

The Guardian style guide

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Saying it in style

"The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do"

Thomas Jefferson

The Guardian style guide is edited by David Marsh and Nikki Marshall

The word and pdf versions of the Guardian style guide are regularly updated so return often to www.guardian.co.uk/styleguide/ for the latest additions.

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(Collins English Dictionary-Millennium Edition)

to which you should refer for for guidance on anything that does not appear in the style guide

Neither pedantic nor wild ...

an introduction by Michael McNay

The Guardian has always been a newspaper for writers, and so a newspaper for readers. All the other skills, copy editing, design, typography, illustration, photography, are there to enhance the writing and to make it more accessible, to make the paper a more desirable journal to read - though illustration and photography each has its separate justification as well.

It should not be necessary to add that Guardian writers and subeditors should all be interested in the language, in its proper use and its development, and that regular trips to books as wide-ranging as Gower's *The Complete Plain Words*, Partridge's *Usage and Abusage*, Orwell's brilliant short essay *Politics and the English Language*, Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, or Kingsley Amis's *The King's English*, are useful in sharpening professional tools as well as for entertainment.

One says it should not be necessary, but it is very obvious all round the Guardian office that uncomfortably many people involved in producing and shaping text for the paper rely more on the casual question, "What's the style for x?" and the casual answer, "I think it's probably y." Journalists who are not sufficiently interested in house style to check the house style guide are not on the face of it very likely to be much interested in style at all.

But our approach to style in its broadest sense is, if anything, more important now than before, first because other newspapers, which may always have had good writing in specialist areas, have caught up fast across a whole range of news and features; second because the Guardian itself employs so many staff on freelance shifts or short contracts who arrive here with no particular idea of what makes this paper different from others, and even staff journalists who are never inducted into what values the Guardian holds particularly close; third, though more obscurely, because of the arrival of the internet: this style guide itself is the first to be published on the world wide web. That makes it accessible in seconds; it cannot get lost or suffer having coffee spilt on it. But though there is no reason in itself why new publishing methods should change the language for the worse, the example of radio and television shows that it can: at the top end, the best correspondents file spoken reports that could grace this newspaper; at the broad base, reporters speak a form of unlovely but infectious journalese destined only for the rubbish bin.

House style is the means by which a newspaper seeks to ensure that where there are permissible variants in spellings, the use of acronyms and so forth, a unified approach to these matters is

adopted to help in disseminating a sense of rationality and authority in the use of language. What it does not mean is imposing a unified writing style on the newspaper. Many of the reporters, columnists, critics and at least one former editor who once ran a highly idiosyncratic gossip column and who have enlivened the pages of the Guardian and helped to build its international reputation could hardly have done so had they been edited from the beginning into a homogenous house style. A subeditor can do no worse disservice to the text before him and thus to the writer, the reader, and the newspaper, than to impose his or her own preferences for words, for the shape of sentences and how they link, for a pedantic insistence on grammar in all cases as it used to be taught in school; in the process destroying nuances and possibly even the flow of a piece. And I write this as a career copy and layout editor with the best part of 40 years' service on the Guardian and who regards the skills involved in copy editing not just as desirable but essential.

Editing involves fine judgment, particularly as the paper has so many sections today serving possibly quite different kinds of readership. But fine judgments mean good editing, blanket judgments mean bad editing. A piece written in the vernacular that would be inappropriate on the analysis page or even (even?) in a sports column might pass muster in the Guide, where the demotic language of an NME review would be closer to the mark than the high style of Macaulay or CP Scott. And dealing sympathetically with quirks of writing style certainly does not preclude tidying up cliché-ridden journalese, verbosity, the latest vogue words and phrases, the words and phrases that flatten out meaning, replace a range of better more finely tuned words and concepts, and anaesthetise writing.

The introduction to the Guardian stylebook of 1960, which itself was a revision to the initial guide published in 1928, was headed "Neither pedantic nor wild".

That much has not changed.

- Michael McNay worked for the Guardian from 1963 to 1999.

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a or an before h?

use an only if the h is silent: an hour, an heir, an honourable man, an honest woman; but a hero, a hotel, a historian (but don't change a direct quote if the speaker says, for example, "an historic")

abattoir

abbeys

cap up, eg Rievaulx Abbey, Westminster Abbey

abbreviations

Do not use full points in abbreviations, or spaces between initials: BBC, US, mph, eg, 4am, lbw, No 10, PJ O'Rourke, WH Smith, etc.

Spell out less well-known abbreviations on first mention; it is not necessary to spell out well-known ones, such as EU, UN, US, BBC, CIA, FBI, CD, Aids, Nasa.

Use all caps only if the abbreviation is pronounced as the individual letters; otherwise spell the word out: the BBC, ICI, VAT, but Isa, Nato.

Beware of overusing less well-known acronyms and abbreviations; they can look clunky and clutter up text, especially those explained in brackets but then only referred to once or twice again. It is usually simpler to use another word, or even to write out the name in full a second time.

See contractions

Aborigines, Aboriginal

cap up when referring to native Australians

aborigines, aboriginal

lc when referring to indigenous populations

abscess

absorption

abysmal

abyss

a cappella

Acas

the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service at first mention, thereafter just Acas

accents

use on French, German, Spanish and Irish Gaelic words (but not anglicised French words such as cafe, apart from exposé)

Accenture

formerly Andersen Consulting

access

has been known as **contact** since the 1989 Children Act

accommodate, accommodation

accordion

achilles heel, achilles tendon

acknowledgment

not acknowledgement

acronyms

take initial cap, eg Aids, Isa, Mori, Nato

act

uc when using full name, eg Criminal Justice Act 1998, Official Secrets Act; but lc on second reference, eg “the act”, and when speaking in more general terms, eg “we need a radical freedom of information act”; bills remain lc until passed into law

acting

always lc: acting prime minister, acting committee chair, etc

actor

male and female, avoid actress except when in name of award, eg Oscar for best actress; one 27-year-old actor contacted the Guardian to say “actress” has acquired a faintly pejorative tinge and she wants people to call her actor (except for her agent who should call her often)

AD, BC

AD goes before the date (AD64), BC goes after (300BC); both go after the century, eg second century AD, fourth century BC

adaptation

not adaption

addendum

plural **addendums**

addresses

119 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3ER

Adidas

initial cap

administration

the Clinton administration, etc

Adrenalin

TM; a brand of adrenaline

adrenaline

hormone that increases heart rate and blood pressure, extracted from animals or synthesised for medical uses

adverbs

do not use hyphens after adverbs ending in -ly, eg a hotly disputed penalty, a constantly evolving newspaper, genetically modified food, etc; but hyphens are needed with short and common adverbs, eg ill-prepared report, hard-bitten hack

adviser

not advisor

advocate

member of the Scottish bar (not a barrister)

aeroplane

not airplane

affect/effect

exhortations in the style guide had no effect (noun) on the number of mistakes; the level of mistakes was not affected (verb) by exhortations in the style guide; we hope to effect (verb) a change in this

affinity

with or between, not to or for

Afghans

people **Afghanis** currency of Afghanistan

aficionado

plural **aficionados**

African-Caribbean

not Afro-Caribbean

Afrikaans

language

Afrikaner

person

ageing

ages

Tony Blair, 52 (not “aged 52”); little Johnny, four; the woman was in her 20s (but twentysomething, fortysomething)

Aggravate

to make worse, not to annoy

aggro

despite the once popular terrace chant “A, G, A-G-R, A-G-R-O:Agro!”

AGM

ahead of

avoid, use before or in advance of

aide-de-camp

plural **aides-de-camp**

aide-memoire

plural **aide-memoires**

Aids

acquired immune deficiency syndrome, but normally no need to spell out

airbase, aircrew, airdrop, airlift, airmail

aircraft carrier

air raid, air strike

air vice-marshal

al-

(note lc and hyphen) before an Arabic name means “the” so try to avoid writing “the al- ... ” where possible

Alastair or Alistair?

Alastair Campbell, Alastair Hetherington

Alistair Cooke, Alistair Darling, Alistair Maclean, Alistair McGowan

Aleister Crowley

Albright, Madeleine

former US secretary of state; Mrs Albright, not Ms, after first mention

Alcott, Louisa May

(1832-88) American author of Little Women

www.alcottweb.com

A-levels

Ali, Muhammad

alibi

being somewhere else; not synonymous with excuse

alice band

as worn by Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) and David Beckham

Allah

Arabic for "the God". Both words refer to the same concept: there is no major difference between God in the Old Testament and Allah in Islam. Therefore it makes sense to talk about "God" in an Islamic context and to use "Allah" in quotations or for literary effect

Allahu Akbar

"God is most great"

all comers

Allende, Isabel

Chilean author, niece of Salvador

www.isabelallende.com

Allende, Salvador

Chilean president, overthrown and killed in 1973

allies

1c, second world war allies, etc; but use **coalition** when referring to the 2003 Iraq war

all mouth and trousers

not "all mouth and no trousers", as has appeared in the paper

allot, allotted

all right

is right; alright is not all right

All Souls College

Oxford, no apostrophe

Almodóvar, Pedro

Spanish film-maker

alsatian

dog

AltaVista

alternative

strictly, a choice between two courses of action; if there are more than two, option or choice may be preferred

alumnus

plural **alumni**

Alzheimer's disease

AM (assembly member)

member of the [Welsh assembly](#), eg Rhodri Morgan AM

ambassador

lc, eg the British ambassador to Washington

American Civil Liberties Union

not American Civil Rights Union

American universities

Take care: "University of X" is not the same as "X University"; most states have two large public universities, eg University of Kentucky and Kentucky State University, University of Illinois and Illinois State University, etc

Do not call Johns Hopkins University "John Hopkins" or Stanford University "Stamford"

America's Cup

Amhrán na bhFiann

Irish national anthem

Amicus

trade union formed by a merger between the AEEU and MSF

amid

not amidst

amok

not amuck

among

not amongst

among or between?

Contrary to popular myth, between is not limited to two parties. It is appropriate when the relationship is essentially reciprocal: fighting between the many peoples of Yugoslavia, treaties between European countries. Among belongs to distributive relationships: shared among, etc

ampersand

use in company names when the company does: Marks & Spencer, P&O

anaesthetic

analysis

plural **analyses**

ancestors

precede descendants; we frequently manage to get them the wrong way round

Andalucía

annex

verb

annexe

noun

anonymous pejorative quotes

See appendix 2: the editor's guidelines on the identification of sources

Ansaphone

TM; use **answering machine** or **answerphone**

antenna, antennae, antennas

antenna (insect), plural antennae; antenna (radio), plural antennas

anticipate

take action in expectation of; not synonymous with expect

anticlimax

antidepressants

antihero

antipodes

anti-semitic, anti-war but **antisocial**

any more

two words

apex

plural apexes



apostrophes

Some plural nouns have no "s", eg children. These take an apostrophe and "s" in the possessive, eg children's games, gentlemen's outfitter, old folk's home.

The possessive in words and names ending in s normally takes an apostrophe followed by a second s (Jones's, James's), but be guided by pronunciation and use the plural apostrophe where it helps: Mephistopheles' rather than Mephistopheles's.

Use apostrophes in phrases such as in two days' time, 12 years' imprisonment and six weeks' holiday, where the time period (two days) modifies a noun (time), but not in nine months pregnant or three weeks old, where the time period is adverbial (modifying an adjective such as pregnant or old) — if in doubt, test with a singular such as one day's time, one month pregnant.

And if anyone tries to tell you that apostrophes don't matter and we'd be better off without them, consider these four phrases (listed in Steven Pinker's *The Language Instinct*), each of which means something completely different: my sister's friend's investments, my sisters' friends' investments, my sisters' friend's investments, my sister's friends' investments

appal, appalling

appendix
plural **appendices**

appraise
to estimate worth

apprise
to inform

aquarium
plural **aquariums**

Arab

Both a noun and an adjective, and the preferred adjective when referring to Arab things in general, eg Arab history, Arab traditions. Arabic usually refers to the language and literature: "the Arabic press" means newspapers written in Arabic, while "the Arab press" would include newspapers produced by Arabs in other languages.

There is no simple definition of an Arab. At an international level, the 22 members of the Arab League can safely be described as Arab countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. At a human level, there are substantial groups within those countries – the Berbers of north Africa and the Kurds, for example – who do not regard themselves as Arabs.

Arabic

Though Arabic has only three vowels – a, i and u – it has several consonants that have no equivalent in the Roman alphabet. For instance, there are two kinds of s, d and t. There are also two kinds of glottal sound. This means there are at least 32 ways of writing the Libyan leader Muammar Gadafy's name in English, and a reasonable argument can be made for adopting almost any of them. With no standard approach to transliteration agreed by the western media, we must try to balance consistency, comprehensibility and familiarity – which often puts a strain on all three.

Typically, Arabs have at least three names. In some cases the first or second name may be the one that is most used, and this does not imply familiarity (Arabs often address foreigners politely as "Mr John" or "Dr David"). Saddam, for example, is used by western and Arab media alike because it is more unusual than Hussein. And often Arabs also have familiar names which have no connection with the names on their identity cards; a man might become known

after the birth of his first son as “Abu Ahmad”, the father of Ahmad (eg the Palestinian leader Ahmed Qureia is commonly known as Abu Ala).

Where a particular spelling has become widely accepted through usage we should retain it. Where an individual with links to the west has clearly adopted a particular spelling of his or her own name, we should respect that. For breaking news and stories using names for which the Guardian has no established style, we take the lead given by Reuters wire copy.

Note also that names in some parts of the Arab world have become gallicised, while others have become anglicised, eg the leading Egyptian film director Youssef Chahine uses a French spelling instead of the English transliteration, Shaheen.

Some guidelines (for use particularly where there is no established transliteration):

al-

Means “the”. In names it is not capitalised, eg Ahmad al-Saqqaf, and can be dropped after the first mention (Mr Saqqaf). For placenames the Guardian drops it altogether. Sometimes it appears as as- or ash- or ad- or ul-: these should be ignored and can be safely rewritten as al-. But some Arabs, including Syrians and Egyptians, prefer to use el- in place of al-.

Exceptions: by convention, **Allah** (al-Lah, literally “the God”) is written as one word and capitalised; and in Saudi royal names, **Al Saud** is correct (in this case, “al” is actually “aal” and does not mean “the”).

abdul, abu and bin

These are not self-contained names, but are connected to the name that follows:

abdul means “slave of ...” and so cannot correctly be used on its own. There are standard combinations, “slave of the merciful one”, “slave of the generous one”, etc, which all indicate that the person is a servant of God. In transliteration, “abd” (slave) is lower case, eg Ahmad abd al-Rahman al-Saqqaf, except when used at the start of a name.

abu (father of) and **bin** (son of) are similar. When they appear in the middle of a name they should be lower case and are used in combination with the following part of the name: Faisal abu Ahmad al-Saqqaf, Faisal bin Ahmad al-Saqqaf.

Despite the above, some people are actually known as “Abdul”. This is more common among non-Arab Muslims. And some Arabs run “abd” or “abu” into the following word, eg the writer Abdelrahman Munif.

Muhammad

Our style for the prophet’s name and for most Muhammads living in Arab countries, though where someone’s preferred spelling is known we respect it, eg Mohamed Al Fayed, Mohamed ElBaradei. The spelling Mohammed (or variants) is considered archaic by most British Muslims, and disrespectful by many of them.

Muhandis/Mohandes, Qadi

Be wary of names where the first word is Muhandis or Qadi: these are honorary titles, meaning engineer and judge respectively

Arafat, Yasser

archbishops

the Archbishop of Canterbury, (the Right Rev) Rowan Williams, at first mention, thereafter Dr Williams or the archbishop; the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor, on first mention, subsequently Cardinal Murphy-O’Connor or the archbishop

archdeacon

the Ven Paul Olive, Archdeacon of Farringdon, at first mention; then Mr Olive (unless he is a Dr), or the archdeacon

archipelago

plural **archipelagos**

Ardoyne

(Belfast), not “the Ardoyne”

Argentinian

noun and adjective

arguably

unarguably one of the most overused words in the language

armed forces, armed services

the army, the **British army**, **the navy**, but **Royal Navy**, **Royal Air Force** (RAF is OK)

arms akimbo

hands on hips, elbows out; we have had “legs akimbo” in the paper (uncomfortable as well as ungrammatical)

around

about or approximately are better, eg “about £1m” or “approximately 2,000 people”

arranged marriages

are a traditional and perfectly acceptable form of wedlock across southern Asia and within the Asian community in Britain; they should not be confused with forced marriages, which are arranged without the consent of one or both partners, and have been widely criticised

artist

not artiste (except, possibly, in a historical context)

art movements

lc, **art deco**, **art nouveau**, **cubism**, **dadaism**, **gothic**, **impressionism**, **pop art**, **surrealism**, etc, but **Bauhaus**, **Modern** (in the sense of Modern British, to distinguish it from “modern art”, **pre-Raphaelite**, **Romantic** (to differentiate between a romantic painting and a Romantic painting))

Arts Council

ascendancy, ascendant

Ashura

a day of voluntary fasting for Muslims; Shia Muslims also commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein, a grandson of the prophet. For their community, therefore, it is not a festival but a day of deep mourning

aspirin

astrologer

not astrologist

Asunción

capital of Paraguay

asylum seeker

Someone seeking refugee status or humanitarian protection; there is no such thing as an “illegal asylum seeker”. Refugees are people who have fled their home countries in fear for their lives, and may have been granted asylum under the 1951 refugee convention or qualify for humanitarian protection or discretionary leave, or have been granted exceptional leave to remain in Britain. An asylum seeker can only become an illegal immigrant if he or she remains in Britain after having failed to respond to a removal notice

athletics

1500m but **5,000m** (the former is the “fifteen hundred” not “one thousand five hundred” metres)

Atlantic Ocean

or just the Atlantic

attache

no accent

Attlee, Clement

(1883-1967) Labour prime minister 1945-51, often misspelt as Atlee

attorney general

lc, no hyphen

auger

used to make holes **augur** predict or presage

Aum Shinrikyo

means Supreme Truth sect, but note that the “aum” means sect, so to talk about the “Aum sect” or “Aum cult” is tautologous

au pair

Australian Labor party

not Labour

autism

an incurable neurological disorder, to be used only when referring to the condition, not as a term of abuse, or in producing such witticisms as “mindless moral autism” and “Star Wars is a form of male autism”, both of which have appeared in the paper; **autistic** someone with autism, not someone with poor social skills

Autocue

TM; **teleprompter** is a generic alternative

avant garde

no hyphen

awards, prizes, medals

generally lc, eg Guardian first book award, Nobel peace prize, Fields medal (exceptions: the Academy Awards, Victoria Cross); note that categories are lc, eg “he took the best actor Oscar at the awards”

axis

plural **axes**

Azerbaijan

noun **Azerbaijani** adjective; note that there are ethnic Azeris living in, for example, Armenia

Aziz, Tariq

former deputy prime minister of Iraq

Aznar, José María

former prime minister of Spain

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BAA

do not call it the British Airports Authority, its former name

Ba'ath

Babybel

cheese

baby Bells

US regional telephone companies formed after the breakup of AT&T in 1984

backbench

newspaper or politics; **backbenches**, **backbenchers**

backstreet

bacteria

plural of **bacterium**, so don't write "the bacteria is"

BAE Systems

formerly British Aerospace

Baghdad

bail out

a prisoner, a company or person in financial difficulty; the noun is **bail-out**; but **bale out** a boat or from an aircraft

bakewell tart

balk

obstruct, pull up, stop short **bulk** area of a snooker table

ballot, balloted

Band-Aid

TM; say **plaster** or **sticking plaster**

band names

lc the: the Beatles, the Black Eyed Peas, the The; but uc equivalents in other languages, eg Les Négresses Vertes, Los Lobos

Bank of England

the Bank (uc) is acceptable on subsequent mentions

www.bankofengland.co.uk

bank holiday

banknote

bar

(legal) she was called to the bar; (political) of the House of Commons

barbecue

Barclays Bank

barcode

barmitzvah, batmitzvah

Barnardo's

children's charity, formerly Dr Barnardo's; it no longer runs orphanages

barolo

wine

barons, baronesses

we call them lords and ladies, even at first mention: Lady Thatcher, Lady Blackstone, Lady Jay, Lord Callaghan, etc

Barons Court

baroque

Basle

not Basel

Basque country

bas-relief

Battenberg

(not Battenburg) German family name that became Mountbatten; **battenberg cake** lc

battlebus

Bauhaus

B&B

abbreviation for bed and breakfast

BBC1, BBC2, BBC3, BBC4

no spaces

1000BC

but **AD1066** see *AD*



Beaton, Sir Cecil

(1904-80) Society photographer

B&Q

beau plural **beaux**

bebop, hard bop, post-bop

Becket, Thomas

(1118-70) murdered Archbishop of Canterbury, not Thomas à Becket

bed blocking

bedouin

beef wellington

Beeton, Mrs

(Isabella Mary Beeton, 1836-65) author of the Book of Household Management

befitted

begs the question

A tricky one, best avoided since it is almost invariably misused: it means assuming a proposition that, in reality, involves the conclusion. An example would be to say that parallel lines will never meet because they are parallel, assuming as a fact the thing you are professing to prove. What it does not mean is "raises the question"

Beijing

Belarus

adjective **Belarussian**

believable

Bell's

whisky

bellwether

sheep that leads the herd; customarily misspelt, misused, or both

benefited, benefiting

Benefits Agency

Benetton

Berchtesgaden

berks and wankers

Kingsley Amis identified two principal groups in debates over use of language: “Berks are careless, coarse, crass, gross and of what anybody would agree is a lower social class than one’s own; wankers are prissy, fussy, priggish, prim and of what they would probably misrepresent as a higher social class than one’s own”

Bernabéu stadium

Madrid

Betaferon

TM; the generic term for the drug is **interferon-beta 1b**

bete noire

no accent

betting odds

These are meaningless to many readers, and we frequently get them wrong. But here’s a brief explanation: Long odds (eg 100-1 against, normally expressed as 100-1) mean something unlikely; shorter odds (eg 10-1) still mean it’s unlikely, but less unlikely; odds on (eg 2-1 on, sometimes expressed as 1-2) means it is likely, so if you were betting £2 you would win only £1 plus the stake.

Take care using the phrase “odds on”: if Labour is quoted by bookmakers at 3-1 to win a byelection, and the odds are cut to 2-1, it is wrong to say “the odds on Labour to win were cut last night” — in fact, the odds against Labour to win have been cut (the shorter the price, the more likely something is expected to happen).

It gets more complicated when something is genuinely odds on, ie bookmakers quote a price of “2-1 on”: in this case, if the Labour candidate is quoted at 2-1 on and becomes an even hotter favourite, at 3-1 on, the odds have shortened; if Labour loses popularity, and 2-1 on becomes, say, 7-4 on or evens, the odds have lengthened

Bevan, Aneurin

Labour health minister (1945-51) and architect of the NHS, also known as Nye Bevan **Bevin**, **Ernest** Labour foreign secretary (1945-51) who helped to create Nato

Beverly Hills

Beyoncé

biannual

twice a year, **biennial** every two years; biannual is almost always misused: to avoid confusion stick with the alternative twice-yearly; two-yearly is an alternative to biennial

bias, biased

Bible

cap up if referring to Old or New Testament; lc in such sentences as “the Guardian style guide is my bible”; **biblical** lc

biblical quotations

Use a modern translation, not the Authorised Version. From a reader: “Peradventure the editor hath no copy of Holy Writ in the office, save the King James Version only. Howbeit the great multitude of believers knoweth this translation not. And he (or she) who quoteth the words of Jesus in ancient form, sheweth plainly that he (or she) considereth them to be out of date. Wherefore let them be quoted in such manner that the people may understand.”

biblical references

Genesis 1:1; II Corinthians 2:13; Revelation 3:16 (anyone calling it “Revelations” will burn in hell for eternity)

bicentenary

a 200th anniversary **bicentennial** its adjective

biceps

singular and plural, there is no such thing as a bicep

bid

use only in a financial sense, eg Manchester United have made a bid for Henry, or auction room

big

usually preferable to major, massive, giant, mammoth, behemoth, etc, particularly in news copy

bigot, bigoted

bill

lc, even when giving full name; cap up only if it becomes an act

billion

one thousand million, not one million million: in copy use **bn** for sums of money, quantities or inanimate objects: £10bn, 1bn litres of water; otherwise **billion**: 6 billion people, etc; use **bn** in headlines

Birds Eye

TM; no apostrophe

birdwatchers

also known as **birders**, not “twitchers”; they go birdwatching or birding, not “twitching”

Biro

TM; say **ballpoint pen**

birthplace, birthrate, birthright

Birtwistle, Sir Harrison

British composer

bishops

the Right Rev Clifford Richard, Bishop of Wimbledon, at first mention; thereafter the bishop or Bishop Richard; it is OK to leave out the Right Rev

bismillah

means “in the name of God” in Arabic

black

lc noun and adjective when referring to race

Black Country

black economy

prefer hidden or parallel economy

black-on-black violence

is banned, unless in a quote, but even then treat with scepticism (imagine the police saying they were “investigating an incident of white-on-white violence between Millwall and West Ham supporters”)

blackout

Blair/Booth, Cherie

wishes to be called **Mrs Blair** when we are referring to her role as the wife of the prime minister; if she is appearing in court or at a function related to her work as a lawyer, she is **Cherie Booth QC** (Ms Booth on second mention)

blase

no accent

blastfurnace

bleeper

not beeper; synonym for pager

blitz, blitzkrieg

blond

adjective and male noun; **blonde** female noun: the woman is a blonde, because she has blond hair; the man has blond hair and is, if you insist, a blond

Bloody Sunday

take care when writing about the death toll: 13 died in Derry on January 30 1972, but a 14th victim died from a brain tumour several months later, so we should use a phrase such as “which led to 14 deaths”

Bluffer's Guide

TM; beware of using phrases like “a bluffer’s guide to crimewriting”, a headline that led to a complaint from the copyright holder

Blu-Tack

TM

Boat Race

Oxford v Cambridge

Boddingtons

bogey

golf, ghost; **bogie** trolley, truck

Bogotá

capital of Colombia

Bombay

see *Mumbai*

bona fide, bona fides

Bonham Carter, Helena

bookcase, bookkeeper, bookseller, bookshelf

book titles

are not italicised, except in the newspaper’s Review section; lc for a, an, and, of, on, the (unless they are the first word of the title): *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Pride and the Passion*, etc

bon vivant

not bon viveur

bordeaux

wine

bored with, by

not bored of

Boston Strangler

both

unnecessary in most sentences that contain “and”; “both men and women” says no more than “men and women”, and takes longer; if you do use it, it is plural: “both women have reached the tops of their professions”

bottleneck

Boudicca

not Boadicea

Boundary Commission

bourgeois

adjective **bourgeoisie** noun

Boutros Boutros-Ghali

former UN secretary general; Mr Boutros-Ghali at second mention

bovine somatotrophin

(BST)

box office

boy

male under 18

boyfriend

boy's own

brackets

If the sentence is logically and grammatically complete without the information contained within the parentheses (round brackets), the punctuation stays outside the brackets. (A complete sentence that stands alone in parentheses starts with a capital letter and ends with a stop.)

“Square brackets,” the grammarian said, “are used in direct quotes when an interpolation [a note from the writer, not uttered by the speaker] is added to provide essential information.”

braille

brand

avoid tabloidese such as “Howard brands Blair a liar”

Brands Hatch

no apostrophe

Brasilia

capital of Brazil

breastfed, breastfeeding

briar

bush, pipe

bric-a-brac

brickbat

cliche, do not use

Bridgnorth

Brink's-Mat

Britain, UK

These terms are synonymous: Britain is the official short form of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Used as adjectives, therefore, British and UK mean the same. Great Britain, however, refers only to England, Wales and Scotland.

Take care not to write Britain when you might mean only England and Wales, for example when referring to the education system. See *Scotland*

Britart

British Council

British Film Institute

BFI on second mention

British Library

British Medical Association

(doctors' trade union), BMA on second mention

British Museum

www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

Britpop

Britvic

TM

brownie points

Brueghel

family of Flemish painters

Brum, Brummie

brussels sprouts

brutalise

render brutal, not treat brutally; so soldiers may be brutalised by the experience of war

Brylcreem

TM

BSE

bovine spongiform encephalopathy; no need to spell out

BST

British summer time

Buckingham Palace

the palace on second mention

buckminsterfullerene

a form of carbon, named after the US engineer Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983)

budget, the

lc noun and adj, eg budget talks, budget measures, mini-budget, pre-budget report, etc

buffaloes

not buffalos

Bulger, James

not Jamie

Buñuel, Luis

(1900-83) Spanish film director

Burberry

TM

bureau

plural **bureaus** (furniture) or **bureaux** (organisations)

burgomaster

not burgomeister

burka

not burqa

Burma

not Myanmar

burned/burnt

burned is the past tense form (he burned the cakes); burnt is the participle, an “adjectival” form of the verb (“the cakes are burnt”)

buses, bussed, bussing

Bush, George

not George W; his father is George Bush Sr

businesslike, businessman, businesswoman

businessmen

say **business people** or the **business community** if that is what you mean

Bussell, Darcey

British ballet dancer

but, however

often redundant, and increasingly wrongly used to connect two compatible statements; “in contrast, however, ... ” is tautologous

Butlins

but **Pontin’s**

butterflies

lc, painted lady, red admiral, etc; but note **queen of Spain fritillary**

buyout
but **buy-in**

byelection, bylaw, bypass, bystander

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cabin attendant, flight attendant, cabin crew, cabin staff

not air hostess, stewardess

cabinet, shadow cabinet

Cádiz

caesarean section

Caesars Palace

no apostrophe

Cafcass

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

cafe

no accent

Californian

a person; the adjective is California, or Brian Wilson would have written about “Californian Girls”

Calor

TM

Campari

TM

Canary Wharf

the whole development, not the main tower, which is No 1 Canada Square

cannabis

people smoke cannabis rather than “experiment” with it, despite what politicians and young members of the royal family might claim

Canute

(c994-1035) Danish king of England, Denmark and Norway who commanded the tide to turn back, so the legend says, to prove to his toadying courtiers that he was not all-powerful

canvas

tent, painting **canvass** solicit votes



capitals

Times have changed since the days of medieval manuscripts with elaborate hand-illuminated capital letters, or Victorian documents in which not just proper names, but virtually all nouns, were given initial caps (a Tradition valiantly maintained to this day by Estate Agents). A glance at the Guardian of, say, 1990, 1970 and 1950 would show greater use of capitals the further back you went. The tendency towards lower case, which in part reflects a less formal, less deferential society, has been accelerated by the explosion of the internet: some net companies, and many email users, have dispensed with capitals altogether.

Our style reflects these developments. We aim for coherence and consistency, but not at the expense of clarity. As with any aspect of style, it is impossible to be wholly consistent — there are almost always exceptions, so if you are unsure check for an individual entry in this guide. But here are the main principles:

jobs

all lc, eg prime minister, US secretary of state, editor of the Guardian, readers' editor

titles

differentiate between title and job description, eg the Archbishop of Canterbury, (the Right Rev) Rowan Williams, at first mention, thereafter Dr Williams or the archbishop; President Bush (but the US president, George Bush, and Mr Bush on subsequent mention); the Duke of Westminster (the duke at second mention); the Pope; the Queen

British government departments of state

initial caps, eg Home Office, Foreign Office, Ministry of Defence (MoD on second mention).

See departments of state for a full list

other countries

lc, eg US state department, Russian foreign ministry

government agencies, commissions, public bodies, quangos, etc

initial caps, eg Benefits Agency, Crown Prosecution Service, Customs and Excise, Equal Opportunities Commission, Heritage Lottery Fund, Parole Board

acts of parliament

initial caps (but bills lc), eg Official Secrets Act, Criminal Justice Act 1992

parliamentary committees, reports and inquiries

all lc, eg trade and industry select committee, Lawrence report, royal commission on electoral reform

artistic and cultural

initial caps for names of institutions, etc, eg British Museum, Tate Modern, Royal Court, Leeds Castle, National Theatre, Blenheim Palace

churches, hospitals and schools

cap up the proper or placename, lc the rest

eg St Peter's church, Pembury, Great Ormond Street children's hospital, Ripon grammar school, Vernon county primary school

universities and colleges of further and higher education

caps for institution, lc for departments, eg Sheffield University department of medieval and modern history, Oregon State University, Free University of Berlin, University of Queensland school of journalism, London College of Printing

geographical features, bridges

lc, eg river Thames, the Wash, Sydney harbour, Golden Gate bridge, Monterey peninsula, Bondi beach, Solsbury hill (but Mount Everest)

words and phrases based on proper names

that have lost connection with their origins (alsatian, cardigan, champagne, french windows, yorkshire pudding and numerous others) are usually lc; many are listed individually in this guide, as are the few exceptions (eg Long Island iced tea)

cappuccino

car bomb

carcass

plural **carcasses**

cards

scratchcard, smartcard, swipecard, but credit card, debit card

careen

to sway or keel over to one side; often confused with **career**, to rush along

career girl, career woman

these labels are banned

carer

an unpaid family member, partner or friend who helps a disabled or frail person with the activities of daily living; not someone who works in a caring job or profession. The term is important because carers are entitled to a range of benefits and services that depend on them recognising themselves as carers

Caribbean

carmaker

cashmere

fabric

castoff

one word (noun, adjective) **cast off** two words (verb)

casual (workers)

use freelance

Catalonia

adjective **Catalan**

catchphrase

catch-22

lc unless specifically referring to Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22*

cathedrals

cap up, eg Canterbury Cathedral

Catholic church

caviar

not caviare

CD, CDs, CD-rom

ceasefire

Ceausescu, Nicolae

former president of Romania, deposed and executed in 1989

celibate, celibacy

strictly refer to being unmarried (especially for religious reasons), but it is now acceptable to use them to mean abstaining from sexual intercourse

celsius

scale of temperature invented by a man named Celsius; write with fahrenheit equivalent in brackets: 23C (73F), -3C (27F), etc (avoid “centigrade” because of its possible confusion with the 100th part of a grade, and never try to convert a temperature change. *See numeracy*)

Celtic

not Glasgow Celtic

ensor

prevent publication **censure** criticise severely

Center Parcs

centre

on or in; revolve around

century

sixth century, 21st century, etc

CFC

chlorofluorocarbon

chablis

wines are lc, whether named after a place (as in this case) or a grape variety

chair

acceptable in place of **chairman** or **chairwoman**, being nowadays widely used in the public sector and by organisations such as the Labour party and trade unions (though not the Conservative party, which had a “chairman” in kitten heels); if it seems inappropriate for a particular body, use a different construction (“the meeting was chaired by Alan” or “Georgina was in the chair”)

champagne

chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster

chancellor of the exchequer

Channel 4, Channel Five

but **Five** at second mention

Channel tunnel

never Chunnel

chaos theory

Not a synonym for chaos. It describes the behaviour of dynamic systems that are sensitively dependent on their initial conditions. An example is the weather: under the “butterfly effect”, the flap of a butterfly’s wing in Brazil can in principle result in a tornado in Texas

chardonnay

lc, like other wines, whether named after a grape (as in this case) or a region

chargé d'affaires

Charity Commission

chassis

singular and plural

chateau, chateaux

no accent

chatroom, chatshow

Chechnya

inhabited by **Chechens**

checkout

noun, adjective **check out** verb

cheese

normally lc: **brie, camembert, cheddar, cheshire, double gloucester, lancashire, stilton**, etc, but uc for those still closely associated with a place, eg **Wensleydale**

cherubim

plural of cherub

chicken tikka masala

Britain's favourite dish

chief

("planning chiefs", etc): try to use proper titles; officers or officials may be preferable

chief constable

a job, not a title — John Smith, chief constable of Greater Manchester; Mr Smith at second mention

chief secretary to the Treasury

chief whip

childcare, childminder

Chinese names

Mainland China: in two parts, eg Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Jiang Zemin

Hong Kong, Taiwan: in two parts with hyphen, eg Tung Chee-hwa, Chiang Kai-shek (exception: when a building, park or the like is named after a person it becomes three parts, eg Chiang Kai Shek Cultural Centre); note also that Korean names are written the same way, eg Kim Il-sung

Singapore, Malaysia: in three parts, eg Lee Kuan Yew

For people with Chinese names elsewhere in the world, follow their preference — but make sure you know which is the surname

chock-a-block

Chomsky, Noam

US linguist

chords

musical **cords** vocal

christened, christening

use only when referring to a Christian baptism: don't talk about a boat being christened or a football club christening a new stadium. *See Christian name*

Christian, Christianity but **unchristian**

Christian name

use first name or forename

Christian Union

an evangelical Christian organisation

Christie's

Christmas Day, Christmas Eve

chronic

means lasting for a long time or constantly recurring, too often misused when acute (short but severe) is meant

Chumbawamba

not Chumbawumba

church

lc for the established church, eg "the church is no longer relevant today"; Catholic church, Anglican church, etc, but Church of England

cinemagoer

city

in Britain a town that has been granted a charter by the crown; it usually has a cathedral

City

capped when used as shorthand for the City of London

civil servant, civil service

CJD

Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, not normally necessary to spell it out; it is acceptable to refer to variant CJD as the human form of BSE, but not “the human form of mad cow disease”

classical music

Mozart's 41st Symphony (or Symphony No 41) in C, K551; Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 2; Schubert's Sonata in A minor for Piano, D845

clearcut

cliches

overused words and phrases to be avoided include: back burner, boost (massive or otherwise), bouquets and brickbats, but hey ... , drop-dead gorgeous, insisted, luvvies, major, massive, political correctness, politically correct, PC, raft of measures, special, to die for, upsurge (surge will do); verbs overused in headlines include: bid, boost, fuel, hike, signal, target, set to

A survey by the Plain English Campaign in 2004 found that the most irritating phrase in the language was at the end of the day, followed by (in order of annoyance): at this moment in time, like (as in, like, this), with all due respect, to be perfectly honest with you, touch base, I hear what you're saying, going forward, absolutely, and blue sky thinking; other words and phrases that upset people included 24/7, ballpark figure, bottom line, diamond geezer, it's not rocket science, ongoing, prioritise, pushing the envelope, singing from the same hymn sheet, and thinking outside the box

[Cliche finder](#)

cliffhanger

climbdown

noun **climb down** verb

cloud cuckoo land

coalfield, coalmine, coalminer

Coalite

TM

coastguard

Coca-Cola, Coke

TM

cockney

coconut

cold war

Coliseum

London theatre **Colosseum** Rome

collective nouns

Nouns such as committee, family, government, jury, take a singular verb or pronoun when thought of as a single unit, but a plural verb or pronoun when thought of as a collection of individuals:

The committee gave its unanimous approval to the plans;
The committee enjoyed biscuits with their tea

The family can trace its history back to the middle ages;
The family were sitting down, scratching their heads

College of Arms

colleges

take initial caps, eg Fire Service College; but not when college forms part of the name of a school, eg Bash Street sixth-form college, Eton college

Colombia South American country that we frequently misspell as “Columbia”

colon

Use like this: “to deliver the goods that have been invoiced in the preceding words” (Fowler).

This, from the paper, is a dreadful (but by no means isolated) example of the tendency to use a semi-colon where only a colon will do: “Being a retired soap ‘treasure’ must be a bit like being in the army reserves; when a ratings war breaks out, it’s time to dust off your uniform and wait by the phone.”

colonel

Colonel Napoleon Bogey, subsequently Col Bogey

Columbia

as in District of Columbia (Washington DC) and Columbia University (New York)

Columbus Day

October 12, marking the date Christopher Columbus landed in the West Indies in 1492; Columbus is also the state capital of Ohio

comedian

male and female; do not use comedienne

commas

“The editor, Alan Rusbridger, is a man of great vision” — correct (commas) if there is only one

“The subeditor David Marsh is all style and no substance” — correct (no commas) if there are more than one

commented

avoid, prefer “she said”

Commons, House of Commons

but the house, not the House

Commons committees

lc, home affairs select committee, public accounts committee, etc

common sense

noun **commonsense** adjective: "William Hague's 'commonsense revolution' showed little common sense"

Commonwealth, the

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

communiqué

no accent

communism, communist

lc, except in name of party: **Communist party**

company names

A tricky area, as so many companies these days have adopted unconventional typography and other devices that, in some cases, turn their names into logos. In general, we use the names that the companies use themselves: easyJet, eBay, ebookers, iSoft Group, Yahoo! are fine; but Adidas (not adidas), BhS (no italicised h), Toys R Us (do not attempt to turn the R backwards). Many of these look odd, particularly when used as first word in a headline, although some are becoming more familiar with time

compare to/with

The former means liken to, the latter means make a comparison: so unless you are specifically likening someone or something to someone or something else, use compare with.

The lord chancellor compared himself to Cardinal Wolsey because he believed he was like Wolsey; I might compare him with Wolsey to assess their relative merits

compass points

lc for regions: the north, the south of England, the south-west, north-east England; the same applies to geopolitical areas: the west, western Europe, the far east, south-east Asia, central America, etc; cap up, however, when part of the name of a county (West Sussex, East Riding of Yorkshire) or province (East Java, North Sulawesi, etc); note the following: East End, West End (London), Middle East, Latin America, North America, South America

Competition Commission

complement/compliment/complimentary

to complement is to make complete: the two strikers complemented each other; to compliment is to praise; a complimentary copy is free

complete

or **finish** is better than finalise

comprise

to consist of; "comprise of" is wrong

Concord

town in Massachusetts **Concorde** plane

Congo

acceptable on second mention for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (or DRC, formerly Zaire); we call its neighbour **Congo-Brazzaville**; never write “the Congo”

Congregational

use when referring to the Congregational Union of England and Wales, formed in 1832, which joined the Presbyterian Church of England in 1972 to form the United Reformed Church

Congress

(US)

conjoined twins

not Siamese twins

connection

not connexion

Conservative central office

Conservative party

consortium

plural **consortiums**

constitution

Consuelo

not Consuela; from a reader: “I really have had enough of show-off ignoramuses messing up my name. Consuelo is a Spanish abstract noun, masculine, invariable. Pilar and Mercedes are also Spanish female names derived, like Consuelo, from titles of the Virgin Mary”

consult

not consult with

consumer price index (CPI)

normally no need to spell it out

Consumers' Association

contemporary

of the same period, though often wrongly used to mean modern; a performance of Shakespeare in contemporary dress would involve Elizabethan costume, not 21st-century clothes

continent, the

mainland Europe

continual

refers to things that happen repeatedly but not constantly **continuous** indicates an unbroken sequence

contractions

Do not overuse contractions such as aren't, can't, couldn't, hasn't, don't, I'm, it's, there's and what's (even the horrific "there've" has appeared in the paper); while they might make a piece more colloquial or easier to read, they can be an irritant and a distraction, and make a serious article sound frivolous. They also look horrible

convince/persuade

having convinced someone of the facts, you might persuade them to do something

convener

not convenor

conversions

We give metric measures and convert on first mention only to imperial in brackets (exceptions: miles and pints); if a rough figure is given in metric, do not convert it into an exact figure in imperial, and vice versa, eg if someone says the towns are about 50km apart, convert to 30 miles, not "31.07 miles"; the same goes for rough amounts of currencies, though don't round up £3.6bn to £4bn

cooperate, cooperation, cooperative

no hyphen, but the store is the **Co-op**

coordinate

Le Corbusier

(1887-1965) Swiss architect and city planner

cords

vocal **chords** musical

Córdoba

cornish pasty

coronavirus

corporation of London

corps de ballet

cortege

no accent

La Coruña

coruscating

means sparkling, or emitting flashes of light; people seem to think, wrongly, that it means the same as excoriating, censuring severely eg "a coruscating attack on Blair's advisers"

councils

lc apart from placename: Lancaster city council, London borough of Southwark, Kent county council

count 'em

Resist the temptation to use this cliché, often seen in parenthesis after a number is mentioned, eg “the seminal Andrex puppy advent calendar with 25 — count 'em — puppy pictures”

counter-attack

coupe

no accent

courts

all lc, court of appeal, high court, supreme court, magistrates court (no apostrophe), European court of human rights, international criminal court

court martial

plural **courts martial**

court of St James's

couscous

crescendo

a gradual increase in loudness or intensity; musically or figuratively, it is the build-up to a climax, not the climax itself (we frequently get this wrong)

cricket

leg-side, leg-spinner, off-spin, off-stump, silly mid-on, mid-off, etc, all hyphenated

cripple, crippled

offensive and outdated; do not use

criterion

plural **criteria**

Crombie

TM

Crowley, Aleister

dead satanist

crown, the

crown estate, crown jewels

crucifixion, the

Crufts

cruise missile

Crusades, the

Cruz, Penélope

cubism, cubist

cumberland sausage

Cummings, EE

US poet (1894-1962) who, despite what many people think, used capitals in his signature

cunt

see *swearwords*

Cup, FA

after first mention it is the Cup; but other cups are lc on second mention

curb

restrain **kerb** pavement

currencies

When the whole word is used it is lc: euro, pound, sterling, dong, etc

Abbreviate dollars like this: \$50 (US dollars); A\$50 (Australian dollars); HK\$50 (Hong Kong dollars)

[Convert](#) all foreign amounts to sterling in brackets at first mention, but use common sense — there is no need to put £660,000 in brackets after the phrase “I feel like a million dollars”

currently

“now” is usually preferable, if needed at all

cusp

a place where two points meet (eg “on the cusp of Manchester and Salford”); sometimes misused to mean on the brink (“a girl on the cusp of womanhood”)

custody

since the 1989 Children Act the correct term for what used to be known as custody in cases involving care of children is **residence**

Customs, Customs and Excise, HM Customs

(all singular) but **customs officers**

cutbacks

avoid; **cuts** will suffice

cyberspace

Czech Republic

[A](#) | [B](#) | [C](#) | [D](#) | [E](#) | [F](#) | [G](#) | [H](#) | [I](#) | [J](#) | [K](#) | [L](#) | [M](#) | [N](#) | [O](#) | [P](#) | [Q](#) | [R](#) | [S](#) | [T](#) | [U](#) | [V](#) | [W](#) | [X](#) | [Y](#) | [Z](#)



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dadaism, dadaist

Dalí, Salvador

(1904-89) Spanish surrealist

dancefloor

dangling participles

Avoid constructions such as “having died, they buried him”; the pitfalls are nicely highlighted in Mark Lawson's novel *Going Out Live*, in which a TV critic writes: “Dreary, repetitive and well past the sell-by date, I switched off the new series of *Fleming Faces*”

dark ages

dashes

Beware sentences — such as this one — that dash about all over the place — commas (or even, very occasionally, brackets) are often better; semi-colons also have their uses

data

takes a singular verb (like agenda); though strictly a plural, no one ever uses “agendum” or “datum”

dates

January 1 2000 (no commas); it is occasionally alleged that putting month before date in this way is an “Americanisation” — in which case it should be pointed out that this has been our style since the first issue of the *Manchester Guardian* on May 5 1821

21st century; fourth century BC; AD2006 but 1000BC; for decades use figures: the swinging 60s or 1960s

daughter of, son of

Think twice before using these terms, often only the person's father is described and such descriptions can smack of snobbery as well as sexism. Simplistic labels may also be misleading: we published a clarification after calling Captain James Cook the son of a Scottish farm labourer. True enough, but Cook's mother was a Yorkshire woman and he is a famous son of Yorkshire

Davison, Emily

suffragette who died after diving under George V's horse at the 1913 Derby

Day-Glo

TM

daylong
but **month-long, year-long**

D-day

D notices
issued by the defence, press and broadcasting advisory committee “suggesting” that the media do not publish sensitive information

death row

debacle
no accents

debatable

decades
use figures if you abbreviate: roaring 20s, swinging 60s, etc

defensible

deforestation

defuse
render harmless **diffuse** spread about

deja vu
no accents

delphic

delusion/illusion
“That the sun moves round the Earth was once a delusion, and is still an illusion”(Fowler)

DeMille, Cecil B
(1881-1959) Hollywood producer and director

Democratic party
(US), not “Democrat party”

Dench, Dame Judi
not Judy

De Niro, Robert

denouement
no accent

departments of state

British government ministries (but not ministers) take initial caps as follows:

Cabinet Office (but **the cabinet**)
Department for Constitutional Affairs
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Department for Education and Skills
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department of Health
Department for International Development
Department of Trade and Industry (DTI on second mention)
Department of Transport
Department for Work and Pensions
Foreign Office
Home Office
Ministry of Defence (MoD on second mention)
Northern Ireland Office
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Scotland Office (not Scottish Office)
Treasury
Wales Office (not Welsh Office)

lc when departments are abbreviated, eg **environment department, transport department**

lc for departments and ministries of other countries, eg **US state department, Iraqi foreign ministry**

dependant

noun **dependent** adjective

dependence

depository

person **depository** place

de rigueur

the two Us are de rigueur

Derry, Co Derry

not Londonderry

descendants

come after ancestors; you wouldn't think the Guardian would get this simple thing wrong as often as we do

deselect

desiccate

despoil, despoliation

dessert

pudding, but **just deserts**



detente

Dettol

TM

developing countries

use this term in preference to “third world”

devil, the

DeVito, Danny

Diabetes UK

formerly known as the British Diabetic Association

dialects

cockney, estuary English, geordie, scouse

DiCaprio, Leonardo

Dictaphone

TM

diehard

dietician

different from

or **to**, not different than

dignitary, dignitaries

dilapidated

not delapidated

dilettante

dim sum

Dinky Toys

TM

diphtheria

diplomatic service

direct speech

People we write about are allowed to speak in their own, not necessarily the Guardian's, style, but be sensitive: do not, for example, expose someone to ridicule for dialect or grammatical errors. Do not attempt facetious phonetic renditions such as "oop north", "fooking" and "booger" when interviewing someone from the north, or "dahn sarf" when writing about south London

director general

disabled people

not "the disabled". Use positive language about disability, avoiding outdated terms that stereotype or stigmatise. Terms to avoid, with acceptable alternatives in brackets, include victim of, crippled by, suffering from, afflicted by (prefer person who has, person with); wheelchair-bound, in a wheelchair (uses a wheelchair); invalid (disabled person); mentally handicapped, backward, retarded, slow (person with learning difficulties); the disabled, the handicapped, the blind, the deaf (disabled people, blind people, deaf people); deaf and dumb (deaf and speech-impaired, hearing and speech-impaired)

discernible

not discernable

discolour

but **discoloration**

discomfit

thwart; do not confuse with **discomfort**, make uncomfortable

discreet

circumspect **discrete** separate

disfranchise

not disenfranchise

disinterested

free from bias, objective (the negative form of interested as in “interested party”) **uninterested** not taking an interest (the negative form of interested as in “interested in football”)

dispatch, dispatch box

(Commons), **dispatched**; not despatch, despatched

Disprin

TM, use aspirin

disk

(computers), not disc

Disneyland Paris

formerly Euro Disney

dissociate, dissociation

not disassociate, disassociation

divorcee

a divorced person, male or female

Dr

Use at second mention for medical and scientific doctors and doctors of divinity, not, for example, a politician who happens to have a PhD in history

Doctor Who

the title of the series; the character’s name is **the Doctor**, and it should never be abbreviated to Dr Who

dogs

lc, alsatian, doberman, rottweiler, yorkshire terrier; but Irish setter, old English sheepdog

D'oh!

as Homer Simpson would say, note the apostrophe

Dolby

TM

dome, the

Millennium Dome at first mention, thereafter the dome

Dominica

lies in the Windward Islands, south-west of the Dominican Republic

Dominican Republic

shares an island with Haiti

Donahue, Phil

dos and don'ts

Dostoevsky, Fyodor Mikhailovich

(1821-81) Russian novelist

dotcom

double, the

as in Sheffield United may win the double (FA Cup and Premiership)

dozer sole

downmarket

Down's syndrome

dozen

precisely, not approximately, 12

draconian

draftsman

of document **draughtsman** of drawing

dreamed

not dreamt

dressng room

two words

driving licence

not driver's licence

drug companies, drug dealer, drug raid, drug squad, drug tsar

not drugs raid, etc

drug enforcement administration

(US, not agency), DEA at second mention

drum'n'bass

drunkenness

dub

avoid tabloidese such as "they have been dubbed the nation's leading experts on style" (even if true)

due to/owing to

Many people ignore this distinction, but it can be valuable. For example, compare "It was difficult to assess the changes due to outside factors" with "It was difficult to assess the changes owing to outside factors". The first

says the changes that were a result of outside factors were difficult to assess, the second says outside factors made the changes difficult to assess (if in doubt, **because of** can be substituted for owing to, but not due to)

dugout

Duke of Westminster

or wherever, first mention; thereafter the duke

Duke of York

first mention; thereafter Prince Andrew or the prince

dumb

do not use; say speech-impaired

du Pré, Jacqueline

(1945-87) English cellist, Du Pré at second mention

Dupré, Marcel

(1886-1971) French organist and composer

dyke

not dike

dynamo

plural **dynamos**

Dynamo

football teams from the former Soviet Union are Dynamo; teams from Romania are **Dinamo**

dyslexia

write "Paul has dyslexia" rather than labelling him "a dyslexic" or saying he "suffers from" dyslexia

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earlier

often redundant since context will inform the reader: “They met this month” is preferable to “They met earlier this month” and will save space

Earls Court

no apostrophe

earring

earshot

Earth

in an astronomical context; but moon, sun

East Anglia

east coast mainline

East End

inner east London north of the river (the equivalent district south of the Thames is south-east London)

EastEnders

TV soap

Easter Day

not Easter Sunday

eastern Europe, western Europe

East Jerusalem

East Riding of Yorkshire council

easyJet

eBay

ebook

eccles cake

E coli

e-commerce

ecstasy
(drug), lc

ecu
European currency unit, superseded by the euro

Edinburgh festival, Edinburgh Fringe festival

educationist
not educationalist

eerie
weird **Erie** North American lake **eyrie** of eagles

effect/affect
see affect

effectively
Not a synonym for in effect: “the Blair campaign was launched effectively in 1992” means the intended effect was achieved; “the Blair campaign was in effect launched in 1992” means this was not the official launch, but the event described did have the effect of launching it, whether intended or not. The word effectively is overused as well as misused, and can often be omitted

effete
does not mean effeminate or foppish, but “weak, ineffectual or decadent as a result of over-refinement ... exhausted, worn out, spent” (Collins)

efit
(electronic facial identification technique) program used to create police drawings

eg
no full point

Eid al-Adha
(Festival of Sacrifice) Muslim festival laid down in Islamic law, celebrates the end of the hajj. Note that eid means festival, so it is tautologous to describe it as the “Eid festival”

Eid al-Fitr
Muslim festival of thanksgiving laid down in Islamic law, celebrates the end of Ramadan (al-fitr means the breaking of the fast)

eid mubarak

not a festival but a greeting (mubarak means “may it be blessed”)

Eire

do not use; say Republic of Ireland or Irish Republic

elan

no accent

ElBaradei, Mohamed

director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Dr ElBaradei after first mention

elderly

do not use to describe anyone under 70

El Dorado

fabled city of gold **Eldorado** fabled flop of a soap

electrocution

death by electric shock, so don't say survivors of torture were “electrocuted” during their ordeal — rather that they were given electric shocks

elegiac

elite

ellipsis

use spaces before and after ellipses, eg “She didn't want to go there ... ”; there is no need for a full point

email

emanate

is intransitive; use **exude** if you need a transitive verb

Embankment, the

London

embargo

plural **embargos**

embarrass, embarrassment

embassy

lc, eg British embassy

emigrate

leave a country **immigrate** arrive in one

emir

not amir

employment tribunal

not industrial tribunal

EMS

European monetary system

Emu

economic and monetary union

enamoured of

not by or with

enclose

not inclose

enervate

to deprive of strength or vitality

enforce, enforceable

England, English

take care not to offend by saying England or English when you mean Britain or British. See *Scotland*

English Heritage, English Nature, English Partnerships

en masse

enormity

something monstrous or wicked; not synonymous with large

enrol, enrolling, enrolment

en route

not on route



ensure

make certain **insure** against risk **assure** life

enthral, enthralling

entr'acte

epicentre

the point on the earth's surface directly above the focus of an earthquake or underground explosion; frequently misused to mean the centre or focus itself

epilepsy

we do not define people by their medical condition: seizures are epileptic, people are not; so say (if relevant) "Mr Smith, who has epilepsy ... " not "Mr Smith, an epileptic ... "

EPO

erythropoietin, a performance-enhancing drug

equator, the

ere long

not e'er long

ERM

exchange rate mechanism

Ernie

electronic random number indicator equipment: the machine that picks winning premium bond numbers

Eskimo

is a language spoken in Greenland, Canada, Alaska and Siberia. Please note that it has no more words for snow than does English. The people are **Inuit** (singular **Inuk**), not "Eskimos"

espresso

not *expresso*

establishment, the

estuary English

Eta

not ETA

ethnic

never say ethnic when you mean ethnic minority, which leads to such nonsense as “the constituency has a small ethnic population”

ethnic cleansing

do not use as a euphemism for **genocide** unless in quote marks

EU

European Union (no need to spell out at first mention); formerly EC (European Community); before that EEC (European Economic Community)

Euan, Ewan or Ewen?

Euan Blair

Ewan McGregor

Ewen Bremner, Ewen MacAskill

euro

currency; plural **euros** and **cents**

Euro

do not use as a prefix to everything European, but Euro-MP is an acceptable alternative to MEP

Euro Disney

now called Disneyland Paris

Europe

includes Britain, so don't say, for example, something is common “in Europe” unless it is common in Britain as well; to distinguish between Britain and the rest of Europe the phrase “continental Europe” may be useful; **eastern Europe, central Europe, western Europe**

euroland, eurozone

European commission

the commission after first mention

European convention on human rights

European court of human rights

nothing to do with the EU; it is a Council of Europe body

Eurosceptic

one word, capped: they are sceptics about the EU, not just the euro

Eurovision song contest

evangelical

fundamentalist wing of Christianity **evangelist** someone who spreads the gospel

every day

noun and adverb: it happens every day **everyday** adjective: an everyday mistake

every parent's nightmare

cliche; from a reader: "This seems to crop up for anything to do with children, from abduction, to death, to today's piece on musical taste. As a parent I can't cope with that many nightmares."

exchequer, the

exclusive

term used by tabloid newspapers to denote a story that is in all of them

execution

the carrying out of a death sentence by lawful authority, so a terrorist, for example, does not "execute" someone

ex officio

by right of position or office

ex parte

on behalf of one party only

expat, expatriate

not ex-pat or expatriot; this is "ex" meaning "out of" (as in export, extract), not "ex-" meaning "former" (as in ex-husband)

explained

avoid; write "he said" not "he explained"

Export Credits Guarantee Department

ECGD at second mention

extraterrestrial, extraterritorial

extrovert

not extravert

eye level

no hyphen

eyewitness

one word, but **witness** is preferable

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facade

no cedilla

factoid

not a trivial fact, but a mistaken assumption repeated so often that it is believed to be true (a word coined by Norman Mailer)

FA Cup

the Cup (the cap C is hallowed by convention); all other cups lc at second mention

fahrenheit

68F etc, use in brackets after celsius figure

Fáilte Ireland

Ireland's tourism authority

fairytale

falafel

fallout

far, farther, farthest

of distances, otherwise **further, furthest**

far east

but **Middle East**

farrago

a hotchpotch or jumbled mixture, not synonymous with **fiasco** (a humiliating failure)

Farsi

language spoken by the majority of Iranians (not Persian)

fascism, fascist

fashion weeks

lc, eg London fashion week

fatality

use death

father of two

etc, not father-of-two

fatwa

an edict, not necessarily a death sentence

Al Fayed, Mohamed

owner of Harrods (Mr Fayed after first mention); the son who died in Paris in 1997 was Dodi Fayed

faze

disconcert **phase** a stage

FBI

Federal Bureau of Investigation, no need to spell out

fedayeen

Arab fighters (the word means those who risk their lives for a cause); can be capped up when referring to a specific force, eg the Saddam Fedayeen militia which fought coalition forces in the 2003 Iraq war

Federal Reserve Board

first reference, **the Fed** thereafter

fed up with

not fed up of

feelgood factor

fellow

lc, eg a fellow of All Souls, fellow artist, fellow members, etc (and do not hyphenate)

ferris wheel

festivals

lc, eg Cannes film festival, Edinburgh Fringe festival

fete

no accent

fewer/less

fewer means smaller in number, eg fewer coins; less means smaller in quantity, eg less money

Ffestiniog

fiance

male **fiancee** female; but note divorcee is both male and female

Fianna Fáil

Irish political party

field marshal

figures

spell out from one to nine; integers from 10 to 999,999; thereafter 1m, 3.2bn (except for people and animals, eg 2 million viewers, 8 billion cattle)

film-maker

Filofax

TM; use **personal organiser** unless you are sure

finalise, finalised

avoid, use **complete, completed** or **finish, finished**

Financial Services Authority

FSA on second mention

financial years

2004-05, etc

Fine Gael

Irish political party

fine-tooth comb

Finnegans Wake

firebomb

firefighter

not fireman

firing line

the people who do the firing; if they are aiming at you, you are **in the line of fire** not “in the firing line”

firm

strictly a partnership without limited liability, such as solicitors or accountants, but may be used in place of company in headlines

first

second, third spell out up to ninth, then 10th, 21st, millionth

firstly, secondly

prefer first, second, etc

first aid

first-hand

first minister

(Scottish parliament, Welsh assembly, Northern Ireland assembly)

first name, forename

not Christian name

first world war

flak

not flack

flammable

means the same as **inflammable**; the negative is **non-flammable**



flaunt/flout

to flaunt is to make a display of something, as in flaunting wealth; to flout is to show disregard for something, as in flouting the seatbelt law

fledgling

not fledgeling

flounder/founder

to flounder is to perform a task badly, like someone stuck in mud; **founder** means fail: a business might be foundering because its bosses are floundering

flu

fluky

not flukey

flyer

not flier

fo'c'sle

abbreviation of forecastle

focus, focused, focusing

foetid

not fetid

foetus

not fetus

fogey

not foggy

following

prefer after, eg Mansfield Town went to pieces after their Cup exit

foot and mouth disease

forbear

abstain **forebear** ancestor

foreign names

The French (or French origin) le or de, the Italian di and the Dutch van are all lc when the name is full out: eg Graeme le Saux, Roberto di Matteo, Pierre van Hooijdonk; but Le Saux, Di Matteo, Van Hooijdonk when written without forenames

foreign placenames

Style for foreign placenames evolves with common usage. Leghorn has become Livorno, and maybe one day München will supplant Munich, but not yet. Remember that many names have become part of the English language: Geneva is the English name for the city Switzerland's French speakers refer to as Genève and its German speakers call Genf.

Accordingly we opt for locally used names, with these main exceptions (the list is not exhaustive, apply common sense): Archangel, Basle, Berne, Brittany, Cologne, Dunkirk, Florence, Fribourg, Genoa, Gothenburg, Hanover, Kiev, Lombardy, Milan, Munich, Naples, Normandy, Nuremberg, Padua, Piedmont, Rome, Sardinia, Seville, Sicily, Syracuse, Turin, Tuscany, Venice, Zurich

And next time someone says we should call Burma "Myanmar" because that's what it calls itself, point out that Colonel Gadafy renamed Libya "The Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriyya"

foreign words and phrases

Italicise, with roman translation in brackets, if it really is a foreign word or phrase and not an anglicised one, in which case it is roman with no accents (exception: *exposé*).

Use accents on French, German, Spanish, and Irish Gaelic words.

But remember [Orwell](#): do not use a foreign word where a suitable English equivalent exists

forensic

belonging to the courts; does not mean scientific

forego

go before **forgo** go without

forever

continually: he is forever changing his mind **for ever** for always: I will love you for ever

former Soviet republics

These are:

Armenia adjective **Armenian**

Azerbaijan adjective **Azerbaijani** (though there are ethnic Azeris in, eg, Armenia)

Belarus adjective **Belarussian**

Estonia adjective **Estonian** (Estonia did not join the Commonwealth of Independent States)

Georgia adjective **Georgian**

Kazakhstan adjective **Kazakh**

Kyrgyzstan adjective **Kyrgyz**

Latvia adjective **Latvian** (not in the commonwealth)

Lithuania adjective **Lithuanian** (not in the commonwealth)

Moldova adjective **Moldovan**

Russia adjective **Russian**

Tajikistan adjective **Tajik**

Turkmenistan adjective **Turkmen** (its citizens are Turkmen, singular Turkman)

Ukraine adjective **Ukrainian** (not “the Ukraine”)

Uzbekistan adjective **Uzbek**

Formica

TM

formula

plural **formulas**, but **formulae** in scientific context

formula one

motor racing

fortuitous

by chance, accidental; not by good fortune, lucky

fosbury flop

Fourth of July

foxhunting

FRA

fellow of the Royal Academy **FRS** fellow of the Royal Society

fractions

two-thirds, three-quarters, etc, but two and a half

Frankenstein

the monster's creator, not the monster

Frankenstein food

has already become a cliché to describe GM food: do not use

french fries, french kiss, french letter, french polish, french window

fresco

plural **frescoes**

Freud, Lucian

British artist, not Lucien

freudian slip

frontbench, frontline, frontrunner

FTSE 100

fuck

do not describe this as “a good, honest old-fashioned Anglo-Saxon word” because, first, there is no such thing as an Anglo-Saxon word (they spoke Old English) and, more important, its first recorded use dates from 1278
see *swearwords*

fuel

overused as a verb

fulfil, fulfilling, fulfilment

fulsome

means “cloying, excessive, disgusting by excess” (and is not, as some appear to believe, a clever word for full); so “fulsome praise” should not be used in a complimentary sense

fundraiser, fundraising

fungus

plural **fungi**

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Gadafy, Muammar

Libyan president, Col Gadafy on second mention

gaff

hook or spar, also slang for house **blow the gaff** give away a secret **gaffe** blunder

Gambia, the

not Gambia

gambit

an opening strategy that involves some sacrifice or concession; so to talk of an opening gambit is tautologous — an opening ploy might be better

gameplan, gameshow

Gandhi

not Ghandi

García Lorca, Federico

(1898-1936) Spanish writer

García Márquez, Gabriel

Colombian novelist

Garda

Irish police force **garda** (plural **gardaí**) Irish police officer

garotte

not garrotte or garrote

garryowen

up-and-under (rugby union) **Garryowen** Irish rugby club

gases

plural of gas, not gasses

Gatt

general agreement on tariffs and trade

gay

use as an adjective, eg “gay bishops”, “gay people”, rather than a noun (“gays”) where possible, though “gays and lesbians” is OK

Gaudí, Antoni

(1852-1926) Catalan architect

Gauguin, Paul

(1848-1903) French painter, often misspelt as Gaugin

Gaza Strip

Gb

gigabits **GB** gigabytes

gender

Our use of language should reflect not only changes in society but the newspaper's values. Phrases such as career girl or career woman, for example, are outdated (more women have careers than men) and patronising (there is no male equivalent): never use them. Businessmen, housewives, male nurse, woman pilot, woman (or lady!) doctor similarly reinforce outdated stereotypes.

Actor and comedian cover men and women; not actress, comedienne (but waiter and waitress are acceptable — at least for the moment). Firefighter, not fireman; PC, not WPC (most police forces have abandoned the distinction).

Use humankind or humanity rather than mankind, a word that, as one of our readers points out, “alienates half the population from their own history”.

Never say “his” to cover men and women: use his or her, or a different construction; in sentences such as “a teacher who beats his/her pupils is not fit to do the job”, there is usually a way round the problem — in this case, “teachers who beat their pupils ... ”

general

General Tommy Franks at first mention, then Gen Franks

general election

General Medical Council

(GMC), doctors' disciplinary body

Geneva convention

geography

distinct areas are capped up: Black Country, East Anglia, Lake District, Midlands, Peak District, West Country; but areas defined by compass points are lc: the north, the south-east, the south-west, etc



german measles

but rubella is preferable

ghetto

plural **ghettoes**

ghoti

George Bernard Shaw's proposed spelling of the word "fish" (gh as in trough, o as in women, ti as in nation)

Gibraltar

overseas territory or dependency, not a British colony

gift

not a verb (unless, perhaps, directly quoting a football manager or player: "We gifted Spurs their second goal")

girl

female under 18

girlie

noun (only when quoting someone) **girly** adjective (eg girly clothes) **girlish** behaviour

girlfriend

Giscard d'Estaing, Valéry

former French president, Mr Giscard on second mention

Giuliani, Rudolph

or **Rudy** former New York mayor (not "Rudi")

Giuseppe

regularly misspelt as Guiseppe

GLA

A mistake repeated ad nauseam is the assumption that GLA stands for “Greater London assembly”. There is no such thing. The **Greater London authority** constitutes the mayor, who runs it, and the **London assembly**, which holds the mayor to account

glamorous

not glamorous

Glasgow kiss

GM crops, GM food

no need to write genetically modified in full at first mention

GMT

Greenwich mean time: the ship ran aground at 8am local time (0700 GMT)

glasnost

goalline, goalpost

gobsmacked

use only when directly quoting someone

God

godchild, godfather, godmother, godson, goddaughter

Goldsmiths College

no apostrophe

golf

for holes, use numbers: 1st, 2nd, 18th, etc; matchplay: one word, except World Match Play Championship; the Open not the British Open

Good Friday agreement

goodness, for goodness sake

goodnight

go-slow

noun **go slow** verb

government

lc in all contexts and all countries; resist the awful trend to say, for eg, “Lord Browne fended off accusations of being too close to government” — it is **the government**

government departments

see *departments of state*

graffiti

are plural, **graffito** is the singular

grammar

the set of rules followed by speakers of a language, rather than a set of arbitrary dos and don'ts, or as Ambrose Bierce put it "a system of pitfalls thoughtfully prepared for the feet of the self-made man"

grandad

but **granddaughter**

grandparents

Mention this status only when relevant, leave "battling grannies" and similar examples of ageism and sexism to the tabloids; in particular we should avoid such patronising drivel as "How this 55-year-old granny came to earn \$25m a year" (page 1 blurb, January 3 2003) — just in case anyone still didn't get the message the front of G2 said: "She's five foot two, she's a grandmother and she earns \$25m a year"

grand prix

lc, the British grand prix **grands prix** plural

grassroots

one word

Great Britain

England, Wales and Scotland; if you want to include Northern Ireland, use Britain or the UK

great-grandfather, great-great-grandmother

green

a green activist, the green movement, but uc when referring to so-named political parties, eg the German Greens

green belt

designated areas around cities subject to strict planning controls, not open countryside in general

greenfield site

one that has not been built on before; one that has been built on before is a **brownfield site**

greenhouse effect

Energy from the Earth's surface is trapped in the lower atmosphere by gases that prevent it leaking into space, a natural phenomenon that makes life possible, whose enhancement by natural or manmade means may make life impossible. Not the result of the hole in the ozone layer, whose thinning in the upper atmosphere is due to CFCs; the connection is that CFCs are also greenhouse gases

green paper

grisly

gruesome **grizzly** bear

G7

Group of Seven leading industrial countries (Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US), but no need to spell out

G8

the G7 plus Russia

Guantánamo Bay

guerrilla

Guevara, Che

(1928-67) Argentinian-born revolutionary

Guildhall

(City of London), not “the Guildhall”

Gulf, the

not the Persian or Arabian Gulf

Gulf war

of 1991

guineapig

gun battle

not gunbattle

guttural

not gutteral

Gypsies

uc, recognised as an ethnic group under the Race Relations Act, as are Irish Travellers

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Ha'aretz

Israeli newspaper

habeas corpus

Hair, Darrell

Australian cricket umpire

The Hague

not "the Hague"

hajj

half

no hyphen when used adverbially: you look half dead; it was half wine, half water; hyphen when used adjectivally: a half-eaten sandwich, he got it half-price

half a dozen, half past

halfway, halfwit

Halloween

halo

plural **haloes**

Hambros Bank

Hamed, Prince Naseem

boxer, Hamed at second mention

Hamilton Academical

not Academicals, nickname the Accies

handbill, handbook, handout

handicapped

do not use to refer to people with disabilities or learning difficulties

hanging participles

see *dangling participles*

Hanukah

happy-clappy

derogatory term describing evangelical Christians, do not use

hara-kiri

known less vulgarly in Japan as **seppuku**

harass, harassment

hardline

adjective, **hardliner** noun, take a **hard line**

harebrained

not hairbrained

hare lip

never use, say **cleft lip** or **cleft palate**

Haringey

north London borough, one ward of which is **Harringay**

Harrods

hat-trick

hazard/risk

scientists use hazard to mean a potential for harm and risk to mean the actual probability of harm occurring; though headline writers may feel more at home with risk than hazard, the distinction is worth bearing in mind

headdress

headlines

Use active verbs where possible, particularly in news headlines: “Editors publish new style guidelines” is much better than “New style guidelines published”. Avoid tabloidese such as bid, brand, dub, and slam, and broadsheet clichés such as insist, signal, and target.

Take care over ambiguity: “Landmine claims dog UK arms firm”, which appeared in the paper, contains so many ambiguous words that you have to read it several times to work out what it means.

Also to be avoided are quotation marks, unless essential to signify a quote or for legal reasons. And resist the temptation to replace “and” with a comma: “Blair and Brown agree euro deal” not “Blair, Brown agree euro deal”.

Be careful when making references to popular culture: “Mrs Culpepper’s lonely hearts club banned” works, because most people are familiar with Sgt Pepper’s, but allusions to your favourite obscure 70s prog-rock album

are likely to pass over most readers' heads. Long after everyone had forgotten the 60s movie Charlie Bubbles, tabloid sports subeditors continued to mystify readers by using the headline "Charlie bubbles" whenever Charlie Nicholas (or any other Charlie) scored a goal.

Puns are fine — "Where there's muck there's bras", about a farmer's wife who started a lingerie business, was voted 2003 headline of the year by our staff — but do not overuse, or resort to tired puns such as "flushed with success" (this story has got a plumber in it!). In the 70s the Guardian suffered from a reputation for excruciating puns; today, we want to be known for clever, original and witty headlines

headquarters

can be used as a singular ("a large headquarters") or plural ("our headquarters are in London"); HQ, however, takes the singular

headteacher

one word, not headmaster, headmistress; but **Association of Head Teachers**

Health and Safety Executive

HSE on second mention

healthcare

Heathrow airport

or simply Heathrow; not "London's Heathrow"

heaven

hectares

not abbreviated, convert to acres in brackets at first mention

height

in metres with imperial conversion, eg 1.68metres (5ft 7in)

heir apparent

someone certain to inherit from a deceased unless he or she dies first or is taken out of the will; don't use to mean "likely successor"

hell, hades

hello

not hallo (and certainly not "hullo", unless quoting the Rev ARP Blair)

help

help to decide or help decide; not "help and decide"

herculean

here

generally avoid if what you mean is "in Britain"

Heritage Lottery Fund

Her Majesty

the Queen is HM, never HRH

hiccup

not hiccough

highfalutin

high flyer

highland fling

Highlands, the

(Scottish)

high street

lc in retail spending stories: “the recession is making an impact in the high street”; capped only in proper name: “I went shopping in Walthamstow High Street”

Highways Agency

hijab

covering for the head and face worn by some Muslim women

hijack

of movable objects only, not of schools, embassies, etc

hike

a walk, not a rise in interest rates

hip-hop

hippopotamus

plural **hippopotamuses**

hippy

plural **hippies**

His Master's Voice

TM (picture of Nipper the dog with phonograph)

historian, historic

use a not an, unless in a direct quote

hi-tech

HIV positive

no hyphen

Hizbullah

not Hezbollah

hoard/horde

a hoard of treasure; a horde (or hordes) of tourists

Ho Chi Minh City

formerly Saigon

hoi polloi

common people, the masses; "the hoi polloi" is acceptable

Holland

do not use when you mean the Netherlands, with the exception of the Dutch football team, who are conventionally known as Holland

Holocaust

holy grail

Holy Land

homebuyer, homeowner

one word

home counties

homeopathy

homeland

but **home town**

homepage

homogeneous

uniform, of the same kind **homogenous** (biology) having a common descent; the latter is often misused for the former

homosexual rape

do not use; say rape (or male rape if necessary)

honeybee

Hong Kong names

like Taiwanese and Korean names, Hong Kong names are written in two parts with a hyphen, eg Tung Chee-hwa

hon members

of parliament

honorarium

plural **honorariums**

honorifics

On news and comment pages: Tony Blair or Sir Bobby Charlton at first mention, thereafter Mr Blair, Sir Bobby, etc; in a big feature or news focus piece on a news page it may be appropriate to drop honorifics.

Use surnames only after first mention for sportsmen and sportswomen; for actors, authors, artists, musicians, etc; for journalists (but not for editors and television and radio executives); for those convicted of criminal offences; and for the dead (though use sensitivity: they are not stripped of their honorifics immediately — we would usually use them until after the funeral).

If people not normally given honorifics (eg footballers) are charged with criminal offences, they are given back their titles for the duration of the case. Similarly in court stories it sounds heartless and crude to write “Mr Radcliffe is charged with raping and murdering Jones, an 86-year-old who lived alone in her flat in Kensal Rise”. Restore the deceased’s honorific in such reports.

Use Dr at second mention for medical and scientific doctors and doctors of divinity, not, for example, a politician who happens to have a PhD in history.

In other sections: surnames are acceptable after first mention, but again use your judgment: for parents of a child who has drowned, say, surnames only may be inappropriate



Hoover

TM; say **vacuum cleaner**

hopefully

like many other adverbs, such as frankly, happily, honestly and sadly, hopefully can be used as a “sentence adverb” indicating the writer’s view of events — “hopefully, we will reach the summit” — or as a “manner adverb” modifying a verb — “we set off hopefully for the summit”. Why some people are upset by “hopefully we will win” and not “sadly we lost” is a mystery

horrendous

sounds like a rather ugly combination of horrific and tremendous, but is in fact from the Latin for fearful; **horrific** is generally preferable

hospital

use a not an

hospitalised

avoid; use taken (never "rushed") to hospital

hospitals

cap the placename, eg Derby district general hospital, Great Ormond Street children's hospital, Royal London hospital; but London Clinic

hotdog

hotel

use a not an

hotspot

houseboat, housebreaker, housebuyer, householder, housekeeper

Housing Corporation

housewife

avoid

hovercraft

Hudson Bay

but **Hudson's Bay Company**

humanity, humankind

use instead of mankind *See gender*

hummus

you eat it **humus** you put it on the garden

humour, humorist, humorous

hunky dory

hyperbole

don't overegg stories: strive instead for straight and accurate reporting; Guardian readers prefer the unvarnished truth. *See sexing up*

hyphens

Our style is to use one word wherever possible, including some instances where a word might be hyphenated by other publications. Hyphens tend to clutter up text (particularly when the computer breaks already hyphenated words at the end of lines).

Inventions, ideas and new concepts often begin life as two words, then become hyphenated, before finally becoming accepted as one word. Why wait? “Wire-less” and “down-stairs” were once hyphenated. In pursuit of this it is preferable to go further than Collins does in many cases: eg trenchcoat is two words in Collins but one under our style; words such as handspring, madhouse and talkshow should all be one word, not two words, and not hyphenated.

Do use hyphens where not using one would be ambiguous, eg to distinguish “black-cab drivers come under attack” from “black cab-drivers come under attack”.

Do not use after adverbs ending in -ly, eg politically naive, wholly owned, but hyphens are needed with short and common adverbs, eg ill-prepared report, hard-bitten hack, much-needed grammar lesson, well-established principle of style (note though that in the construction “the principle of style is well established” there is no need to hyphenate).

Finally, do use hyphens to form compound adjectives, eg two-tonne vessel, three-year deal, 19th-century artist

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icon, iconic

words in danger of losing all meaning after more than 1,000 appearances in the Guardian during 2003, lazily employed to describe anything vaguely memorable or well-known — from Weetabix, Dr Martens boots and the Ferrero Rocher TV ads to Jimi Hendrix's final gigs and the vacant fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square

ie

no full points

IJ

if a Dutch word starts with IJ then both letters are always capped (there is a waterway called the IJ so a lot of places have IJ in their name, eg IJsselmeer, IJmuiden, etc)

illegitimate

do not use to refer to children born outside marriage (unless in a historical context, eg “the illegitimate son of Charles the Good”)

iMac, iPod

immigrate

to arrive in a country **emigrate** to leave one

immune to

not immune from

Imperial College London

no commas

impinge, impinging

impostor

not imposter

impracticable

impossible, it cannot be done **impractical** possible in theory but not workable at the moment

inchoate

just beginning or undeveloped, not chaotic or disorderly

incident

be wary of this word, another — “attack” or “clash”, for example —will often stand better in its place; within a couple of years of the massacre in Tiananmen Square the Chinese government was referring to it as an “incident” or even “alleged incident”

income support

income tax

index

plural **indexes**, except for scientific and economic **indices**

indie

music, films, etc **Indy** short for the Independent, a newspaper

indispensible

not indispensable

industrial tribunals

have not existed since 1998, when they became **employment tribunals**; they still appear in the pages of the paper with embarrassing frequency despite regular entreaties from the readers’ editor in his corrections and clarifications column

infer/imply

to infer is to deduce something from evidence; to imply is to hint at something (and wait for someone to infer it)



infinite

without limit; does not mean very large

infinitives, split

see *split infinitives*

inflammable

means the same as **flammable**; the negative is **non-flammable**

initials

no spaces or points, whether businesses or individuals, eg WH Smith, PCR Tufnell

Inland Revenue

the Revenue on second reference

inner city

noun two words, adjective hyphen: inner-city blues made Marvin Gaye wanna holler

innocuous

innuendo

plural **innuendoes**

inoculate

not inoculate

inquiry

not enquiry

inshallah

means "God willing" in Arabic

insignia

are plural

insisted

overused, especially in political stories; just use said

install, instalment

instil, instilled, instilling

followed by into

Institute for Fiscal Studies

not Institute of Fiscal Studies

insure

against risk **assure** life **ensure** make certain

insurgents, insurgency

see *terrorism, terrorists*

International Atomic Energy Agency

not "authority", its director general is Mohamed ElBaradei

international date line

internet

net, web, world wide web, website, chatroom, homepage all lc

Interpol

intifada

introducing people

Never use the following construction to introduce a speaker or a subject: "School standards minister David Miliband said ... "

Instead, use the definite article and commas to separate the job from the name, like this: "The school standards minister, David Miliband, said ... " (there is only one person with this specific post).

Commas are not used if the description is more general and could apply to more than one person, like this: "The education minister David Miliband said ... " (there are several education ministers); or like this: "The former school standards minister Estelle Morris said ... " (there have been several).

Another example: "Jonathan Glancey, the Guardian's architecture critic, gave his verdict ... " is correct; "The architecture critic Jonathan Glancey gave his verdict ... " is fine as well.

We get this wrong somewhere in the paper every day, and we shouldn't

into

but **on to**

Inuit

not Eskimos, an individual is an **Inuk**

invalid

means not valid or of no worth; do not use to refer to disabled or ill people

invariable, invariably

unchanging; often used wrongly to mean hardly ever changing

Iraqi placenames

Use these spellings for Iraq's biggest cities and towns: Amara, Baiji, Baghdad, Baquba, Basra, Diwaniya, Dohuk, Falluja, Haditha, Hilla, Irbil, Kerbala, Kirkuk, Kut, Mosul, Najaf, Nassiriya, Ramadi, Rutba, Samarra, Samawa, Sulaimaniya, Tikrit (note that these transliterations do away with al- prefixes and the final h)

Ireland, Irish Republic

not Eire

Irish Travellers

uc, recognised as a distinct ethnic group under race relations legislation

ironfounder, ironmonger, ironworks

iron curtain

ironically

Avoid when what you mean is strangely, coincidentally, paradoxically or amusingly (if you mean them say so, or leave it up to the reader to decide). There are times when ironically is right but too often it is misused. As Kingsley Amis put it: "The slightest and most banal coincidence or point of resemblance, or even just-perceptible absence of one, unworthy of a single grunt of interest, gets called 'ironical'." The idiotic "post-ironic", which Amis would be glad he not live to see, is banned

Isa

individual savings account, but no need to spell it out

-ise

not -ize at end of word, eg maximise, synthesise (exception: capsise)

Islam (means "submission to the will of God")

Muslims should never be referred to as "Mohammedans", as 19th-century writers did. It causes serious offence because they insist that they worship God, not the prophet Muhammad.

"Allah" is simply Arabic for "God". Both words refer to the same concept: there is no major difference between God in the Old Testament and Allah in Islam. Therefore it makes sense to talk about "God" in an Islamic context and to use "Allah" in quotations or for literary effect.

The holy book of Islam is the **Qur'an** (not Koran)

Islamist

an advocate or supporter of Islamic fundamentalism; the likes of Osama bin Laden and his followers should be described as Islamist terrorists and never as Islamic terrorists

Islamophobia

italics

Use roman for titles of books, films etc; the only exception is the Review, which by special dispensation is allowed to ignore the generally sound advice of George Bernard Shaw: "1 I was reading The Merchant of Venice. 2 I was reading 'The Merchant of Venice'. 3 I was reading *The Merchant of Venice*. The man who cannot see that No 1 is the best looking, as well as the sufficient and sensible form, should print or write nothing but advertisements for lost dogs or ironmongers' catalogues: literature is not for him to meddle with."

ITV1, ITV2

Ivory Coast

not "the Ivory Coast" or Côte D'Ivoire; its nationals are **Ivorians**

ivy league universities

Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth College, Harvard, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania, Yale

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J

joules

kJ

kilojoules

Jacuzzi

TM, named after its US inventors, Roy and Candido Jacuzzi; call it a whirlpool bath or spa bath unless you're sure it really is a Jacuzzi

jail

not gaol

al-Jazeera

jejune

naive, unsophisticated (not necessarily anything to do with being young)

jellaba

loose cloak with a hood, worn especially in north Africa and the Middle East

Jérez

jerry-builder

jewellery

jib

triangular sail or arm of a crane; "I don't like the cut of his jib" means you don't like the look or manner of someone

jibe

(not gibe) taunt

jihad

used by Muslims to describe three different kinds of struggle: an individual's internal struggle to live out the Muslim faith as well as possible; the struggle to build a good Muslim society; and the struggle to defend Islam, with force if necessary (holy war)

Jobcentre Plus

government agency that runs **jobcentres**

jobseeker's allowance

job titles

are all lc, editor of the Guardian, governor of the Bank of England, prime minister, etc

jodhpurs

Joe Public, John Doe

John O'Groats

Johns Hopkins University

not John Hopkins (one of our most frequent errors)

Johnson Matthey plc

metal specialist, not to be confused with **Johnson Matthey Bank**

jokey

not joky

Joneses

as in "keeping up with the Joneses"; also note "the Joneses' house" (not the Jones' house)

Jonsson, Ulrika

judgment

jumbo jet

Boeing 747



junior

abbreviate to **Jr** not Jun or Jnr, eg Sammy Davis Jr

just deserts

not just desserts, unless you are saying you only want pudding

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Ka'bah

cube-shaped shrine in the centre of the great mosque in Mecca towards which all Muslims face in prayer; the shrine is not worshipped but used as the focal point of the worship of God

kapok

Kashmir

adjective **Kashmiri**; but **cashmere** fabric

Kathmandu

capital of Nepal

Kazakhstan

adjective **Kazakh**

Kefalonia

not Cephalonia

key

a useful headline word cheapened by tedious overuse

keyring

K-For

Nato peacekeeping force in Kosovo

khaki

Khachaturian, Aram

(1903-78) Armenian composer

Khrushchev, Nikita

(1894-1971) Soviet leader

kibbutz

plural **kibbutzim**

kibosh

kick-off

kilogram/s, kilojoule/s, kilometre/s, kilowatt/s
abbreviate as **kg, kJ, km, kW**

King Edward potatoes

King's College, Cambridge
comma

King's College London
no comma

King's Cross

King's Lynn

King's Road (Chelsea)
not "the King's Road"

Kirkcaldy
not Kirkaldy; a town in **Fife**, not Fyfe

kissogram

Kitemark
TM

knockout

knots
measure of nautical miles an hour; do not say "knots per hour"

Knowles, Beyoncé

Korean names
like Hong Kong and Taiwanese names, Korean names are written in two parts with a hyphen, eg Kim Jong-il, Kim Dae-jung

Kosovo, Kosovans
adjective **Kosovan**, not Kosovar

kowtow

krugerrands

kukri
Gurkha knife

Kyrgyzstan
adjective **Kyrgyz**

Kyrie Eleison

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laager

South African encampment **lager** beer

bin Laden, Osama

Bin Laden on second reference. Note: Bin Laden has been stripped of his Saudi citizenship, so can be described as Saudi-born but not as a Saudi. His organisation is known as al-Qaida (“the Base”)

Lady Blackstone, Jay, Thatcher, etc

not Baroness

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk

Shostakovich opera, traditionally misspelt in the Guardian as Mtsensk, with occasional variations such as Mtsenk

Lailat al-Miraj

Islamic holy day

Lailat al-Qadr

Islamic holy day, time for study and prayer

laissez-faire

not italicised

Lake District

or the Lakes

lambast

lamb's wool

lamp-post

lance corporal

Land

state of Federal German Republic; use state, eg Hesse, the German state

landmine

Land Registry

government department that registers title to land in England and Wales

Land Rover

lang, kd

Canadian singer

largesse

La's, the

defunct Liverpool rock band; keep apostrophe (abbreviation for Lads)

lasso

plural **lassoes**

last post

later

often redundant since context will inform the reader: "They will meet this month" rather than "They will meet later this month"

Latin

Some people object to, say, the use of "decimate" to mean destroy on the grounds that in ancient Rome it meant to kill every 10th man; some of them are also likely to complain about so-called split infinitives, a prejudice that goes back to 19th-century Latin teachers who argued that as you can't split infinitives in Latin (they are one word) you shouldn't separate "to" from the verb in English. Others might even get upset about our alleged misuse of grammatical "case" (including cases such as dative and genitive that no longer exist in English).

As the Guardian is written in English, rather than Latin, do not worry about any of this even slightly

latitude

like this: 21 deg 14 min S

law lords

may be female: we don't say "law ladies"

lawsuit

layby

plural **laybys**

lay off

does not mean to sack or make redundant, but to send workers home on part pay because of a temporary lack of demand for their product

lbw

(cricket)

leap year

learned

not learnt, unless you are writing old-fashioned poetry (he learned his tables, a message well learned)

left wing, the left, leftwinger

nouns **leftwing** adjective; **hard left, old left**

Legal Aid Board

legal terms

in camera is now known as **in secret** and in chambers **in private**; a writ is a **claim form** and a plaintiff a **claimant**; leave to appeal is **permission to appeal**

Since the Children Act 1989, access has been known as **contact** and custody is known as **residence**; do not use the older terms

legionnaires' disease

named after an outbreak at a conference of American Legionnaires

lepers

do not use: these days the term is regarded as inappropriate and stigmatising; prefer people affected by or people with leprosy

lese-majeste

less/fewer

less means smaller in quantity, eg less money; fewer means smaller in number, eg fewer coins

letdown, let-up

nouns **let down, let up** verbs

leukaemia

level crossing

liaison

libretto

plural **librettos**

licence

noun **license** verb

lied

plural **lieder**

Liège

but adjective **Liégeois**

lieutenant colonel, lieutenant general

abbreviate on second mention to Col or Gen: Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Mackay, subsequently Col Mackay, etc

lifelong

lightbulb

light year

a measure of distance, not time

likable

not likeable

like/as if

never use the former to mean the latter: “it looks as if he's finished” not “it looks like he's finished”

like/such as

Like excludes; such as includes: “Cities like Manchester are wonderful” suggests the writer has in mind, say, Sheffield or Birmingham; she actually means “cities such as Manchester”

Do not just automatically change “like” to “such as” — the following appeared in the paper: “He is not a celebrity, such as Jesse Ventura, the former wrestler...”

likely

he is likely to win or he will very likely win, not “he will likely win” — if you want to use that form, say “he will probably win”

lilliputian

liquefy

not liquify

limpid

means clear or transparent, not limp

linchpin

not lynchpin

lineup, lineout

listed buildings

In England and Wales, Grade I-listed (note cap G, roman numeral I) buildings are of exceptional interest; Grade II* are particularly important buildings of more than special interest; Grade II are of special interest, warranting every

effort to preserve them. In Scotland and Northern Ireland these categories are replaced by the more logical Grade A, Grade B and Grade C

literally

term used, particularly by sports commentators, to denote an event that is not literally true, as in “Manchester City literally came back from the dead”

Lloyd's

of London; **names** lc

Lloyds TSB

bank

Lord Lloyd-Webber

but **Andrew Lloyd Webber**

loan

noun; the verb is **lend**

loathe

detest **loath** unwilling, not loath

lock-in, lockout

nouns **lock in, lock out** verbs

London assembly

elected body of 25 members whose role is to hold the mayor of London to account. Together, assembly and mayor constitute the **Greater London authority** (GLA); note there is no such organisation as the “Greater London assembly”

Londonderry

use **Derry** and **Co Derry**

London Eye

official name of the millennium wheel

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

London Transport Users Committee

Long Island iced tea

longitude

like this: 149 deg 18 min E

longtime

adjective, as in longtime companion

looking-glass

lord chancellor

the government announced in 2003 that this post would be abolished and the Lord Chancellor's Department replaced by the **Department for Constitutional Affairs**

lord chief justice

lord lieutenant

no hyphen, plural **lords lieutenant**

Lords, House of Lords

but the house, not the House; **their lordships**

Lord's

cricket ground

lottery, national lottery

but **Lotto** and **National Lottery Commission**



lovable

not loveable

lowlife

plural, **lowlifes**, not lowlives (for an explanation, see chapter six of Steven Pinker's Words and Rules)

loyalists

(Northern Ireland)

lumpenproletariat

luvvies

a silly cliché; do not use

Luxembourg

the country **Luxembourgeois** its inhabitants

luxury, luxurious

Lycra

TM; the briefly fashionable term “lycra louts” let to complaints from the Lycra lawyers

lying in state

no hyphens

Lynyrd Skynyrd

US rock band (named after a man called Leonard Skinner)

Lyon

not Lyons

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Mac or Mc?

Shirley MacLaine, Sue MacGregor, Kelvin MacKenzie, Ewen MacAskill, Murdo MacLeod
Sir Trevor McDonald, Malcolm McLaren, David McKie, Gareth McLean
Elle Macpherson

mace, the

(parliament) **Mace** riot control spray

MacDonald, James Ramsay

(1866-1937) first Labour prime minister, known as Ramsay MacDonald

McDonald's

hamburgers

machiavellian

after Nicolo Machiavelli (1469-1527)

machine gun

noun **machine-gun** verb; **submachine gun**

McLuhan, Marshall

(1911-80) Canadian author who coined the phrase “the medium is the message”

Macmillan, Harold

(1894-1986) Tory prime minister

MacMillan, Kenneth

(1929-92) choreographer

MacNeice, Louis

(1907-63) Belfast-born poet

madeira

wine and cake

madrassa

Islamic school

mafia

Mafikeng

now spelt thus, though it was Mafeking when it was relieved

magistrates court

no apostrophe

maharajah

mailbag, mailvan

mail train

mainland

do not use to refer to Great Britain in reports about Northern Ireland

mainmast, mainsail

al-Majid, General Ali Hassan

member of Saddam Hussein's revolutionary command council, nicknamed Chemical Ali for his atrocities against Iraq's Kurds (Majid on second reference)

major

overused; avoid except in military context

Major General

abbreviate on second mention to Gen: Major General Ben Summers, subsequently Gen Summers

makeover, makeup

no hyphens

Málaga

Malagasy

inhabitant or inhabitants of **Madagascar** and the name of their language; the adjective for the country is **Madagascan**

Malaysian names

generally the surname comes first, so Mahathir Mohamad becomes Mr Mahathir on second ref. Chinese Malaysian names, like Singaporean names, are in three parts: eg Ling Liong Sik (Mr Ling)

Mall, the

Mamma Mia!

musical show featuring [Abba](#) songs

mañana

manifesto

plural **manifestos**

mankind

avoid: use **humankind** or **humanity**

manoeuvre, manoeuvring

Maori

singular and plural

Mao Zedong

Mao on second mention

marines

Royal Marines, but **US marines**

Marks & Spencer

at first mention, then **M&S**

marquis

not marquess, except where it is the correct formal title, eg Marquess of Blandford

Marrakech

Marseille

not Marseilles

marshal

(military rank) not marshall, a frequent error; a reader sent in this mnemonic: "Air Chief Marshal Marshall presided at the court martial of the martial arts instructor"

Marshall Aid

Martí, José

(1853-95) writer and leader of Cuba's war of independence against Spain

martial law

Mary Celeste

not Marie Celeste

massacre

the savage killing of large numbers of people, not Stockport County beating Mansfield Town 4-0

massive

massively overused; avoid

masterful

imperious **masterly** skilful

masthead

matinee

no accent

matins

matt

matt finish, etc

may or might?

The subtle distinctions between these (and between other so-called modal verbs) are gradually disappearing, but they still matter to many of our readers and can be useful.

may

implies that the possibility remains open: “The Mies van der Rohe tower may have changed the face of British architecture forever” (it has been built); **might** suggests that the possibility remains open no longer: “The Mies tower might have changed the face of architecture forever”(if only they had built it). Similarly, “they may have played tennis, or they may have gone boating” suggests I don’t know what they did; “they might have played tennis if the weather had been dry ”means they didn’t, because it wasn’t.

may

also has the meaning of “having permission”, so be careful: does “Megawatt Corp may bid for TransElectric Inc” mean that it is considering a bid, or that the competition authorities have allowed it to bid?

May Day

May 1 **Mayday** distress signal (from the French “m’aidez!”)

mayor of London

or anywhere else, lc

MCC, the

not “MCC”

meanwhile

almost always misused to mean “here’s a slight change of subject”

Meat and Livestock Commission

Meat Loaf

sings **meatloaf** doesn't

Médecins sans Frontières

international medical aid charity (don’t describe it as French)

Medellín

Colombia

Medical Research Council

media

plural of **medium**: “the media are sex-obsessed”, etc; but a convention of spiritualists would be attended by **mediums**

medieval

not mediaeval

meet, met

not meet with, met with someone

mega

horrible; do not use

memento

plural **mementoes**

memorandum

plural **memorandums**

menage

no accent

menswear

mental handicap, mentally handicapped, mentally retarded

do not use: say person with learning difficulties

mental health

Take care using language about mental health issues. In addition to such clearly offensive and unacceptable expressions as loony, maniac, nutter, psycho and schizo, terms to avoid — because they stereotype and stigmatise — include victim of, suffering from, and afflicted by; “a person with” is clear, accurate and preferable to “a person suffering from”. Never use schizophrenic to mean “in two minds”. And avoid writing “the mentally ill”— say mentally ill people, mental health patients or people with mental health problems

Messiaen, Olivier

(1908-92) French composer

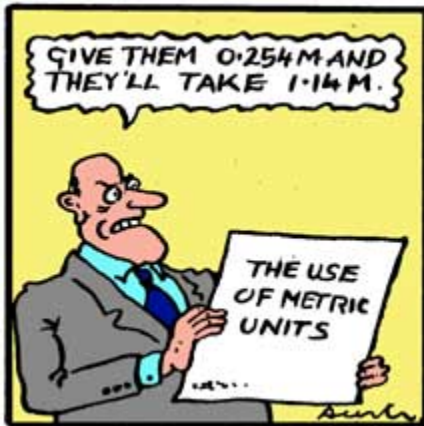
metaphor

traditionally defined as the application to one thing of a name belonging to another, eg bowling blitz, economic meltdown, “every language is a temple in which the soul of those who speak it is enshrined” (Oliver Wendell Holmes)

Meteorological Office or Met Office

metres

write metres out in full, to avoid confusion with million (an obvious exception would be in an article about athletics, eg she won the 400m)



metric system

The Guardian uses the metric system for weights and measures; exceptions are the mile and the pint. Since understanding of the two systems is a matter of generations, conversions (in brackets) to imperial units should be provided wherever this seems useful, though usually one conversion — the first — will suffice. Imperial units in quoted matter should be retained, and converted to metric [in square brackets] if it doesn't ruin the flow of the quote.

It is not necessary to convert moderate distances between metres and yards, which are close enough for rough and ready purposes (though it is preferable to use metres), or small domestic quantities: two litres of wine, a kilogram of sugar, a couple of pounds of apples, a few inches of string. Small units should be converted when precision is required: 44mm (1.7in) of rain fell in two hours. Tons and tonnes (metric) are also close enough for most purposes to do without conversion; again use tonnes.

Body weights and heights should always be converted in brackets: metres to feet and inches, kilograms to stones/pounds. Geographical heights and depths, of people, buildings, monuments, etc, should be converted, metres to feet. In square measurement, land is given in sq metres, hectares and sq km, with sq yards, acres or sq miles in brackets where there is space to provide a conversion. The floor areas of buildings are conventionally expressed in sq metres (or sq ft). Take great care in conversions of square and cubic measures

Metropolitan police

the Met at second mention; commissioner of the Metropolitan police, Met commissioner is acceptable

mexican wave

Miami Beach

US city

mic

abbreviation for microphone

mid-90s, mid-60s, etc

mid-Atlantic but transatlantic

midday

middle ages

middle America

Middle East

never Mid, even in headlines

middle England

Middlesbrough

not Middlesborough

Midlands, east Midlands (but East Midlands airport), West Midlands

midterm

no hyphen

midweek

midwest (US)

Milad al-Nabi

Islamic festival celebrating the birth of the prophet; many Muslims disapprove of celebrating this event

mileage

Militant tendency

military

For British brigades and divisions use cardinal numbers: 7 Armoured Brigade, 1 UK Armoured Division, 40 Commando, etc; for British battalions and regiments use ordinals, eg 2nd Battalion Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (for US divisions the style is as follows: 101st Air Assault, 82nd Airborne).

You go **aboard** a ship and when you are **on board** you may be welcomed aboard, but you sail or serve or travel **in** a ship. Note also that British ships are written "HMS Ark Royal", not "the HMS Ark Royal". When HMS is dropped, mariners shun the definite article, eg he served in Invincible, though inserting one can avoid ambiguities, eg he served in the Plymouth (the ship not the city).

A brief guide to weapons and equipment, etc:

ballistic missile

has no wings or fins, and follows a ballistic trajectory, eg the Iraqi Scud

cruise missile

missile with its own engine, best known is the Tomahawk

SAMs

surface-to-air missiles

Harm

high-speed anti-radiation missile, anti-SAM weapon

Jdam

joint direct attack munition, the satellite-guided smartbomb

Moab

massive ordnance air blast, nicknamed mother of all bombs

B-52, F-16

note hyphens

Tornado

plural is **Tornados**

Lantirn

stands for low altitude navigation and targeting infrared for night, the equipment allows fighters to fly at low altitudes, at night, and under the weather

Awacs

airborne warning and control system, found on board the E-3 Sentry (a modified Boeing); Awacs is singular

Istar

stands for intelligence, surveillance, target, acquisition and reconnaissance, a "real-time" intelligence gathering system that aims to let decision makers respond to events as they occur

Sead

suppression of enemy air defences

A jargon-busting guide to the armed forces' command structure and organisation, ranks, and weapons and equipment follows:

Whitehall

The head of the armed forces is the **chief of the defence staff**, who is the chief military adviser to the defence secretary, equal in status to the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defence on the civilian side. The rest of the defence staff comprises the vice-chief and the three service chiefs: chief of the naval staff, chief of the general staff, chief of the air staff, and their respective assistant chiefs. They and their various aides, advisers and experts (staff officers) make up the top-level HQ, at the MoD in Whitehall.

The MoD is divided into 11 sections headed by what it calls TLB (top level budget) holders, five of which are concerned with operations:

- 1 Chief of Joint Operations, responsible for all military operations, HQ at Northwood, north-west London
- 2 Navy: Commander in Chief Fleet

3 Army 1: Land Command

4 Army 2: General Officer Commanding, Northern Ireland

5 RAF: Strike Command

Each force has a personnel TLB, the other three are Central, Defence Procurement Agency and Defence Logistics Organisation.

Command structures in all three services are complicated by various joint commands and joint operations, either of two or more services or with other Nato/EU forces.

Royal Navy

The senior service: it was formed first, and its officers are senior to army and RAF officers of equivalent rank. The army, in turn, is senior to the RAF.

Command structure and organisation

Head: first sea lord and chief of the naval staff

Top body: the Admiralty Board, chaired by the defence secretary

Operational body: Navy Board, headed by first sea lord (1SL) and including commander in chief fleet, and second sea lord (deals with personnel, etc) and others

Work gets done by Battle Fleet Staff, headed by CinCFleet, who is a full admiral, with HQs in Portsmouth and Plymouth

Ships:

Three aircraft carriers: they carry helicopters crewed by the Fleet Air Arm and Harrier jets crewed by a joint FAA and RAF command, and a Royal Marine commando unit. In a taskforce or other assembly of ships the carrier will have the admiral (or commodore) commanding on board, and will fly his flag, hence it is the flagship

Amphibious assault ships: land marines, etc, directly on land or by helicopter; like a small aircraft carrier

Destroyers and frigates: armed mainly with missiles and helicopters, for attack and defence against aircraft and other ships

Mine countermeasure vessels (MCMVs)

Assorted hydrographic survey ships, fisheries protection, patrol boats, etc

Submarine Service: ballistic missile subs (SSBN) are nuclear armed; fleet subs (SSN) are nuclear powered.

Training establishments on shore, including RN Reserve and University Royal Navy Units, are labelled HMS. The main bases (Portsmouth, Devonport, Clyde) are HMNB; Fleet Air Arm airfields are RNAS (royal naval air station) but also have a ship name, eg RNAS Yeovilton is also HMS Heron; NROs (naval regional offices/officers) are the regional flag wavers, each of four headed by a commodore.

Fleet Air Arm: organised in naval air squadrons, flying Merlin, Lynx and Sea King helicopters and Sea Harrier jump jets; its ranks are navy style.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary: tankers, supply, landing and repair ships; commanding officer is Commodore RFA, answering to CinCFleet, crews are civilian ships are RFA (not HMS) Sir Galahad, etc.

Royal Marines

are soldiers in ships (and planes), part of the navy but they have army-style ranks, eg colonel, major, sergeant.

The main operational force is

3 Commando, which comprises three commando units, supported by Royal Engineers and Royal Artillery (army)

commando units. Their main base and training centre is RM Poole. A branch of the Royal Marines is the **SBS** (Special Boat Service) whose fighters are special forces.

Ranks

Officers:

Admiral of the Fleet; Admiral (abbreviated to Adm on subsequent mentions); Vice Admiral (Adm); Rear Admiral (Adm). All four are flag officers, entitled to fly their flag in the ship (flagship) in which they are quartered. The captain of such a ship is a flag captain. A flag lieutenant is an admiral's aide-de-camp. Confusingly, the navy is liable to refer to/address any of these as flag for short

Commodore: likely to command, for example, a small force of ships or shore station (the title is also given to the chief captain of a shipping line)

Captain (abbreviated to Capt); Commander (Cmdr); Lieutenant Commander (Lt Cmdr); Lieutenant (Lt); Sub-Lieutenant (Sub Lt); Midshipman. The captain of a small ship will not have the rank of captain.

Ratings:

Warrant Officer (WO); Chief Petty Officer (CPO); Petty Officer (PO); leading and able ratings are usually addressed according to their trade or field of expertise, eg Leading Artificer (a naval term for engineer), Able Communications Technician, etc.

Weapons

Spearfish torpedo: wire and sonar-guided, homes on its target

Stringray torpedo: light, aircraft- or ship-borne

Paams: principal anti-air missile system, on destroyers, Aster 15 and Aster 30 (longer range) missiles

Sea Wolf (on frigates) and Sea Dart (destroyers): defensive anti-air missiles

Harpoon (frigate): anti-ship missile

Tomahawk (submarines): land attack cruise missile, 1,000-mile range

Goalkeeper: close range (up to 1,500metres) defensive weapon system with seven-barrel Gatling gun firing at the rate of 70 rounds a second

Phalanx: last-chance 20mm Gatling gun, 3,000 rpm

114mm/4.5in Mk8 gun: the only real gun left in the navy, 21kg shell, 25 rpm, fitted to all frigates and destroyers

British army

Command structure and organisation

Head: chief of the general staff

Top body: the Army Board, chaired by the defence secretary

Main HQ is Joint Permanent Headquarters, Northwood (joint with the other services)

HQ Land Command, at Erskine barracks, Wilton, near Salisbury, commands fighting soldiers at home and abroad, and in addition there are:

HQ General Officer Commanding, Northern Ireland

plus HQ British Forces Cyprus, HQ British Forces Falkland Islands

The next level of command is the division. There are two operationally ready divisions, 1 (UK) Armoured Division, which is confusingly based in Germany, attached to Nato Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, and 3 (UK) Division, HQ Bulford, Wiltshire, part of the Nato Allied Rapid Reaction Corps. Numbers 2, 4 and 5 are administrative organisations, geographically based Britain, capable of being bumped up if need be.

The next level is the brigade, historically consisting of three battalions/regiments of infantry or armour or artillery and support troops, but these days most units at most levels are mixed bunches. Of particular interest is 16 Air Assault Brigade, the newest and biggest (6,000) with a joint army/RAF HQ at Colchester; it is the primary rapid reaction force, including two Parachute Regiment battalions, one line infantry battalion, RAF and Army Air Corps units, artillery, engineers and other support services.

Corps are the professional organisations, both fighting and support. The infantry is technically a corps, though not often referred to as such, and there are the Royal Armoured Corps, Royal Corps of Logistics, etc.

Infantry

section: eight to 12 soldiers commanded by an NCO (corporal)

platoon: 25-40 soldiers commanded by a lieutenant, aided by a sergeant

company: three platoons and a HQ, 150 officers and men commanded by a major

battalion/regiment: three companies, a support company and a HQ company, 500-800 soldiers commanded by a lieutenant-colonel, assisted by an adjutant (usually a major). Some regiments have several battalions, ie 1, 2 and 3 Para. During the first and second world wars each regiment had many battalions. Many regiments have been disbanded: some amalgamated with others; some historical regimental names are preserved at company level (see Armoured Division)

The **SAS** is a regiment and counts as part of the infantry, but it is also designated special forces.

Armoured units

troop: four tanks, 12 troopers, commanded by a first or second lieutenant, a sergeant and two corporals, each of whom commands a tank

squadron: 14 tanks, commanded by a major (but there are reconnaissance squadrons with light armoured cars, etc)

regiment: 58 tanks, about 550 officers and troopers, commanded by a lieutenant colonel

brigade: three to four battalions/regiments grouped together with added support troops, commanded by a brigadier (in historical terms a brigade would be three infantry battalions but most of them are now made up of a wide range of fighting and support units of various sizes)

division: two to four brigades grouped together with added support troops, 16,000-30,000 soldiers commanded by a major general (30,000 may be theoretical, but the biggest is about 18,000, and others are as low as a couple of thousand. In addition, regiments are grouped in divisions, viz Guards Division, Scottish Division, Queen's Division, etc, and the Brigade of Gurkhas (which includes the Royal Irish regiment)

The Armoured Division includes the various remaining mounted units, Life Guards, Blues and Greys, assorted Hussars, Dragoons, Lancers, etc, retained for ceremonial purposes when the cavalry regiments were turned into tank regiments and gradually lost their individual identity.

Support troops are drawn from:

The Royal Regiment of Artillery (but it has many regiments, each with its own number, which are historical rather than an indication of the number currently in being) It is divided into batteries, not companies, privates are called gunners, corporals are bombardiers

Royal Engineers (a number of regiments, ie 21 Royal Engineers Regiment, plus battalions of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME), which also tends to link with Logistics

The various corps, including:

Royal Corps of Logistics (transport and supply of ammunition, equipment, food, etc Formerly Transport Corps, formerly Royal Army Service Corps)

Royal Signals

Army Air Corps
Intelligence Corps
Royal Army Medical Corps (plus RA Dental and Veterinary Corps, and Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps)
Adjutant General's Corps (lawyers, administrators, teachers, Provost Branch, including Royal Military Police)

Ranks

Officers:

Field Marshal; General (abbreviated to Gen); Lieutenant General (Gen); Major General (Gen); Brigadier (Brig); Colonel (Col); Lieutenant Colonel (Col); Major (Maj); Captain (Capt); Lieutenant (Lt); Second Lieutenant (Lt).

Non-commissioned officers:

Warrant Officer First Class (WO1) – warrant officers hold their warrant, as commissioned officers hold their commission, from the sovereign; historically they were professional types rather than “gentlemen”; Warrant Officer Second Class (WO2), includes Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant (RQMS); Sergeant (Sgt) (Colour Sergeant, in cavalry/armoured regiments); Corporal (Cpl)/Bombardier (Bdr); Lance Corporal (L/Cpl) or Lance Bombardier (L/Bdr) in the artillery. Some NCOs have regimental/corps titles other than those indicated.

According to the corps or regiment, the rank of Private (Pte) may be gunner, sapper (engineers), trooper (cavalry, armour), signaller, craftsman, driver, fusilier, ranger, kingsman, rifleman, airtrooper, etc.

Weapons and equipment

Light arms from the SA80 family — L85 individual weapon and L86 light support weapon — replace old-fashioned rifles and light machine guns; heavy machine gun; general purpose machine gun; light machine gun; Milan anti-tank weapon; 51mm and 81mm mortars; light anti-armour weapon (sits on the shoulder, looks like a bazooka); sniper rifles.

Armour: Challenger 2 main battletank; Warrior infantry fighting vehicle; Saxon armoured personnel carrier; Sabre armoured light recce vehicle; various others, eg Samaritan armoured ambulance, Samson armoured recovery vehicle (note that tanks, armoured personnel carriers and self-propelled guns look similar but have different roles. A tank's main role is to attack other tanks and armour. An armoured personnel carrier carries infantry, commanders, signallers or other support troops. Spata – stands for self-propelled artillery-tracked artillery – are big guns with their own engines).

Artillery: multiple launch rocket system; AS90 self-propelled gun (looks a bit like a tank, but tanks are primarily used on the move against other armour); L118 light gun; Starstreak high-velocity missile.

Aircraft: Apache attack; Bell 212; Gazelle and Lynx helicopters; Britten-Norman Islander plane.

Royal Air Force

Command structure and organisation

Head: chief of the air staff, senior to commander in chief strike command and deputy CinC strike command

Strike Command HQ at RAF High Wycombe, with three groups:

1 all strike aircraft

2 all support aircraft

3 Joint Force Harrier, mix of RAF and navy, commanded by a naval officer;

UK Combined Air Operations Centre at High Wycombe works with RAF, RN and Nato forces to scramble the jets if the missiles start coming in

The basic units are squadrons, those at the sharp end being strike/attack and offensive support; air defence and airborne early warning, and reconnaissance. HQs, airfields and other establishments are RAF stations, eg RAF Boulmer.

Ranks

Officers: Marshal of the Royal Air Force; Air Chief Marshal; Air Marshal; Air Vice-Marshal; Air Commodore (equivalent to navy commodore and army brigadier); Group Captain (Group Capt, equivalent to captain, colonel); Wing Commander (Wing Cdr, = commander, lieutenant colonel); Squadron Leader (Sqdn Ldr, = lieutenant commander, major); Flight Lieutenant (Flt Lt, = lieutenant, captain); Flying Officer, (= sub-lieutenant, lieutenant); Pilot Officer (Plt Off, = midshipman, second lieutenant – except that midshipmen are junior to their army and air force counterparts).

Other ranks:

Master Aircrew (= warrant officer, WO1); Warrant Officer (WO, = warrant officer, WO1); Flight Sergeant (FS, = chief petty officer, staff corporal, staff sergeant); Chief Technician (Ch Tech, = chief petty officer, staff corporal, staff sergeant); Sergeant (Sgt, = petty officer, sergeant, corporal of horse); Corporal (Cpl, = leading rate, corporal, bombardier); Junior Technician (Jr Tech, = able or ordinary rate, private or its equivalents, as are the remaining ranks); Senior Aircraftman/Aircraftwoman and Leading Aircraftman/Aircraftwoman.

Equipment

Offensive aircraft:

Harrier single-seat attack, vertical take off and landing, general purpose bomb, cluster bombs, laser-guided bombs, anti-tank bombs

Jaguar single-seat attack and recce, general purpose bomb, cluster bombs, guided bomb, rockets, cannon, defensive air-to-air missiles

Tornado GR4 twin seat, swing wing, supersonic, guided bombs, cruise missiles

Typhoon (Eurofighter) upcoming replacement for Jaguar and Tornado F3, bristling with all the above weapons

Defensive aircraft:

Sentry ex-Boeing 707, flying radar station

Tornado F3 two-seater supersonic, air-to-air and anti-radar missiles

Recce/marine patrol:

Canberra 1940s bomber, now high-altitude recce

Nimrod based on Comet, the first jetliner

Transport:

Globemaster, Hercules, Tristar, VC10

Weapons

air-to-air missiles: Asraam, Aim-9 Sidewinder, Amraam, Skyflash

anti-shipping: Harpoon, Stingray

short-range air-to-surface (gp bombs): CVR-7 1,000lb bomb, Paveway II and III, Enhanced Paveway (guided gp bombs), Maverick (missile)

long-range air-launched missiles: Alarm, Brimstone, Storm Shadow

surface-to-air (defensive) missile system: Rapier

cannon: Aden 30mm/1,200-1,400 rounds a minute (the rate of fire, the ammo box carries only 150 rounds);
Mauser 27mm, 1,000/1,700 rounds a minute rate of fire

Finally, here is our style for US aircraft which played a big part in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: F-14 Tomcat, F-15 Eagle, F-16 Fighting Falcon, F/A-18 Hornet/Super Hornet, F-117 Nighthawk stealth fighter, B-52 Stratofortress, B-2 stealth bomber, B-1B Lancer

militate/mitigate

to militate against something is to influence it (his record militated against his early release); to mitigate means to lessen an offence (in mitigation, her counsel argued that she came from a broken home)

millenary, millennium, millennia

Millennium Dome

at first mention, then just **the dome**

millennium wheel

its official name is **London Eye**

million

in copy use **m** for sums of money, units or inanimate objects: £10m, 45m tonnes of coal, 30m doses of vaccine;
but **million** for people or animals: 1 million people, 23 million rabbits, etc; use **m** in headlines

mimic, mimicked, mimicking

min

contraction of minute/minutes, no full point

mineworker

minibus, minicab, miniskirt, minivan

minimum

plural **minima**

ministers

minuscule

not miniscule

mistakable, unmistakable

misuse, misused

no hyphen

MLA

member of the Northern Ireland assembly, eg Bairbre de Brun MLA (stands for member of the legislative assembly)

MLitt

master of letters, not master of literature

Moby-Dick

Herman Melville's classic is, believe it or not, hyphenated

Modern

in the sense of Modern British, to distinguish it from “modern art”

Moët & Chandon

Mönchengladbach

moneys

not monies **moneyed**, not monied

Mongol

one of the peoples of Mongolia

Monk, Thelonious

(1920-82) American jazz pianist and composer, generally but erroneously referred to in the Guardian and elsewhere as “Thelonius”

Montenegro

inhabited by **Montenegrins**

Moors murders

committed in the 1960s by Ian Brady and Myra Hindley

more than generally preferable to over: there were more than 20,000 people at the game, it will cost more than £100 to get it fixed; but she is over 18

Morissette, Alanis

morning-after pill

morris dance

Morrisons

for the stores, Wm Morrison Supermarkets is the name of the company

mortgage borrower, lender

the person borrowing the money is the mortgagor, the lender is both the mortgagee and the mortgage holder; to avoid confusion, call the mortgagor the mortgage borrower and the mortgagee the mortgage lender

mosquito

plural **mosquitoes**

mother of parliaments

the great Liberal politician and Manchester Guardian reader John Bright described England, the country (not Westminster, the institution), as the mother of parliaments

mother of three etc, not mother-of-three

motorcar, motorcycle

Motörhead

motorways

write M1, not M1 motorway

mottoes

movable

mph

no points

MPs

Mr, Ms, Mrs, Miss

use after first mention on news (but not sport) pages and in leading articles, unless you are writing about an artist, author, journalist, musician, criminal or dead person; defendants keep their honorifics unless they are convicted

Mrs, Miss or Ms?

we use whichever the woman in question prefers: with most women in public life (Mrs May, Miss Widdecombe) that preference is well known; if you don't know, try to find out; if that proves impossible, use Ms

MSP

member of the Scottish parliament, eg Sir David Steel MSP

Muhammad

Muslims consider Muhammad to be the last of God's prophets, who delivered God's final message. They recognise Moses and Jesus as prophets also.

The above transliteration is our style for the prophet's name and for most Muhammads living in Arab countries, though where someone's preferred spelling is known we respect it, eg Mohamed Al Fayed, Mohamed ElBaradei. The spelling Mohammed (or variants) is considered archaic by most British Muslims today, and disrespectful by many of them

Muhammad Ali

mujahideen

collective noun for people fighting a jihad; the singular is **mujahid**

mukhabarat

Saddam Hussein's secret police

multicultural, multimedia, multimillion but **multi-ethnic**

Mumbai (formerly Bombay)

use this phrase at first mention

Murphy's law

“If there are two or more ways to do something, and one of those ways can result in a catastrophe, then someone will do it”; also known as sod's law

museums

initial caps, eg British Museum, Natural History Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A on second reference), Metropolitan Museum of Art, etc

Muslim

not Moslem

Muzak

TM

MW

megawatts **mW** milliwatts

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Nabokov, Vladimir

(1899-1977) Russian-born author of *Lolita*; not Nabakov

nailbomb

naive, naively, naivety

names

Avoid the “chancellor Gordon Brown” syndrome: do not use constructions, beloved of the tabloids, such as “chancellor Gordon Brown said”. The chancellor refers to his job, not his title. Prominent figures can just be named, with their function at second mention: “Gordon Brown said last night” (first mention); “the chancellor said” (subsequent mentions).

Where it is thought necessary to explain who someone is, write “Neil Warnock, the Sheffield United manager, said” or “the Sheffield United manager, Neil Warnock, said”. In such cases the commas around the name indicate there is only one person in the position, so write “the Tory leader, Michael Howard, said” (only one person in the job), but “the former Tory prime minister John Major said” (there have been many)

Nasa

National Aeronautics and Space Administration, but no need to spell out

nation

Do not use when you mean country or state; reserve nation to describe people united by language, culture and history so as to form a distinct group within a larger territory. And beware of attributing the actions of a government or a military force to a national population (eg, “The Israelis have killed 400 children during the intifada”). Official actions always have opponents within a population; if we don’t acknowledge this, we oversimplify the situation and shortchange the opponents

National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers

(NASUWT); we are stuck with these initials unless the organisation changes its name to something more sensible; call it “the union” after first mention

National Audit Office

National Grid

owner and operator of the British electricity transmission system since the industry was privatised in 1990

national insurance

nationalists

(Northern Ireland)

national lottery

National Offender Management Service

National Savings

the former Post Office Savings Bank, now a government agency (full name National Savings and Investments)



Native Americans

Geronimo was a Native American (not an American Indian or Red Indian); George Bush is a native American

Nato

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, but no need to spell out

naught

nothing **nought** the figure 0

Navarro-Valls, Dr Joaquín Vatican spokesman

navy

but **Royal Navy**

Nazi

but **nazism**

nearby

one word, whether adjective or adverb: the pub nearby; the nearby pub

nearsighted, nearsightedness

neophilia

Even if you have always wanted to appear in Private Eye, resist the temptation to write such nonsense as “grey is the new black”, “billiards is the new snooker”, “Umbria is the new Tuscany”, etc

nerve-racking

Nestlé

Netherlands, the

not Holland, which is only part of the country; use Dutch as the adjective. Exception: the Dutch football team is generally known as Holland

nevertheless

but **none the less**

new, now

often redundant

Newcastle-under-Lyme

hyphens **Newcastle upon Tyne** no hyphens

New Labour

but **old Labour**

news agency

newsagent, newsprint, newsreel

newspaper titles

the Guardian, the New York Times, etc, do not write “the Guardian newspaper”

New Testament

new year

lc, but **New Year's Day, New Year's Eve**

New York City

but **New York state**

next of kin

NHS

national health service, but not necessary to spell out; health service is also OK

Nichpa

National Infection Control and Health Protection Agency

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm

(1844-1900) German philosopher

Nigeriannames

Surnames do not exist in the north of Nigeria: a typical name would be Isa Sani Sokoto (Isa the son of Sani who comes from the town of Sokoto); so best to write in full

nightcap, nightdress, nightfall, nightgown, nightshade, nightshirt

Nobel prize

Nobel peace prize, Nobel prize for literature, etc

No 1

in the charts, the world tennis No 1, etc — with thin (non-breaking) space before the number

No 10

(Downing Street) — with thin space before the 10

no

plural **noes**

no-brainer

means something along the lines of “this is so obvious, you don’t need a brain to know it” not “only someone with no brain would think this”

no campaign, yes campaign

not No campaign, “no” campaign or any of the other variants

no man's land

no hyphens

no one

not no-one

noncommissioned officer

nonconformist

none

It is a (very persistent) myth that “none” has to take a singular verb, but plural is acceptable and often sounds more natural, eg “none of the current squad are good enough to play in the Premiership”, “none of the issues have been resolved”

none the

but **nevertheless**

north

north London, north-east England, the north-west, etc

north of the border

avoid this expression: the Guardian is a national newspaper

northern hemisphere

north pole

North-West Frontier Province

Pakistan

North York Moors

national park; but **North Yorkshire Moors railway**

nosy

not nose-y

noticeboard

notebook, notepaper

Nottingham Forest, Notts County

Notting Hill carnival

numbers

Spell out from one to nine; integers from 10 to 999,999; thereafter use m or bn for sums of money, quantities or inanimate objects in copy, eg £10m, 5bn tonnes of coal, 30m doses of vaccine; but million or billion for people or animals, eg 1 million people, 3 billion rabbits, etc; in headlines use m or bn

numeracy

Numbers have always contained power, and many a journalist will tremble at the very sight of them. But most often the only maths we need to make sense of them is simple arithmetic. Far more important are our critical faculties, all too often switched off at the first sniff of a figure.

It's easy to be hoodwinked by big numbers in particular. But are they really so big? Compared with what? And what is being assumed? A government announcement of an extra £X million a year will look far less impressive if divided by 60million (the British population) and/or 52 (weeks in the year). That's quite apart from the fact that it was probably trumpeted last week already, as part of another, bigger number. We have to be aggressive when interpreting the spin thrown at us.

The legal profession has, in the same way, been forced to put DNA evidence in the dock. If the probability of the accused and the culprit sharing the same genetic profile is one in 3million, then there are 19 other people in Britain alone who share the same DNA "match".

Never invent a big figure when a small one will do. Totting jail sentences together ("the six men were jailed for a total of 87 years") is meaningless as well as irritating. Similarly, saying that something has an area the size of 150 football pitches, or is "eight times the size of Wales", is clichéd and may not be helpful.

Here is an easy three-point guide to sidestepping common "mythematics" traps:

1 Be careful in conversions, don't muddle metric and imperial, or linear, square and cubic measures. Square miles and miles square are constantly confused: an area 10 miles square is 10 miles by 10 miles, which equals 100 square miles.

2 Be extremely wary of (or don't bother) converting changes in temperature; you run the risk of confusing absolute and relative temperatures, eg while a temperature of 2C is about the same as 36F, a temperature change of 2C corresponds to a change of about 4F.

3 When calculating percentages, beware the "rose by/fell by X%" construction: an increase from 3% to 5% is a 2 percentage point increase or a 2-point increase, not a 2% increase

Nuremberg

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OAPs, old age pensioners

do not use: they are **pensioners** or **old people**; note also that we should take care using the word elderly — it should not be used to describe anyone younger than 70

obligato

not obligato

O’Brian, Patrick

author of Master and Commander

obscenities

see *swearwords*

obtuse

“mentally slow or emotionally insensitive” (Collins); often confused with **abstruse** (hard to understand) or **obscure**

occupied territories

oceans, seas

uc, eg Atlantic Ocean, Red Sea

Ofcom

Office of Communications, the broadcasting and telecommunications regulator

offhand, offside

but **off-licence**

Office for National Statistics

Office of Fair Trading

OFT on second mention

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

avoid the ugly abbreviation ODPM after first mention by calling it Mr Prescott’s office, the office, the department, etc

Oh!

not O!

oilfield

oil painting

oil production platform

for production of oil **oil rig** for exploration and drilling

OK

is OK; “okay” is not

Old Testament

O-levels

hyphen

Olympic games

or just **Olympics**

omelette

ongoing

prefer continuous or continual

online



only

can be ambiguous if not placed next to the word or phrase modified: “I have only one ambition” is clearer than “I only have one ambition”

on to

but **into**

Op 58, No 2

music style

opencast

ophthalmic

opossum

opposition, the

or

do not use “or” when explaining or amplifying — rather than “the NUT, or National Union of Teachers” say “The NUT (National Union of Teachers)” or, even better, “The National Union of Teachers” at first mention and then just “the NUT” or “the union”

ordinance

direction, decree

Ordnance Survey

Britain's national mapping agency (“ordnance” because such work was originally undertaken by the army)

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OECD on second reference

outed, outing

take care with these terms: if we say, for example, that a paedophile was outed, we are equating him with a gay person being outed; use exposed or revealed instead

outgrow, outgun, outmanoeuvre, outpatient

outward bound

we have been sued twice by the Outward Bound Trust when we have reported that people have died on “outward bound” courses that were nothing to do with the trust; use a safer term such as outdoor adventure or adventure training

over

not overly; *see more than*

overestimate, overstate

take care that you don't mean underestimate or understate (we often get this wrong)

overrule

Oxford comma

a comma before the final “and” in lists: straightforward ones (he ate ham, eggs and chips) do not need one, but sometimes it can help the reader (he ate cereal, kippers, bacon, eggs, toast and marmalade, and tea)

oxymoron

does not just vaguely mean self-contradictory; an oxymoron is a figure of speech in which apparently contradictory terms are used in conjunction, such as bittersweet, living death, “darkness visible” (Paradise Lost),

“the living dead” (The Waste Land); one of Margaret Atwood's characters thought “interesting Canadian” was an oxymoron

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pace

Latin tag meaning “by the leave of”, as a courteous nod to the views of a dissenting author, or “even acknowledging the existence of”, not “such as”

Pacific Ocean

paean

song of praise **paean** metrical foot of one long and three short syllables

El País

Palestinian Authority

becomes “the authority” on second reference

Palme d'Or

(Cannes film festival)

Palme, Olof

(1927-86) Swedish prime minister who was assassinated in a Stockholm street (not Olaf)

Palmer-Tomkinson, Tara

Pandora's box

panel, panelled, panelling

paparazzo

plural **paparazzi**; named after a character in Fellini's 1960 film *La Dolce Vita*

papier-mache

paralleled

parentheses

see brackets

Parker Bowles, Camilla

no hyphen

Parkinson's disease

Parkinson's law

"Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion"

parliament, parliamentary

but cap up those parliaments referred to by their name in the relevant language, eg Knesset, Folketing, Duma, etc

Parthenon marbles

official name, recognised by both Britain and Greece, for the Elgin marbles

party

lc in name of organisation, eg Labour party

Pashtuns

make up about 40% of the Afghan population (called Pathans during the British Raj); singular **Pashtun**; they speak **Pashtu**

passerby

plural **passersby**

passive voice

strive for active verbs: compare "the mat was sat upon by the cat" with "the cat sat on the mat"

Passport Agency

password

pasteurise

Patent Office

patients

are discharged from hospital, not released

payback, payday, payout

peacekeeper, peacetime

Peak District

Pearl Harbor

use American English spellings for US placenames

pedaller

cyclist **peddler** drug dealer **pedlar** hawker

peers

Avoid writing “Lord Asquith’s Liberal government”, or “Lady Thatcher took power in 1979”; when talking about people before they were given peerages use their names/titles at the time (eg Herbert Asquith, Mrs Thatcher).

Also avoid the construction “Lady Helena Kennedy”: in this case we would write Lady Kennedy or Helena Kennedy, or — if really pushed — Lady (Helena) Kennedy (but never Baroness Kennedy)

peewit

peking duck

pendant

adjective **pendent**

peninsula

adjective **peninsular**

penknife

pensioners

do not call them “old age pensioners” or “OAPs”; take similar care with the word “elderly”, which should never be used to describe someone under 70

peony

flower

per

avoid; use English: “She earns £30,000 a year” is better than “per year”. If you must use it, the Latin preposition is followed by another Latin word, eg per capita, not per head. Exception: miles per hour, which we write mph

per cent

% in headlines and copy

percentage rises

probably our most common lapse into “mythematics”: an increase from 3% to 5% is a 2 percentage point increase or a 2-point increase, not a 2% increase; any sentence saying “such and such rose or fell *by* X%” should be considered and checked carefully

Pérez de Cuéllar, Javier

Peruvian diplomat and former UN secretary general (Mr Pérez de Cuéllar on second mention)

Performing Right Society

not Rights

permissible

Peronists

supporters of the nationalist/populist ideology of the late Argentinian president Juan Domingo Perón

personal equity plan

Pep

persons

No! They are people (can you imagine Barbra Streisand singing “Persons who need persons”?)

Perspex

TM

peshmerga

Kurdish opposition fighters

phenomenon

plural **phenomena**

Philippines

inhabited by **Filipinos** (male) and **Filipinas** (female); adjective **Filipino** for both sexes, but **Philippine** for, say, a Philippine island or the Philippine president

Philips

electronics company **Phillips** screwdriver

philistine

Phnom Penh

phone

no apostrophe

phosphorous

adjective **phosphorus** noun

photocopy

not Photostat or Xerox (trade names)

pi

the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter, as every schoolgirl knows

picket noun (one who pickets), not picketer;

picketed, picketing

piecework

pigeonhole

verb or noun

pigsty

plural **pigsties**

Pilates

pill, the

pillbox

Pimm's

pin

or **pin number** not Pin or PIN number

pipebomb

pipeline

Pissarro, Camille

(1830-1903) French impressionist painter; his son Lucien (1863-1944) was also an artist

placename

Planning Inspectorate



plaster of paris

plateau

plural **plateaux**

plateglass

playbill, playgoer, playwright

playing the race card

an overused phrase

play-off

plc

not PLC

P&O

pocketbook, pocketknife

poet laureate

pointe

(ballet); **on pointe**, not on point or en pointe

Pokemon

no accents

Polari

A form of language used mostly by gay men and lesbians, derived in part from slang used by sailors, actors and prostitutes and popularised in the 1960s BBC radio comedy *Round the Horne* by the characters Julian and Sandy. Example: "Vada the dolly eke on the bona omee ajax" (Look at the gorgeous face on that nice man over there); "naff" is an example of Polari that has passed into more general use, as are "butch", "camp" and "dizzy"

police forces

Metropolitan police (the Met after first mention), West Midlands police, New York police department (NYPD at second mention), etc

police ranks

PC on all references to police constable (never WPC), other ranks full out and initial cap at first reference; thereafter abbreviation plus surname: Sgt Campbell, DC, Insp, Ch Insp, Det Supt, Ch Supt, Cmdr, etc (or just Mr, Ms or Mrs)

politburo

political correctness

a term to be avoided on the grounds that it is, in Polly Toynbee's words, "an empty rightwing smear designed only to elevate its user"

political parties

lc for word "party"; abbreviate if necessary (for example in parliamentary reporting) as C, Lab, Lib Dem (two words), SNP (Scottish National party, not "Scottish Nationalist party"), Plaid Cymru, SDLP (Social Democratic and Labour party), SF (Sinn Féin), UUP (Ulster Unionist party), DUP (Democratic Unionist party), Ukip (UK Independence party)

pop art

Pope, the

but **the pontiff**; no need to give his name in full

poppadom

Portakabin
TM

portland cement, portland stone

Port of London authority
PLA on second mention

postcode

postgraduate

Post-it
TM

postmodern, postmodernist

postmortem

Post Office
cap up the organisation, but you buy stamps in a **post office** or **sub-post office**

postwar

Potters Bar
no apostrophe

PoW
abbreviation for prisoner of war

practice
noun **practise** verb

practising homosexual
do not use this grotesque expression; where it is necessary to discuss someone's sex life, for example a story about gay clergy, it is possible to use other expressions, eg the Anglican church demands celibacy from gay clergy but permits the laity to have sexually active relationships

precis
singular and plural

pre-eminent

prefab, prefabricated

premier

use only when constitutionally correct (eg leaders of Australian states or Canadian provinces), therefore not for Britain — do not use in headlines for British prime minister; exception: the Chinese traditionally give their head of government the title of premier, eg Premier Wen Jiabao (Mr Wen on second mention)

premiere

no accent

Premiership

use for English football (FA Premier League is the governing body, not the competition); in Scotland, however, it is the Premier League

premises

of buildings and logic

prepositions

appeal against, protest against/over/at, not “appealed the sentence”, “protested the verdict”, etc

Schoolchildren used to be told (by English teachers unduly influenced by Latin) that it was ungrammatical to end sentences with a preposition, a fallacy satirised by Churchill's “this is the sort of English up with which I will not put” and HW Fowler's “What did you bring me that book to be read to out of for?”

pre-Raphaelite

presently

means soon, not at present

president

lc except in title: President Bush, but George Bush, the US president

press, the

singular: the British press is a shining example to the rest of the world

Press Complaints Commission

PCC on second mention

Press Gazette

formerly UK Press Gazette

pressurised

use pressured, put pressure on or pressed to mean apply pressure, ie not “they pressurised the Wolves defence”

prestigious

having prestige: nothing wrong with this, despite what wise old subeditors used to tell us

Pret a Manger

food **prêt à porter** fashion

preteen

prevaricate

“to speak or act falsely with intent to deceive” (Collins); often confused with **procrastinate**, to put something off

preventive

not preventative

prewar

PricewaterhouseCoopers

one word

prima donna

plural **prima donnas**

prima facie

not italicised

primary care trusts

lc, eg Southwark primary care trust

primate

another word for archbishop; Primate of All England: Archbishop of Canterbury; Primate of England: Archbishop of York; but “the primate” on second reference

primates

higher mammals of the order Primates, essentially apes and humans

prime minister

Prince of Wales

at first mention; thereafter Prince Charles or the prince

principal

first in importance **principle** standard of conduct

principality

(Wales, Monaco) lc

prison officer

not warder

private finance initiative

PFI on second mention

privy council but **privy counsellor**

prizes

Booker prize, Nobel prize, Whitbread prize, etc. *See awards*

probe

a dental implement, not an inquiry or investigation

procrastinate

to delay or defer; often confused with **prevaricate**

procurator fiscal

prodigal

wasteful or extravagant, not a returned wanderer; the confusion arises from the biblical parable of the prodigal son

profile

a noun, not a verb

program

(computer); otherwise **programme**

prohibition

lc for US prohibition

pro-life

do not use to mean **anti-abortion** unless in a direct quote

propeller

prophecy

noun **prophesy** verb

pros and cons

protege

male and female, no accents

protest against, over or about

not, for example, “protest the election result” which has appeared on our front page

protester

not protestor

proved/proven

beware the creeping “proven”, featuring (mispronounced) in every other TV ad; proven is not the normal past tense of prove, but a term in Scottish law (“not proven”) and in certain English idioms, eg “proven record”

proviso

plural **provisos**

Ps and Qs

publicly

not publically

public-private partnership

PPP on second mention

Public Record Office

merged with the Historical Manuscripts Commission in 2003 to form the **National Archives**

Puffa

TM; say **padded** or **quilted jacket** not “puffa jacket”

pundit

self-appointed expert

purchase

as a noun, perhaps, but use buy as a verb

put

athletics **putt** golf

Pwllheli

pygmy

plural **pygmies**, lc except for members of Equatorial African ethnic group

pyjamas

pyrrhic victory

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al-Qaida

Osama bin Laden's organisation; it means “the Base”

Qantas

qat

not khat

QC

use without comma, eg Cherie Booth QC

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

QCA after first mention

quarterdeck, quartermaster

Queen, the

if it is necessary to say so, she is Her Majesty or HM, never HRH

Queen's College, Oxford

its official name is The Queen's College (named in honour of Queen Philippa in 1341)

Queens' College, Cambridge



Queen's speech

queueing

not queuing

quicklime, quicksand, quicksilver

quixotic

quiz

a suspect is questioned, not quizzed (however tempting for headline purposes)

quizshow

Quorn

TM

quotation marks

Use double quotes at the start and end of a quoted section, with single quotes for quoted words within that section. Place full points and commas inside the quotes for a complete quoted sentence; otherwise the point comes outside: "Mary said, 'Your style guide needs updating,' and I said, 'I agree.'"
but: "Mary said updating the guide was 'a difficult and time-consuming task'."

When beginning a quote with a sentence fragment that is followed by a full sentence, punctuate according to the final part of the quote, eg The minister called the allegations "blatant lies. But in a position such as mine, it is only to be expected."

Headlines and standfirsts (sparingly), captions and display quotes all take single quote marks.

For parentheses in direct quotes, use square brackets.

quotes

Take care with direct speech: our readers should be confident that words appearing in quotation marks accurately represent the actual words uttered by the speaker, though ums and ahems can be removed and bad grammar improved. If you aren't sure of the exact wording, use indirect speech.

Where a lot of material has been left out, start off a new quote with "He added: ...", or signify this with an ellipsis.

Take particular care when extracting from printed material, for example a minister's resignation letter.

And introduce the speaker from the beginning, or after the first sentence: it is confusing and frustrating to read several sentences or even paragraphs of a quote before finding out who is saying it.

From the editor:

If a reader reads something in direct quotation marks in the Guardian he/she is entitled to believe that the reporter can vouch directly for the accuracy of the quote.

Copying quotes out of other newspapers without any form of attribution is simply bad journalism, never mind legally risky. If, where there are no libel issues, you're going to repeat quotes, then always say where they came

from. It won't be much help in a legal action, but at least the reader can evaluate the reliability of the source. A quote in the Sunday Sport may, who knows, count for less than one from the Wall Street Journal.

If we're taking quotes off the radio or television it is our general policy to include an attribution. This matters less if it is a pooled interview or news conference which happens to be covered by, say, the BBC or Sky. If the quote comes from an exclusive interview on a radio or TV programme (eg, Today, Channel 4 News or Newsnight) we should always include an attribution

Qur'an

holy book of Islam (not Koran); regarded as the word of God, having been dictated by the prophet Muhammad, so in the eyes of Muslims it is wrong to suggest the prophet "wrote" the Qur'an

Qureia, Ahmed

Palestinian politician, popularly known as Abu Ala (which means "father of Ala" — it is not a nom de guerre)

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racecourse, racehorse

racial terminology

Do not use ethnic to mean black or Asian people. In a British sense, they are an ethnic minority; in a world sense, of course, white people are an ethnic minority.

Just as in the Balkans or anywhere else, internal African peoples should, where possible, be called ethnic groups or communities rather than “tribes”.

Avoid the word “immigrant”, which is very offensive to many black and Asian people, not only because it is often incorrectly used to describe people who were born in Britain, but also because it has been used negatively for so many years that it carries imagery of “flooding”, “swamping”, “bogus”, “scroungers”, etc.

The words black and Asian should not be used as nouns, but adjectives: black people rather than “blacks”, an Asian woman rather than “an Asian”, etc.

Say African-Caribbean rather than Afro-Caribbean

rack and ruin

racked

with pain, not wracked

rackets

not racquets, except in club titles

Rada

Royal Academy of Dramatic Art; normally no need to spell out

Radio 1, Radio 2, Radio 3, Radio 4, 5 Live

radiographer

takes x-rays **radiologist** reads them

Radio Telefís Éireann

Irish public broadcasting corporation

radius

plural **radii**

raft

something you float on; do not say “a raft of measures”, which has very rapidly become a cliché (particularly in political reporting)

railway, railway station

not the American English versions railroad, train station

raincoat, rainfall, rainproof

Ramadan

month of fasting for Muslims

Range Rover

no hyphen

Rangers

not Glasgow Rangers

rarefy, rarefied

rateable

Rawlplug

TM

Ray-Ban

TM; it's OK to call them **Ray-Bans**

R&B

re/re-

Use re- (with hyphen) when followed by the vowels e or u (not pronounced as “yu”): eg re-entry, re-examine, re-urge.

Use re (no hyphen) when followed by the vowels a, i, o or u (pronounced as “yu”), or any consonant: eg rearm, rearrange, reassemble, reiterate, reorder, reuse, rebuild, reconsider.

Exceptions: re-read; or where confusion with another word would arise:

re-cover/recover, re-form/reform, re-creation/recreation, re-sign/resign

realpolitik

lc, no italics

rear admiral

Rear Admiral Horatio Hornblower at first mention, thereafter Adm Hornblower

reafforestation

not reforestation

received pronunciation (RP)

a traditionally prestigious accent, associated with public schools and used by an estimated 3% of the population of England, also known as BBC English, Oxford English or the Queen's English; nothing to do with Standard English, which includes written as well as spoken language and can be (indeed, normally is) spoken with a regional accent

recent

avoid: if the date is relevant, use it

Red Cross, Red Crescent

referendum

plural **referendums**

re-form

to form again **reform** to change for the better; we should not take initiators' use of the word at its face value, particularly in cases where the paper believes no improvement is likely

refute

use this much-abused word only when an argument is disproved; otherwise **contest, deny, rebut**

regalia

plural, of royalty; "royal regalia" is tautologous

Regent's Park

regime

no accent

register office

not registry office

registrar general

regrettable

reinstate

religious right

reopen

repellant

noun **repellent** adjective: you fight repellent insects with an insect repellant

repertoire

an individual's range of skills or roles **repertory** a selection of works that a theatre or dance company might perform

replaceable

report

the Lawrence report, etc; use report on or inquiry into but not report into, ie not “a report into health problems”

reported speech

When a comment in the present tense is reported, use past tense: “She said: ‘I **like** chocolate’ ” (present tense) becomes in reported speech “she said she **liked** chocolate” (not “she said she likes chocolate”).

When a comment in the past tense is reported, use “had” (past perfect tense): “She said: ‘I **ate** too much chocolate’ ” (past tense) becomes in reported speech “she said she **had eaten** too much chocolate” (not “she said she ate too much chocolate”).

Once it has been established who is speaking, there is no need to keep attributing, so long as you stick to the past tense: “Anne said she would vote Labour. There was no alternative. It was the only truly progressive party”, etc

republicans lc (except for US political party)

resistance, resistance fighters See *terrorism, terrorists*

restaurateur not restauranteur

retail price index (RPI) normally no need to spell it out

Reuters

the Rev at first mention, thereafter use courtesy title: eg the Rev Joan Smith, subsequently Ms Smith; never say “Reverend Smith”, “the Reverend Smith” or “Rev Smith”



Revelation

last book in the New Testament: not Revelations, a very common error; its full name is The Revelation of St John the Divine

veille

rickety

ricochet, ricocheted, ricocheting

rifle

to flick through a book, newspaper or magazine; often confused with **rifle**, to search or ransack and steal from, eg rifle goods from a shop

right wing, the right, rightwinger nouns **rightwing** adjective

ringfence

rivers

lc, eg river Thames, Amazon river

riveted, riveting

roadside

rob

you rob a person or a bank, using force or the threat of violence; but you **steal** a car or a bag of money

Rock

cap if referring to Gibraltar

rock'n'roll

one word

role

no accent

Rollerblade

TM; say inline skates

rollercoaster

one word

Rolls-Royce

Romany

plural **Roma**

Rorschach test

psychological test based on the interpretation of inkblots

roughshod

Rovers Return, the

(no apostrophe) Coronation Street's pub

Royal Academy of Arts

usually known as the **Royal Academy**

Royal Air Force or RAF

Royal Ballet

Royal Botanic Garden

(Edinburgh); **Royal Botanic Gardens** (London), also known as **Kew Gardens** or simply **Kew**

Royal College of Surgeons

the college or the royal college is preferable to the RCS on subsequent mention

royal commission

Royal Courts of Justice

royal family

Royal London hospital

Royal Mail

Royal Marines

marines after first mention

Royal Navy

or the navy

Royal Opera, Royal Opera House

royal parks

RSPB, RSPCA

do not normally need to be spelt out

Rubicon

rugby league, rugby union

Rule, Britannia!

rupee

Indian currency **rupiah** Indonesian currency

russian roulette

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Saatchi

sacrilegious

not sacreligious

Sadler's Wells

Safeway

Sainsbury's

for the stores; the company's name is **J Sainsbury plc**

Saint

in running text should be spelt in full: Saint John, Saint Paul. For names of towns, churches, etc, abbreviate St (no point) eg St Mirren, St Stephen's church. In French placenames a hyphen is needed, eg St-Nazaire, Ste-Suzanne, Stes-Maries-de-la-Mer

St Andrews University

no apostrophe

St James Park

home of Exeter City **St James' Park** home of Newcastle United **St James's Park** royal park in London

St John Ambulance

not St John's and no need for Brigade

St Paul's Cathedral

St Thomas' hospital

in London; not St Thomas's

saleable

Salonika

not Thessaloniki

Salvation Army

never the Sally Army

salvo

plural **salvoes**

Sana'a

capital of Yemen

sanatorium

not sanitorium, plural **sanatoriums**

San Sebastián

San Siro stadium

Milan

Sao Paulo

Brazilian city, not Sao Paolo

Sats

standard assessment tasks **SATs** scholastic aptitude tests (in the US, where they are pronounced as individual letters)

Saumarez Smith, Charles

director of the National Gallery

Savile Row

scherzo

plural **scherzos**

schizophrenia, schizophrenic

use only in a medical context, never to mean “in two minds”, which is wrong, as well as offensive to people diagnosed with this illness

schoolboy, schoolgirl, schoolchildren, schoolroom, schoolteacher

schools

Alfred Salter primary school, Rotherhithe; King's school, Macclesfield; Eton college, etc

school years

year 2, year 10, key stage 1, etc

Schröder, Gerhard

German politician

Schwarzenegger, Arnold

Arnie acceptable in headlines

scientific measurements

Take care: “m” in scientific terms stands for “milli” (1mW is 1,000th of a watt), while “M” denotes “mega” (1MW is a million watts); in such circumstances it is wise not to bung in another “m” when you mean million, so write out, for example, 10million C.

amps A, volts V, watts W, megawatts MW, milliwatts mW, joules J, kilojoules kJ

scientific names No need to italicise — E coli (Escherichia coli) etc. The first name (the genus) is capped, the second (the species) is lc — eg Quercus robur (oak tree)

scientific terms

Some silly cliches you might wish to avoid: you would find it difficult to hesitate for a nanosecond (the shortest measurable human hesitation is probably about 250 million nanoseconds, or a quarter of a second); “astronomical sums” when talking about large sums of money is rather dated (the national debt surpassed the standard astronomical unit of 93 million [miles] 100 years ago)

ScotchTape

TM; say **sticky tape**

scotch whisky, scotch mist

Scotland

The following was written by a Scot who works for the Guardian and lives in London. Letters expressing similar sentiments come from across Britain (and, indeed, from around the world):

We don't carry much coverage of events in Scotland and to be honest, even as an expat, that suits me fine. But I do care very much that we acknowledge that Scotland is a separate nation and in many ways a separate country. It has different laws, education system (primary, higher and further), local government, national government, sport, school terms, weather, property market and selling system, bank holidays, right to roam, banks and money, churches, etc.

If we really want to be a national newspaper then we need to consider whether our stories apply only to England (and Wales) or Britain, or Scotland only. When we write about teachers' pay deals, we should point out that we mean teachers in England and Wales; Scottish teachers have separate pay and management structures and union. When we write about it being half term, we should remember that there's no such thing in Scotland. When we write about bank holiday sunshine/rain, we should remember that in Scotland the weather was probably different and it possibly wasn't even a bank holiday. When we write a back-page special on why the English cricket team is crap, we should be careful not to refer to it as “we” and “us”. When the Scottish Cup final is played, we should perhaps consider devoting more than a few paragraphs at the foot of a page to Rangers winning their 100th major trophy (if it had been Manchester United we'd have had pages and pages with Bobby Charlton's all-time fantasy first XI and a dissertation on why English clubs are the best in Europe).

These daily oversights come across to a Scot as arrogance. They also undermine confidence in what the paper is telling the reader.

Scotland Office

not Scottish Office

Scott, Sir George Gilbert

(1811-78) architect who designed the Albert Memorial and Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras station

<http://www.britannica.com/seo/s/sir-george-gilbert-scott/>

Scott, Sir Giles Gilbert (1880-1960), grandson of the above, responsible for red telephone boxes, Bankside power station (now Tate Modern), Waterloo bridge and the Anglican cathedral in Liverpool

<http://www.britannica.com/seo/s/sir-giles-gilbert-scott/>

Scottish Enterprise

Scottish parliament

members are **MSPs**

scottish terrier

not scotch; once known as Aberdeen terrier

scouse, scouser

seacoast, seaplane, seaport, seashore, seaside, seaweed

sea change, sea level, sea serpent, sea sickness

Séamus, Seán

note accents in Irish Gaelic; sean without a fada means old

seas, oceans

uc, eg Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Pacific Ocean

seasons

spring, summer, autumn, winter, all lc

section 28

seize

not sieze

self-control, self-defence, self-esteem, self-respect

Sellotape

TM; say **sticky tape**

semicolon

The following sentence, from a column by David McKie, illustrates perfectly how to use the semicolon: "Some reporters were brilliant; others were less so"

senior

abbreviate to **Sr** not Sen or Snr, eg George Bush Sr

September 11 (9/11 is acceptable)

The official death toll (revised January 2004) of the victims of the Islamist terrorists who hijacked four aircraft on September 11 2001 is 2,973. The figure includes aircraft passengers and crews, but not the 19 hijackers. Of this total, 2,749 died in the attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre (1,541 have been identified from remains at Ground Zero), 184 were killed in the attack on the Pentagon, and 40 died when their plane crashed into a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

The hijackers were: Fayez Ahmed, Mohamed Atta, Ahmed al-Ghamdi, Hamza al-Ghamdi, Saeed al-Ghamdi, Hani Hanjour, Nawaf al-Hazmi, Salem al-Hazmi, Ahmed al-Haznawi, Khalid al-Mihdhar, Majed Moqed, Ahmed al-Nami, Abdulaziz al-Omari, Marwan al-Shehhi, Mohammad al-Shehri, Wael al-Shehri, Waleed al-Shehri, Satam al-Suqami and Ziad Jarrah (though dozens of permutations of their names have appeared in the paper, we follow Reuters style as for most Arabic transliterations)

Serb

noun **Serbian** adjective: the Serbs ousted the Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic

sergeant major

Sergeant Major Trevor Prescott, subsequently Sgt Maj (not RSM or CSM) Prescott

Serious Fraud Office

SFO on second mention

serjeant at arms

services, the

armed forces

Sex and the City

not Sex in the City

sexing up

From the editor:

Guardian readers would rather we did give them the unvarnished truth — or our best stab at it. It seems obvious enough. But inside many journalists — this goes for desk editors as much as reporters — there is a little demon prompting us to make the story as strong and interesting as possible, if not more so. We drop a few excitable adjectives around the place. We overegg. We may even sex it up.

Strong stories are good. So are interesting stories. But straight, accurate stories are even better. Readers who stick with us over any length of time would far rather judge what we write by our own Richter scale of news judgments and values than feel that we're measuring ourselves against the competition. Every time we flam a story up we disappoint somebody — usually a reader who thought the Guardian was different.

We should be different. Of course we compete fiercely in the most competitive newspaper market in the world. Of course we want to sell as many copies as possible. We've all experienced peer pressure to write something as strongly as possible, if not more so. But our Scott Trust ownership relieves us of the necessity to drive remorselessly for circulation to the exclusion of all else. In other words, we don't need to sex things up, and we shouldn't.

sexuality

From a reader:

“Can I suggest your style guide should state that homosexual, gay, bisexual and heterosexual are primarily adjectives and that use of them as nouns should be avoided. It seems to me that this is both grammatically and politically preferable (politically because using them as nouns really does seem to define people by their sexuality). I would like to read that someone is ‘homosexual’, not ‘a homosexual’, or about ‘gay people’, not ‘gays’. Lesbian is different as it is a noun which later began to be used adjectivally, not the other way round. As an example from Wednesday, the opening line ‘Documents which showed that Lord Byron ... was a bisexual’ rather than ‘was bisexual’ sounds both Daily Mail-esque and stylistically poor.”

shakeout, shakeup

Shakespearean

Shankill Road

Belfast

shareholder

sharia law

sheepdog

sheikh

Shepherd Market

Mayfair **Shepherd’s Bush** west London

Shetland

or the **Shetland Isles** but never “the Shetlands”

Shia, Sunni

two branches of Islam (note: not Shi’ite); plural **Shia Muslims** and **Sunni Muslims**, though Shias and Sunnis are fine if you are pushed for space

ships

not feminine: it ran aground, not she ran aground

shipbuilder, shipbuilding, shipmate, shipowner, shipyard

shoo-in

not shoe-in

shopkeeper

Shoreham-by-Sea

not Shoreham on Sea

Short money

payment to opposition parties to help them carry out their parliamentary functions, named after Ted Short, the Labour leader of the house who introduced it in 1975

Siamese twins

do not use: they are **conjoined twins**

side-effects

sidestreet

siege

not seige

Siena

Tuscan city **sienna** pigment

silicon

computer chips **silicone** breast implants

Singaporean names

in three parts, eg Lee Kuan Yew

Singin' in the Rain

not Singing

single quotes

in headlines (but sparingly), standfirsts and captions

sink

past tense **sank**, past participle **sunk**: he sinks, he sank, he has sunk

Sinn Féin

siphon not syphon

ski, skis, skier, skied, skiing

skipper

usually only of a trawler

smallholding

Smith & Wesson

Smithsonian Institution

not Institute

snowplough

socialism, socialist

c unless name of a party, eg Socialist Workers party

social security benefits

all lc, income support, working tax credit, etc

sod's law

Sofia

queen of Spain

soi-disant

means self-styled, not so-called

soiree

Sotheby's

soundbite

sources

Guardian journalists should use anonymous sources sparingly. We should — except in exceptional circumstances — avoid anonymous pejorative quotes. We should avoid misrepresenting the nature and number of sources, and we should do our best to give readers some clue as to the authority with which they speak. We should never, ever, betray a source. *See appendix: the editor's guidelines on the identification of sources*

South Bank

south south London, south-west England, the south-east, etc

southern hemisphere

south pole

Southport Visiter

a newspaper, not to be confused with the **Visitor**, Morecambe

spaghetti western

Spanish names and accents

Be aware that the surname is normally the second last name, not the last, which is the mother's maiden name, eg the writer Federico García Lorca – known as García in Spain rather than Lorca – should be García Lorca on second mention. Note also that the female name Consuelo ends with an “o” not an “a”.

A guide to accents follows. If in doubt do an internet search (try the word with and without an accent) and look for reputable Spanish language sites, eg big newspapers:

Surnames ending -ez

take an accent over the penultimate vowel, eg Benítez, Fernández, Giménez, Gómez, González, Gutiérrez, Hernández, Jiménez, López, Márquez, Martínez, Núñez, Ordóñez, Pérez, Quiñónez, Ramírez, Rodríguez, Sáez, Vásquez, Vázquez, Velázquez. Exception: Alvarez; note also that names ending -es do not take the accent, eg Martines, Rodrigues.

Other surnames

Aristizabal, Beltrán, Cáceres, Calderón, Cañizares, Chevanton, Couñago, Cúper, Dalí, De la Peña, Díaz, Forlán, García, Gaudí, Miró, Muñoz, Olazábal, Pavón, Sáenz, Sáinz, Valdés, Valerón, Verón.

Forenames

Adán, Alán, Andrés, César, Darío, Elías, Fabián, Ginés, Héctor, Hernán, Iñaki, Iñés, Iván, Jesús, Joaquín, José, Lucía, María, Martín, Matías, Máximo, Michel, Raúl, Ramón, Róger, Rubén, Sebastián, Víctor

The forenames Ana, Angel, Alfredo, Alvaro, Cristina, Diego, Domingo, Emilio, Ernesto, Federico, Fernando, Ignacio, Jorge, Juan, Julio, Luis, Marta, Mario, Miguel, Pablo and Pedro do not usually take accents.

Placenames

Asunción, Bogotá, Cádiz, Catalonia, Córdoba, La Coruña, Guantánamo Bay, Guipúzcoa, Jaén, Jerez, León, Medellín, Potosí, San Sebastián, Valparaíso.

Sports teams, etc

América, Atlético, El Barça (FC Barcelona), Bernabéu, Bolívar, Cerro Porteño, Deportivo La Coruña, Huracán, Málaga, Peñarol,

Note: Spanish is an official language in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela,

Spanish practices, Spanish customs

old Fleet Street expressions to be avoided

span of years

1995-99; but between 1995 and 1999, not between 1995-99

spare-part surgery

avoid this term

spastic

do not use

Speaker, the (Commons) but **deputy speaker** (of whom there are several)

special

usually redundant

Special Immigration Appeals Commission

Siac or “the commission” on second mention

spelled/spelt

she spelled it out for him: “the word is spelt like this”

Spice Girls

Victoria Beckham was Posh Spice; Melanie Brown was Scary Spice; Emma Bunton was Baby Spice; Melanie Chisholm was Sporty Spice; Geri Halliwell was Ginger Spice

spicy

not spicey

Spider-Man

spiral

prices (and other things) can spiral down as well as up; try a less clichéd word that doesn't suggest a circular movement



split infinitives

“The English-speaking world may be divided into (1) those who neither know nor care what a split infinitive is; (2) those who do not know, but care very much; (3) those who know and condemn; (4) those who know and distinguish. Those who neither know nor care are the vast majority, and are happy folk, to be envied.”

HW Fowler, *Modern English Usage*, 1926

It is perfectly acceptable to sensibly split infinitives, and stubbornly to resist doing so can sound awkward and make for ambiguity: “the workers are declared strongly to favour a strike” raises the question of whether the declaration, or the favouring, is strong.

George Bernard Shaw got it about right after an editor tinkered with his infinitives: “I don't care if he is made to go quickly, or to quickly go — but go he must!”

spoiled/spoilt

she spoiled her son: in fact he was a spoilt brat

spokesman, spokeswoman

are preferable to “spokesperson”, but if possible attribute a quote to the organisation, eg “The AA said ... ”

sponsorship

Try to avoid: we are under no obligation to carry sponsors' names. So London Marathon, not Flora London Marathon, etc. When a competition is named after a sponsor, it is unavoidable: Nationwide League, AXA League

spoonful

plural **spoonfuls**

square brackets

use for interpolated words in quotations, eg Mr Howard said: "Iain [Duncan Smith] has my full support"

square metres

not the same as metres squared: eg 300m squared is 90,000 sq m which is very different to 300 sq m; we often get this wrong

squaw

offensive, do not use

stadium

plural **stadiums**

stalactites

cling from the ceiling **stalagmites** grow from the ground

stalemate

do not use to mean deadlock or impasse; a stalemate is the end of the game, and cannot be broken or resolved

stamp

not stomp

state of the union address

(US)

stationary

not moving **stationery** writing materials

steadfast

steamboat, steamhammer, steamship

steam engine

sten gun

step change

avoid; **change** is usually adequate

stepfather, stepmother

sterling
(the pound)

sticky-back plastic

stiletto
plural **stilettos**

still life
plural **still lifes**

stilton
cheese

stimulus
plural **stimuli**

stock in trade

stock market, stock exchange

storey
plural **storeys** (buildings)

straightforward

straitjacket

strait-laced

strait of Dover, strait of Hormuz, etc

Strategic Rail Authority
SRA on second mention

stratum
plural **strata**

Street-Porter, Janet

streetwise

stretchered off
do not use; say **carried off on a stretcher**

strippergram

stumbling block

stylebook
but **style guide**

subcommittee, subcontinent, subeditor, sublet, sublieutenant, subplot, subsection

subjunctive

The author Somerset Maugham noted more than 50 years ago: “The subjunctive mood is in its death throes, and the best thing to do is put it out of its misery as soon as possible.” Would that that were so. Most commonly, it is a third person singular form of the verb expressing hypothesis, typically something demanded, proposed, imagined: he demanded that she resign at once, I propose that she be sacked, she insisted Jane sit down. The subjunctive is particularly common in American English and in formal or poetic contexts: If I were a rich man, etc. It can sound hyper-correct or pretentious, so use common sense; Fowler notes that it is “seldom obligatory”

submachine gun

submarines

are boats, not ships

subpoena, subpoenaed

suchlike

suicide

Guardian journalists should exercise particular care in reporting suicide or issues involving suicide, bearing in mind the risk of encouraging others. This applies to presentation, including the use of pictures, and to describing the method of suicide. Any substances should be referred to in general rather than specific terms. When appropriate a helpline number (eg the Samaritans) should be given. The feelings of relatives should also be carefully considered

summer

Super Bowl

supermarkets

Marks & Spencer or M&S, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Tesco (no wonder people get confused about apostrophes)

supermodel

every new face who makes a name for herself these days is labelled a supermodel; **model** is sufficient

supersede

not supercede

supply, supply days

(parliament)

Sure Start

surge

prefer rise or increase, if that is the meaning; but surge is preferable to “upsurge”

surrealism

swap

not swop

swath, swaths

broad strip, eg cut a wide swath **swathe**, **swathes** baby clothes, bandage, wrappings



swearwords

We are more liberal than any other newspaper, using words such as cunt and fuck that most of our competitors would not use.

The editor's guidelines:

First, remember the reader, and respect demands that we should not casually use words that are likely to offend.

Second, use such words only when absolutely necessary to the facts of a piece, or to portray a character in an article; there is almost never a case in which we need to use a swearword outside direct quotes.

Third, the stronger the swearword, the harder we ought to think about using it.

Finally, never use asterisks, which are just a copout

swingeing

synopsis

plural **synopses**

syntax

beware of ambiguous or incongruous sentence structure: “a man was charged with exposing himself in court yesterday”

synthesis, synthesise, synthesiser

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tableau

plural **tableaux**

table d'hote

tactics

singular and plural

Taiwanese names

like Hong Kong and Korean names, these are in two parts with a hyphen, eg Lee Teng-hui

Tajikistan

adjective **Tajik**

takeoff

noun **take off** verb

takeover

Takeover Panel

Taliban

plural (means “students of Islamic knowledge”)

talkshow

talk to

not talk with

tam o'shanter

woollen cap

Tampax

TM; say **tampon**

T&G

the Transport and General Workers' Union rebranded

Tangier

not Tangiers

Tannoy

TM

taoiseach

Irish prime minister (prime minister is also acceptable)

targeted, targeting

tariff

tarot cards

taskforce

Tate

The original London gallery in Millbank, now known as **Tate Britain**, houses British art from the 16th century; **Tate Modern**, at Southwark, south London, **Tate Liverpool** and **Tate St Ives**, in Cornwall, all house modern art

tax avoidance

is legal **tax evasion** is illegal

taxi, taxiing

of aircraft

Tbilisi

capital of Georgia

teabag, teacup, teapot, teaspoon

team-mate

teams

Sports teams take plural verbs: Australia won by an innings, Wednesday were relegated again, etc; but note that in a business context they are singular like other companies, eg Leeds United posted its biggest loss to date

teargas

Teasmade

TM; say **teemaker**

Technicolor

TM

Teesside

teetotaller

Teflon

TM; say **non-stick pan**

telephone numbers

hyphenate after three or four-figure area codes, but not five-figure area codes: 020-7278 2332, 0161-832 7200; 01892 456789, 01227 123456; treat mobile phone numbers as having five-figure area codes: 07911 654321

Teletubbies

they are: **Tinky Winky** (purple); **Laa-Laa** (yellow); **Dipsy** (green); and **Po** (red)

television shows

chatshow, gameshow, quizshow, talkshow

temazepam



temperatures

thus: 30C (85F) — ie celsius, with fahrenheit in brackets on first mention; but be extremely wary (or don't bother) converting temperature changes, eg an average temperature change of 2C was wrongly converted to 36F in an article about a heatwave (although a temperature of 2C is about the same as 36F, a temperature change of 2C corresponds to a change of about 4F)

Ten Commandments

tendinitis

not tendonitis

Tenerife

tenses

We've Only Just **Begun** was playing on the radio. He **began** to drink; in fact he **drank** so much, he was **drunk** in no time at all. He **sank** into depression, knowing that all his hopes had been **sunk**. Finally, he **sneaked** away. Or perhaps **snuck** away (according to Pinker, the most recent irregular verb to enter the language).

See burned, dreamed, learned, spelled, spoiled

terrace houses

not terraced

Terrence Higgins Trust

terrorism/terrorists

A terrorist act is directed against victims chosen either randomly or as symbols of what is being opposed (eg workers in the World Trade Centre, tourists in Bali, Spanish commuters). It is designed to create a state of terror in the minds of a particular group of people or the public as a whole for political or social ends. Although most terrorist acts are violent, you can be a terrorist without being overtly violent (eg poisoning a water supply or gassing people on the underground).

Does having a good cause make a difference? The UN says no: "Criminal acts calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public are in any circumstances unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them."

Whatever one's political sympathies, Palestinian suicide bombers, al-Qaida, most paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland, and Eta can all reasonably be regarded as terrorists (or at least groups some of whose members perpetrate terrorist acts).

This doesn't mean that we don't have to be very careful about using the term: it is still a subjective judgment (one person's terrorist may be another person's freedom fighter). Often, alternatives such as militants, radicals, separatists, etc, may be more appropriate and less controversial, but this is a difficult area: references to the "resistance", for example, imply more sympathy to a cause than calling such fighters "insurgents". The most important thing is that, in news reporting, we are not seen — because of the language we use — to be taking sides

Tesco

not Tesco's

Tessa

tax-exempt special savings account, replaced by Isas

Test

(cricket) the third Test, etc

Texan

a person; the adjective is **Texas**: Texas Ranger, Texas oilwells, Texas tea, etc

textbook

that

do not use automatically after the word “said”, but it can be useful: you tend to read a sentence such as “he said nothing by way of an explanation would be forthcoming” as “he said nothing by way of an explanation” and then realise that it does not say that at all; “he said that nothing by way of an explanation would be forthcoming” is much clearer

that or which?

that defines, which informs: this is the house that Jack built, but this house, which Jack built, is now falling down

the

Leaving “the” out often reads like jargon: say the conference agreed to do something, not “conference agreed”; the government has to do, not “government has to”; the Super League (rugby), not “Super League”.

Avoid the “chancellor Gordon Brown” syndrome: do not use constructions such as “chancellor Gordon Brown said”. Prominent figures can just be named, with their function at second mention: “Gordon Brown said last night” (first mention); “the chancellor said” (subsequent mentions). Where it is thought necessary to explain who someone is, write “Neil Warnock, the Sheffield United manager, said” or “the Sheffield United manager, Neil Warnock, said”. In such cases the commas around the name indicate there is only one person in the position, so write “the Tory leader, Michael Howard, said” (only one person in the job), but “the former Tory prime minister John Major said” (there have been many).

lc for newspapers (the Guardian), magazines (the New Statesman), pubs (the Coach and Horses), bands (the Beatles, the Black Eyed Peas, the The), sports grounds (the Oval); uc for books (The Lord of the Rings), films (The Matrix), poems (The Waste Land), television shows (The West Wing), and placenames (The Hague)

theatregoer

theirs

no apostrophe

thermonuclear

Thermos

TM; say **vacuum flask**

thinktank

one word

Third Reich

third way

third world

lc, but **developing countries** is preferable

thoroughbred, thoroughgoing

threefold, threescore

three-line whip

thunderstorm

Tiananmen Square

Beijing

Tianjin

not Tientsin

tidal wave

just what it says it is

tsunami

huge wave caused by an underwater earthquake

tidewater

tikka masala

times

1am, 6.30pm, etc; 10 o'clock last night but 10pm yesterday; half past two, a quarter to three, etc; for 24-hour clock, 00.47, 23.59

tinfoil

titbit

not tidbit

titles

Do not italicise or put in quotes titles of books, films, TV programmes, paintings, songs, albums or anything else. Words in titles take initial caps except for a, and, for, from, in, of, the, to (except in initial position): A Tale of Two Cities, Happy End of the World, Shakespeare in Love, The God of Small Things, War and Peace, Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?, etc. Exception:the Review. See *italics*

T-junction

to-do

as in "what a to-do!"

Tolkien, JRR

(1892-1973) British author and philologist, notable for writing The Lord of the Rings and not spelling his name "Tolkein"

tomato

plural **tomatoes**

tonne

not ton: the metric tonne is 1,000kg (2,204.62lb), the British ton is 2,240lb, and the US ton is 2,000lb; usually there is no need to convert

top 10, top 40, etc

top hat

tornado

plural **tornadoes** (storm) **Tornado** plural **Tornados** (aircraft)

tortuous

a tortuous road — one that winds or twists **torturous** a torturous experience — one that involves pain or suffering

Tory party

totalisator, the tote

totalled

touchdown

Toussaint, Allen

US blues musician

Toussaint, Jean

US jazz musician

Toussaint L'Ouverture, Pierre Dominique

(1743-1803) leader of Haiti's slave revolt of 1791 and subsequent fight for independence, which was granted in 1801

town councillor, town hall

Townshend, Pete

member of the Who who didn't die before he got old

trademarks

(TM) Take care: use a generic alternative unless there is a very good reason not to, eg ballpoint pen, not biro (unless it really is a Biro, in which case it takes a cap B); say photocopy rather than Xerox, etc

trade union, trade unionist, trades union council, Trades Union Congress (TUC)

tragic

use with care, especially avoiding cliches such as "tragic accident"

transatlantic

Transport for London

TfL on second mention

Trans-Siberian railway

Travellers

uc: they are recognised as an ethnic group under the Race Relations Act

Treasury, the

treaties

lc, eg Geneva convention, treaty of Nice

Trekkers

how to refer to Star Trek fans unless you want to make fun of them, in which case they are **Trekkies**

trenchcoat

tricolour

French and Irish

trip-hop

Trips

trade-related intellectual property rights

trooper

soldier in a cavalry regiment

trouper

member of a troupe, or dependable worker

trooping the colour

tropic of cancer, tropic of capricorn

the Troubles

(Northern Ireland)

try to

never “try and”, eg “I will try to do something about this misuse of language”

tsar

not czar

tsetse fly

T-shirt

not tee-shirt

tsunami

wave caused by an undersea earthquake; not a tidal wave

tube, the

lc (London Underground is the name of the company); individual lines thus: Jubilee line, Northern line, etc; the underground

TUC

Trades Union Congress, so TUC Congress is tautological; the reference should be to the TUC conference

turgid

does not mean apathetic or sluggish — that's **torpid** — but swollen, congested, or (when used of language) pompous or bombastic

turkish delight

Turkmenistan

adjective **Turkmen**; its citizens are **Turkmen**, singular **Turkman**

Turkomans

(singular noun and adjective is **Turkoman**) are a formerly nomadic central Asian people who now form a minority in Iraq; they speak **Turkmen**

turnover

noun **turn over** verb

21st century

twofold

tying

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Uighur, Uighurs

the Uighur people, particularly of the Xinjiang region in China

Ukraine

no “the”; adjective **Ukrainian**

Ulster

acceptable in headlines to mean Northern Ireland, which in fact comprises six of the nine counties of the province of Ulster

Uluru

formerly known as Ayers Rock, though Ayers Rock can be used in headlines

Umist

University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, due to merge with the University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University

umlaut

In German placenames, ae, oe and ue should almost always be rendered ä, ö, ü. Family names, however, for the most part became petrified many years ago and there is no way of working out whether the e form or the umlaut should be used; you just have to find out for each individual

UN

no need to spell out United Nations, even at first mention

Unesco

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation; no need to spell it out

UN general assembly

UNHCR

United Nations high commissioner for refugees; not commission (although the name stands for both the high commissioner and the refugee agency s/he fronts)

Unicef United Nations Children's Fund; no need to spell it out

UN secretary general

UN security council

UN world food programme

unbiased

unchristian



uncooperative

underage

underestimate, understate

take care that you don't mean overestimate or overstate (we often get this wrong)

underground, the

but **London Underground** for name of company

under way

not underway

uninterested

means not taking an interest; not synonymous with disinterested, which means unbiased, objective

union flag

not union jack

unionists

(Northern Ireland), I.e. except in the name of a party, eg Ulster Unionist party

United Kingdom

England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland; no need to write in full, say Britain or the UK

universities

cap up, eg Sheffield University, Johns Hopkins University, Free University of Berlin

University College London

no comma; **UCL** after first mention

Unknown Soldier

tomb of the

unmistakable

upmarket

up to date

but in an up-to-date fashion

US

for United States, not USA; no need to spell out, even at first mention; America is also acceptable

utopian

U-turn

Uzbekistan

adjective **Uzbek**

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v

(roman) for versus, not vs: England v Australia, Rushden & Diamonds v Sheffield Wednesday, etc

V&A

abbreviation for Victoria and Albert Museum

Val d'Isère

Valparaíso

Valuation Office Agency

VOA after first mention

Vanessa-Mae

Vanuatu

formerly New Hebrides

Vargas Llosa, Mario

Peruvian writer and politician

Vaseline

TM



VAT

value added tax; no need to spell it out

VE Day

May 8 1945

VJ Day

August 15 1945

Vehicle Inspectorate

Velázquez, Diego

(1599-1660) Spanish painter

Velcro

TM

veld

not veldt

venal

open to bribery

venial

easily forgiven

venetian blind

veranda

not verandah

verdicts

recorded by coroners; returned by inquest juries

vermilion

very

usually very redundant

veterinary

veto, vetoes, vetoed, vetoing

vicar

a cleric of the Anglican church (which also has rectors and curates, etc), not of any other denomination

vice-chairman, vice-president

vichyssoise

vie, vying

Villa-Lobos, Heitor

(1887-1959) Brazilian composer

virtuoso

plural **virtuosos**

vis-a-vis

vocal cords

not chords

voiceover

volcano

plural **volcanos**

vortex

plural **vortexes**

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wagon

wah-wah pedal

Wales Office

not Welsh Office

walking stick

Wall's

ice-cream, sausages

Wal-Mart

Wap

(wireless application protocol) phones

wars

do not say "before/after the war" when you mean the second world war

first world war, second world war

Gulf war

(1991)

Iraq war

(2003)

Crimean, Boer, Korean, Vietnam wars

hundred years war

War of Jenkins' Ear

Was (Not Was)

defunct US rock band

Waste Land, The

poem by TS Eliot (not The Wasteland)

watercolour, watercourse, watermark, waterproof, waterworks

Watford Gap

a service area on the M1 in Northamptonshire, named after a nearby village 80 miles north of London; nothing to do with the Hertfordshire town of Watford, with which it is sometimes confused by lazy writers who think such phrases as “anyone north of the Watford Gap” a witty way to depict the unwashed northern hordes

web, webpage, website, world wide web

weight

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

Weight Watchers

TM

welch

to fail to honour an obligation, not welsh

Welch Regiment, Royal Welch Fusiliers

Welsh assembly

members are AMs

welfare state

wellbeing

wellnigh

Welsh, Irvine

Scottish author

welsh rarebit

west, western, the west, western Europe

western

(cowboy film)

West Bank

west coast mainline

West Country

Westminster Abbey

Weyerhaeuser

US pulp and paper company

wheelchair

say (if relevant) that someone uses a wheelchair, not that they are “in a wheelchair” or “wheelchair-bound” — stigmatising and offensive, as well as inaccurate

whence

means where from, so don't write “from whence”

whereabouts

singular: her whereabouts is not known

Which?

magazine

whisky

plural whiskies; but **Irish** and **US whiskey**

whistleblower

white

lc in racial context

white paper

Whitsuntide

not Whitsun

who or whom?

From a Guardian report: “The US kept up the pressure by naming nine Yugoslav military leaders operating in Kosovo whom it said were committing war crimes.” The “whom” should have been “who”. That one was caught by the sub, but it is a common mistake.

If in doubt, ask yourself how the clause beginning who/whom would read in the form of a sentence giving he, him, she, her, they or them instead: if the who/whom person turns into he/she/they, then “who” is right; if it becomes him/her/them, then it should be “whom”.

In the story above, “they” were allegedly committing the crimes, so it should be “who”.

In this example: “Blair was attacked for criticising Howard, whom he despised” — “whom” is correct because he despised “him”.

But in “Blair criticised Howard, who he thought was wrong” — “who” is correct, because it is “he” not “him” who is considered wrong.

Use of “whom” has all but disappeared from spoken English, and seems to be going the same way in most forms of written English too. If you are not sure, it is much better to use “who” when “whom” would traditionally have been required than to use “whom” incorrectly for “who”, which will make you look not just wrong but wrong and pompous

wicketkeeper

Widdecombe, Ann

Tory cabinet minister turned Guardian agony aunt

wide awake

Wi-Fi

TM; the generic term is **wireless computer network**

Wimpey

houses **Wimpy** burgers

Windermere

not Lake Windermere; note that Windermere is also the name of the town

wines

lc, whether taking their name from a region (eg beaujolais, bordeaux, burgundy, chablis, champagne) or a grape variety (eg cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay, merlot, muscadet).

The regions themselves of course are capped up: so one might drink a burgundy from Burgundy, or a muscadet from the Loire valley; as are wines of individual chateaux, eg I enjoyed a glass of Cos d'Estournel 1970

wing commander

abbreviate on second mention to Wing Co; Wing Commander Barry Johnson, subsequently Wing Co Johnson

wipeout

noun **wipe out** verb

withhold

wits' end

wiz

as in "she's a total wiz at maths", not whiz or whizz

woeful

womenswear

Woolworths

working tax credit

replaced the working families tax credit

World Bank

world championship

World Cup

(football, cricket, rugby)

World Health Organisation

WHO (caps) on second mention

world heritage site

World Series

It is a baseball myth that this event got its name from the New York World: originally known as the World's Championship Series, it had nothing to do with the newspaper. However, it has become tedious every time the World Series comes round to see its name cited as an example of American arrogance so please don't do it

World Trade Centre, Ground Zero

but the twin towers

worldwide

but **world wide web**

wrack

seaweed

racked

with guilt, not wracked; **rack and ruin**

WWE

World Wrestling Entertainment, formerly the World Wrestling Federation



WWF

the organisation that used to be known as the World Wide Fund for Nature (or, in the US, World Wildlife Fund) wishes to be known simply by its initials

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xenophobe, xenophobia, xenophobic

Xerox

TM; say **photocopy**

Xhosa

South African ethnic group and language

Xi'an

city in China where the Terracotta Warriors are located

Xmas

avoid; use Christmas unless writing a headline, up against a deadline, and desperate

x-ray

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Yahoo!

(the company)

year

say 2004, not “the year 2004”; for a span of years use hyphen, thus: 2004-05 not 2004/5

yearbook

Yekaterinburg

Yellow Pages

TM

Yemen

not “the Yemen”

yes campaign, no campaign

not Yes or “yes” campaign

yo-yo

Yo-Yo Ma

cellist

Yorkshire

North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire but **east Yorkshire**

Yorkshire dales

but **North York Moors** national park

yorkshire pudding, yorkshire terrier

Yorkshire Ripper

Young, Lady

full title Lady Young of Old Scone (Labour): chairman of English Nature; Lady Young of Farnworth (Tory), a former leader of the Lords and staunch defender of section 28, died in 2002

yours

no apostrophe

yuan

Chinese currency; we don't call it renminbi

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Zapatero, José Luis Rodríguez

Spanish politician; Mr Zapatero on second mention

zeitgeist

Zellweger, Renée

Zephaniah, Benjamin

zero

plural **zeros**

Zeta-Jones, Catherine

zeugma

"The queen takes counsel and tea" (Alexander Pope)

zhoosh

an example of gay slang (*see Polari*), used in the fashion industry and on US television shows such as Will and Grace and Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, it has various shades of meaning: (noun) clothing, ornamentation; (verb) zhoosh your hair, zhoosh yourself up; **zhooshy** (adjective) showy

zigzag

no hyphen

zloty

Polish unit of currency



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