Do not use. Information that might follow ‘NB’ should be incorporated into the main text, but if this isn’t possible, use ‘Please note:’.

### numbers – figures/words

* Use words for numbers up to ten in running text.
* Use figures from 11 but use words where a number is at the beginning of a sentence.
* Hyphenate written numbers, eg thirty-five.
* Use 18th birthday, not eighteenth birthday.
* Hyphenate ages when used as adjectives eg 18-year-old students but avoid ambiguity, eg ‘a seminar of 30 18-year-olds’ can be written as ‘30 students aged 18…’.
* With age ranges, use 18- to 21-year-olds or students aged 18-21 or students aged from 18 to 21 BUT NOT students aged from 18-21.
* Spell out fractions in running text.
* Use commas to clarify numbers with four or more digits: 1,000.
* Always use the percentage symbol %, eg 50%.

## P

### platitudes

Avoid using platitudes such as ‘The University welcomes international students.’ Instead, give evidence that the University provides a welcoming environment.

### punctuation

This section covers common questions you might have about how we use punctuation.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **parentheses ( )** and **square brackets [ ]** | * Use parentheses in most cases. Only use square brackets for explanatory notes in reported speech. * Use an initial capital where brackets include a complete sentence, and end it with a full stop inside the bracket, eg (She completed her course work on time.) * Do not use an initial capital if the parentheses is within another sentence, and place the full stop outside the bracket, eg She successfully passed her degree (she completed her coursework on time). * Do not use brackets to refer to something that could either be singular or plural. Always use the plural instead, eg ‘Check which documents you need’ rather than ‘Check which document(s) you need’. |
| **colons :** and **semicolons;** | * A semicolon divides separate but related clauses which could otherwise be written as complete sentences. * A colon points forward to an illustration, a conclusion, or a list. |
| **commas,** | * Do not use commas to splice whole sentences. Use a conjunction (like ‘eg’, ‘and’ or ‘because’), a semicolon or a full stop. * It’s fine to use a comma before ‘and’ or ‘or’ in a list of three or more items (also known as the Oxford comma or serial comma) where it helps to clarify meaning. |
| **double quotation marks “ ”** and  **single quotation marks ‘ ’** | * Use double quotation marks for reported speech and direct quotations. * Use single quotation marks to introduce new or novel words or phrases, for work titles or for clarity when providing examples. * When a grammatically complete sentence is quoted, the full stop goes inside the quotation marks. * When the punctuation mark is not part of the quoted material, it is placed outside the quotation marks. |
| **spaces** | * Always separate sentences with a single rather than a double space. |

## Q

### qualifications

A level – no hyphen when used alone but A-level Physics; A-level results

AS level – no hyphen when used alone but AS-level Geography

BTEC National Diploma

European Baccalaureate

GCSE

International Baccalaureate

Welsh Baccalaureate

## S

### salutations

When a person is introduced for the first time, use their full title – first and second name, thereafter just the title and second name is required – eg Professor Davies, Dr Evans.

### seasons

Use lower case: spring, summer.

### spelling and grammar

Use the spellchecker on your computer and make sure the settings are for UK English, but do not rely on it. Use the Oxford English Dictionary as your reference.

| **Spelling** | **Grammar** |
| --- | --- |
| **Americanisms**  Use British English and spellings, eg programme not program, centre not center, -ise not -ize. Exceptions**: f**ollow the spelling of the organisation in official names, eg World Health Organization, World Trade Center. Use ‘program’ for computer software.  **benefited, benefiting:** a single ‘t’ is preferred  **biannual and biennial biannual:** twice a year **biennial:** once every two years (or lasting two years)  **data set** rather than dataset  **enquiry, inquiry**  **enquiry:** the act or instance of asking or seeking information  **inquiry:** an investigation, especially an official one  **focused and focusing:** a single ‘s’ is preferred  **helpdesk** rather than help desk  **hi-res and hi-tech** NOT high-  **judgement** rather than judgment  **licence** (noun); **license** (verb)  **medieval** rather than mediaeval  **occur, occurred, occurring**  **on to and onto**  **on to:** meaning ‘continue’, eg Let’s go on to the next point.  **onto:** a preposition, eg She went onto the table (she climbed on top of the table).  **stationary and stationery**  Stationary: immobile  stationery: paper, notepads  **supersede** rather than supercede  **under way** rather than underway  **voicemail** rather than voice mail  **while** rather than whilst  **workplace** rather than work place | **a, an** a before all words beginning with a vowel with the sound of ‘u’, eg a eulogy, a European  an before words beginning with a silent ‘h’, eg an honour  **affect and effect**  **affect (verb)** eg The disorganisation affected their productivity.  **effect (noun)** eg The changes had an immediate effect.  **effect (verb)** eg The new manager effected several changes in the company.  **it’s and its**  It’s = It is, eg “It’s fantastic news that a former Aberystwyth University student has been appointed as an EU Commissioner.” its denotes the possessive, eg Aberystwyth University has pledged to continually reduce its use of single use plastic.  **regard and regards**  **regard (noun)** eg She had no regard for rules.  **regards (noun)** eg Give them my regards.  **as regards (concerning):** As regards content, the course will cover …  **with/having/in regard to:** She made enquiries in regard to the post, not in regards to  **that and which**  Use that in defining clauses and which in non-defining clauses, with commas. For example:  They stopped the exam that was taking place in the hall. / They stopped the exam, which was taking place in the hall.  **uninterested and disinterested**  **uninterested:** having no interest in  **disinterested:** impartial.  **who or whom**  If you can replace the word with ‘he’ or ‘she’, use who. If you can replace it with ‘him’ or ‘her,’ use whom.  Who taught second-year maths? (She did.)  Whom did she teach? (She taught her.) |

### semesters and terms

The University uses both ‘semester’ and ‘term’ in its calendar. We have three terms:

1. Michaelmas Term (which runs between September and December)
2. Lent Term (which runs between January and March)
3. Easter Term (which runs between April and May)

Our semesters run as follows:

* Semester 1 (September to December)
* Semester 2 (January to May)

You can read more about the University’s calendar on our [Dates of term](https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/dates-of-term/) page.

## T

### tautology

Avoid the temptation to over-emphasise which can lead to saying the same thing twice, eg added bonus, significant landmark. See also unique.

### titles

Do not use a full stop after Mr, Mrs, Ms or Dr.

Capitalise job titles when referring to a specific person or role.

Titles of essays, articles, books and poems should be in single quotation marks.

## U

### unique

This cannot be qualified by words such as almost, quite or very.