House style for publishing online

East Sussex County Council

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Document summary

Guidance on important areas where inconsistencies and common mistakes arise. This includes apostrophes, capital letters, dates, numbers and people's titles.

Contents

About this document:

Enquiries: Web Editorial Team Author: Nick Foster Telephone: 01273 482103 Email: webstaff@eastsussex.gov.uk **Download this document** From: eastsussex.gov.uk/publishingstandards	**Version number**: 2.0 **Related information** Web writing standards

Accessibility help Zoom in or out by holding down the Control key and turning the mouse wheel. CTRL and click on the table of contents to navigate. Press CTRL and Home key to return to the top of the document Press Alt-left arrow to return to your previous location.

Abbreviations, acronyms and symbols

See also: [Councillors](#)

Do not use abbreviations:

- 'February' not 'Feb'
- 'Tuesday' not 'Tues'
- 'carbon dioxide' not 'CO_2'
- 'postgraduate certificate' not 'PgCert' (apart from in course titles)

An exception is when the word is most commonly written in it's shortened from:

- 'Mr' instead of 'Mister'
- BBC, HIV, BT

Acronyms

You might know what CA means, but readers probably won't. If you must use an acronym, spell out the phrase or title in full the first time you use it on each web page.

Write acronyms that are pronounced as words with initial capitals (title case):

- Ofsted
- Defra

List of common acronyms within the Council

See the glossary on our Intranet:

- http://esccintranet/intranet/escc/glossary/

And

You can start a sentence with 'And', 'But' or 'Now' if appropriate but avoid overusing them. Try restructuring your sentence to get around this.

The ampersand symbol (&) can stand out in large blocks of text and some people may not know what it stands for. Only use it if you are referring to an actual company's or organisation's name – for example, 'Marks & Spencer' or 'Brighton & Hove City Council'.

In all other cases, use the word 'and'.

And/or

Avoid using 'and/or'. For example, do not say 'We can provide trips to Seven Sisters, Rye and/or Winchelsea'.

Just say 'We can provide trips to Seven Sisters, Rye and Winchelsea'.

Brackets

Use brackets sparingly to show extra text that explains something, or to refer to another part of the page.

- 'Print off the form (below) and fill it in'

eg

'eg' means 'for example'. Always use 'for example' or 'such as' instead.

Do not confuse 'Eg' with 'ie', which means 'that is'. See ie.

etc (etcetera)

'Etc' means 'and so on'. Do not use this abbreviation, use 'and so on' instead.

- 'Homework, teacher training, bullying, exams, and so on are among the topics covered.'

ie

'ie' means 'that is'. Use 'in other words' or 'that is' instead.

per cent (%)

Use the symbol % in text and tables.

Use numerals for all numbers, including 1 to 9, if followed by %.

- 1%, 5%, 20%, 100%

Avoid using the words 'per cent' if possible.

See Numbers.

Regions

In abbreviations, use capitals without spaces and full stops. For example, 'South East' becomes 'SE', 'South West' becomes 'SW'.

See also Capital letters.

Bullet points

Lists are excellent for splitting information up. We suggest you use bullets for lists of two to eight items on average. See the example below.

If your bullet points lead on from a **fragment of a sentence**:

- use a colon and then begin the bullet points
- the first letter of each bullet point should be lower case and there should not be a full stop at the end of each bullet point
- use a full stop at the end of the list.

Do not use semicolons or the word 'and' in this sort of bulleted list.

If your list follows on from a **complete sentence ending in a full stop**, each bullet point should have a capital letter at the start of the first word and a full stop at the end of each bullet point, as shown in the example below.

There are two main types of list.

- You can have a list of separate points with an introductory statement (like this list).
- Or, you can have a continuous sentence with several listed points (see below).

Your list should include:

- relevant information about an issue
- what the reader needs to do
- a contact point.

Remember, you cannot have a full stop in the middle of a bullet point if the style of list is a continuous sentence like the one above.

Capital letters

See also:

- [Acronyms](#)
- [East Sussex County Council](#)

Only use initial capitals when you are sure you need them – for the start of sentences and proper nouns. Using too many capitals in your sentences can make your writing difficult to read, particularly on screen.

Giving a word a capital letter to add significance suggests that what the word represents is worthy of special interest or is authoritative. This is often not the intention.

For example, you should rewrite 'Once we have included a Clause in the Plan' as 'Once we have included a clause in the plan…'

Avoid block capitals. People see them as SHOUTING on screen and they are difficult to read.

The following specific rules always apply.

- The 'county' is lower case.

- The name of an organisation has initial capitals – The 'Institute of Chartered Surveyors' would be in capitals, but when referred to as 'the institute', use lower case.

- When referring to East Sussex County Council as 'the Council' or 'County Council', use upper-case initials. See [East Sussex County Council](#).

- Books, films, newspapers and magazine titles have initial capitals. Online, put them in inverted commas – 'Your County'.

- Schemes, programmes and initiatives are in upper case – the 'Bring a Child to Work' scheme, the 'Buy With Confidence' scheme.

- Job titles on the website should be upper case – 'Administrative Assistant', 'Legal Officer'. This helps people to see the job title more easily when they read the text on screen.

- Departments, services and units are in upper case – 'Transport and Environment Department', 'Children's Services', 'Child Protection Unit'.

A note about titles of books

When writing the title of a new publication, only use an initial capital for the first word unless it is a proper noun – for example, 'A driver's guide to road safety in East Sussex'.

However, if you are writing the title of a publication that already exists, you should copy it word for word (even if the start of each word is in upper case).

Cabinet

Refer to 'the Cabinet', using an upper-case 'C'. For example, you would write 'We have seven lead members of the Cabinet'.

Councillors

When talking about councillors in general, use lower-case 'c' – for example, 'Conservative councillors'. When referring to a named councillor, use upper-case 'C' – for example, 'Councillor Smith'.

You can use the abbreviation 'Cllr' before the name if you are limited for space.

Do not use a full stop after 'Cllr'.

Regions

Use capitals for regional place names.

- 'the South', 'the South East'

When using them as an adverb, use lower case.

- He travelled north-west, south-east.

Religion

Use capitals for religions and religious denominations.

'Christian', 'Christianity', 'Church of England', 'Greek Orthodox Church', 'Roman Catholics', 'Baptists', 'Mormons', 'Buddhism', 'Islam'

Use capitals for 'the Bible', 'the Koran', 'the Talmud'.

Write 'Muslim' (not 'Moslem').

Dates and times

The following list gives the style of dates we should use:

- 'On 1 August'
- 'Friday 1 August 2003' (one day, no time)
- 'Friday 26 May 2006 to Thursday 1 June 2006'
- 'Friday 26 May 2006, 9am to 2pm' (when writing dates with times, write the date first)
- '26 to 27 May 2006' (different days, no times, same month)
- 'Friday 26 May 2006 to Thursday 1 June 2006' (different days, no times, different month)
- 'Start: Friday 26 May 2006, 9am
Finish: Saturday 27 May 2006' (different days, with start time)
- 'Start: Friday 26 May 2006, 9am
Finish: Saturday 27 May 2006, 2pm' (different days, with start and end time)
- '1990s' or 'the '90s', never 'Nineties'
- 'the 21st century'
- 'the class of '69'
- '2000 to 2001'
- '2004/05' to show the financial year
- '2007/08 to 2008/09' to show a range of financial years.

See also [Numbers](#) and [Time](#).

East Sussex County Council

The first time you refer to the Council on a web page, write 'East Sussex County Council'. After this, you can abbreviate it to 'we', 'us' or 'our'.

Don't abbreviate 'East Sussex County Council' to 'ESCC', except for internal documents.

When referring to East Sussex County Council as 'the Council' or 'the County Council', refer to it in upper case. Be consistent – if you are using 'the Council', don't interchange with 'the County Council'.

Full contact details for our office

The following layout shows you how to format our contact details and those for any individual or organisation.

East Sussex County Council
County Hall
St Anne's Crescent
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 1UE

Phone: 0345 60 80 190
Fax: 01273 481261
Email: admin@eastsussex.gov.uk
Website: eastsussex.gov.uk

Numbers

You should write numbers from zero to nine as words, and from 10 onwards in figures. Exceptions to this are if the numbers one to nine:

- relate to a standard unit of measurement – for example, '£5', '5cm', '8pm', 'page 5'

- are in a table

- are at the beginning of a sentence – try to spell out or reword the sentence to avoid the problem

- are in a range of two or more related numbers, at least one of which is higher than nine – 'the accommodation sleeps 8 to 12 people'

- are part of a phrase or title that you didn't create – 'Key Stage 2'.

Use commas in thousands – for example, '1,000', '2,000' and so on. Use million in full – '£2 million' rather than '£2m'.

Fractions

Write fractions out in words.

- 'Two-thirds of the students will begin the year…'

- 'We believe a quarter of the population will be affected.'

But if the fraction is attached to a whole number, write this in numerals.

- '2½'

Money

When writing out money, use the following.

- '£' and 'p', not 'pounds' and 'pence'. Only use the '£' symbol with figures.
- '£1', not '£1.00'
- '99p', not '£0.99'
- '2.5 million', not '£2,500,000'
- Only write 'pound' or 'pence' in full when it's not attached to a figure – 'Britain saves the pound.'

Phone

Including spaces in numbers makes them easier to read:

- for the main Council numbers, follow the format '0345 XX XX XXX'
- for other landlines and mobiles, use the format '0XXXX XXX XXX'
- don't put brackets around the code and don't include the town
- on the website, do not use the UK international dialling code.

Time

Use 'am' and 'pm', not 'o'clock'.

For midday use '12 noon'.

Do not use unnecessary zeros – for example, '9am', not '9.00am'. Do not use the 24-hour clock – instead of '18.30', say '6.30pm'.

You do not need to leave a space between the number and 'am' or 'pm'.

Always use a full stop not a colon – for example, '6.45pm', not '6:45pm'.

When displaying a precise length of time, use the word 'to' (with spaces either side) rather than a dash or hyphen.

- '2pm to 4pm'

Be specific about time periods. Try not to use words or phrases that are meaningless if you do not qualify them with a specific reference to time – for example, 'recent' and 'last year'. You should be more specific to avoid confusion, especially for people reading on the web. 'Recent' information will be out of date very quickly unless you update it, as is the case with anything 'new'.

See Dates and times for how to write dates with times.

Titles

Titles of work

Don't write titles in italics. Put titles and so on in inverted commas, as in

'The Mill on the Floss'.

See also Capital letters.

People

We do not use a full stop after 'Dr,' 'Mr' and 'Mrs'.

When giving a person's job title, if you don't know the sex of the person or how they prefer their title to be phrased, use a job title which is more general. For example, replace 'chairman' with 'chair'.

Chairman

When referring to the Chairman of East Sussex County Council, you should use the following two options, depending on the context.

- 'Councillor <First name> <Last name>'
- 'The Chairman'

See also [Councillors](#).

Web addresses

Our house style is to leave out the 'http://' and 'www.' when writing web addresses.

- 'For further information, visit bbc.co.uk/news'

However, test each web address first. If the web address doesn't work without having the 'www.', add this back in.

Do not put a full stop at the end of a web or email address, even if it falls at the end of a sentence.

Punctuation

Apostrophes (')

We use the apostrophe in the following instances.

- To show that a letter, or letters, have been left out – 'Don't forget to send your cheque'.

- To show possession.
In the singular, the apostrophe comes before the possessive 's', as in 'the customer's complaint'. In the plural, it comes after the plural 's', as in 'the customers' complaint'. But if the plural doesn't end in 's', we add an apostrophe and an 's', as in 'the women's committee'.

- In some expressions of time – 'Thursday's meeting has been cancelled with only two days' warning.'

Be aware of the following points.

- Plurals do not need apostrophes. So 'We sell apple's and pear's' is wrong. Also, plurals like '1990s', 'VDUs' and 'MPs' do not need apostrophes.

- 'It's' with an apostrophe means 'it is' or 'it has'. It does not mean 'belonging to it', which does not have an apostrophe, as in 'The company is confident about its future'.

Colon (:)

A colon is used to show a significant pause between two phrases. Or, it is used to start a list.

- 'The course covers many areas: sociology, psychology and law.'

Never follow a colon with a dash (:-) and never put a character space before a colon.

Comma (,)

A comma adds a pause to a sentence – 'Excuse me, are you Margaret Thatcher or do you just look like her?'. You can also use commas to break up items in a list, as in 'I need eggs, flour, milk and bread'.

You do not normally need a comma before 'and' in a list.

- 'Chocolate, milk and raspberries'.

However, there are exceptions.

- 'The work will be carried out by Peterson Brothers, Abercrombie Jones, and Parker and Knight Industries.'
- 'He is having porridge, and bacon and eggs for breakfast.'

Dashes (–)

Dashes (sometimes called 'en-dashes') are different from hyphens (-).

Use a pair of dashes to make a break in sentences, much in the same way as brackets.

- 'He thought – not for the first time – that he should go.'

This is known as a 'parenthetical phrase' and you can use it to emphasise your point.

You can use a single dash to introduce a statement which summarises text before it.

- 'Chips, pies and chocolates – the basis of his diet.'

Or, you can use a dash to introduce an afterthought.

- 'How amazing – champagne!'

Do not use dashes in number, date or time ranges, use the word 'to' instead.

- 'People aged 55 to 60'

To create a dash in Word, use Ctrl and the minus key on the numeric keypad. However, if you forget this, the software sometimes corrects it automatically.

See also Hyphens (-) and Dates and times.

Ellipsis (…)

Ellipsis marks show a pause in speaking or when something has been left out of a written quotation. But when you edit quotes when writing up an interview, you do not need to use the dots each time you leave out a word. Don't use ellipsis marks instead of a colon.

Exclamation mark (!)

Exclamation marks are rarely necessary. Use them sparingly and only after a genuine exclamation. There is no space before the exclamation mark.

- 'Stop! Thief!'

Forward slash (/)

Only use these in web addresses – for example, eastsussex.gov.uk/yourcounty.

Don't use them instead of 'or' – for example, 'he/she'.

Full stop (.)

Take care not to use commas if a full stop and new sentence is more appropriate.

Do not use full stops after abbreviations such as 'BA' or 'Mrs', or after website or email addresses.

Leave one blank space after a full stop.

Hyphens (-)

A hyphen is used when two words are read as one. There are no spaces either side of a hyphen (unlike a dash).

Nouns that are made up of two words have no hyphen.

- 'They are all in their first year.'

Adjectives (which refer to nouns) do have a hyphen.

- 'I am a full-time student.'
- 'A well-dressed woman'

Broadly speaking, if a word ends in '–ly', it does not need to be followed

by a hyphen.

- 'This broad-based project…'
- 'This broadly based project…'

Below are some helpful hints.

- We do not hyphenate 'email', 'online' or 'website'.
- 'Postgraduate' is one word, not hyphenated, and so is 'undergraduate'.
- Write 'work-related', not 'work related'.

Do not break words over a line with a hyphen.

Do not use hyphens in number, date or time ranges, use the word 'to' instead.

- 'The exhibition will be open 10am to 5pm'

See also Dashes (–).

Semicolon (;)

Online, do not use semicolons as they are difficult to tell apart from colons.