



Rhagoriaeth i bawb - Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

Estyn Writing Guide July 2008



**BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE**



The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities (LAs);
- ▲ primary schools;
- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ adult community-based learning;
- ▲ youth support services;
- ▲ youth and community work training;
- ▲ LAs;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies;
- ▲ offender learning; and
- ▲ the education, guidance and training elements of the Department for Work and Pensions funded training programmes.

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Introduction by the Chief Inspector, Dr Bill Maxwell

Estyn has had an in-house writing guide for some time, but we now wish to share this guide with as many people as possible who have an interest in writing reports for Estyn, for example additional inspectors and registered inspectors.

We are committed as an organisation to producing documents which are clear, accurate and in plain English and/or Welsh. This is because we want as wide an audience as possible to be able to read and understand our findings. Our aim is to make sure that a lay reader has a very good chance of understanding any Estyn report when they read it for the first time and to understand it in the way we intended. A clear style of report writing will help to achieve this.

This guidance aims to help writers and editors of reports to achieve a plain and clear style of report writing. It will also help to make sure that all of Estyn's reports follow a similar style and format.

We have developed this guidance over a number of years. It is not exhaustive. It focuses mainly on those aspects of style, vocabulary and grammar which have proved troublesome for writers and editors of reports in the past. Writers and editors will need to use their judgement where there is no specific guidance available in this document. In such cases, they should keep in mind the overall aim of writing clear, plain reports for an interested reader who is not a specialist in education or training.

Nearly everyone has an opinion, often strongly held, about a particular word, phrase or aspect of grammar. However, in order to achieve consistency, writers and editors of Estyn reports should follow this guidance as much as they can.

We are keen to update this guidance in ways that will help writers and editors of reports, and we are very happy to receive suggestions about how to improve it. If you have any suggestions or queries about this guide, then please contact Estyn using this email address: publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk.

Dr Bill Maxwell
HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales

Introduction

Why do we need a writing guide?

- Estyn reports need to be clear and unambiguous so that a wide-ranging audience can understand what we are saying.
- We write to inform the public about standards and quality in education and training; we should not assume that our readers are all teachers or educationalists.
- Our published reports are public documents and they should provide a model of writing that is polished and clear.
- Editing reports takes time so we need to reduce the amount of editing that reports require in order to make the best possible use of everyone's time.

What is the role of this writing guide?

- This writing guide is here to help every writer and editor of Estyn reports to improve their work.
- It is designed to help writers and editors achieve consistency of approach across all of Estyn's written work. It sets out an agreed Estyn house style.
- Estyn colleagues should follow the guidance even where they may have a different view about a preferred style from the one set out in the guide.
- The guide aims to be easily accessible to everyone with an interest in Estyn's writing.

Who is involved in the writing process?

- The reporting inspector (RI) remains responsible for the report.
- Team members contribute sections of the report as required by the RI.
- The RI writes the inspection report after receiving relevant draft sections from colleagues.
- The completed first draft should be as near to a final draft as possible.
- The role of the editor (for HMI reports this is the role of Managing HMI and Heads of Directorate) is to assure the quality of the report by checking and editing its contents. The quality of the first draft should be such that it does not require substantial re-writing by editors.

- Editors need to strike an appropriate balance in their work by making sure they intervene only to ensure that the report is clear, internally consistent and conforms to Estyn's in-house style. If writing requires substantial editing to achieve this, then it should be returned as soon as possible to the original writer for further work. The authors of reports should take responsibility for them.
- For HMI reports, the Head of Directorate and Chief Inspector have the right to amend any report before publication.

Where does writing take place?

- Team members should undertake their writing on word processors and submit drafts in MS Word.
- Editing usually takes place using 'Track changes' within Word, but can also take place on hard copies of reports where this helps the editor.

When should colleagues use the guide?

- Colleagues should follow this guidance when writing any published report.
- Colleagues should aim to write reports according to the requirements of each inspection and according to the timescales set out in pre-inspection briefing letters and the work programme.
- Colleagues should edit reports as soon as possible after they receive the draft and following the timescales set out in the work programme.

General guidance

Make every report internally consistent and give it a strong degree of coherence and stylistic wholeness. Separate sections should not adopt different styles or have different voices so that they jar against each other. The aim should be to have one style throughout the report.

Make sure that each paragraph of the report is clear and in the most appropriate place within the report.

Make sure that the sentences in a paragraph follow the most logical sequence.

Remove any unnecessary repetition.

Avoid internal contradiction whereby statements made in one part of the report contradict statements or judgements in another part of the report.

Try to avoid using the same words frequently within the same paragraph.

Where a paragraph has many uses of 'but' or 'however', check that they have not modified a favourable comment in such a way as to cancel it out.

At the start of each paragraph, get the main point across first. Ideally, each paragraph should start with the main point. Where a paragraph contains an evaluation this should always come at the start, never in the middle or at the end. Most readers do not read everything, but look for signposts to guide their reading along. They will often scan the first sentence of each paragraph and look for words that interest them. If they only read the first sentence of every paragraph in the report, they should come away from it understanding the main points. Gathering these first sentences together should help most readers to glean the main findings of any report.

Try to look again at any writing before submitting a final draft. Try to leave written work for a while before returning to look it over, even if it is just for an hour or so. You will see it with a fresh pair of eyes and you will be far more likely to spot any weaknesses in it. Please keep this guidance in mind and close at hand when you are writing or editing a report.

Try to make sure that the balance of strengths and shortcomings in a report section reflects the inspection grade awarded. This should also be reflected in the balance of positive and negative words in the report section.

The main findings and recommendations of reports should contain no new facts or findings. Include in the main findings or recommendations what has already been mentioned in the main body of the report.

Make sure that the report is mainly evaluative rather than mainly descriptive. Only use description where necessary, for example when setting out an example of good or outstanding practice or giving a necessary context for judgements.

Do not write sentences that appear to advocate or endorse particular approaches or commercial schemes.

Avoid speculation. This means avoiding the suggestion that by following a particular action a specific consequence will inevitably ensue, as exemplified in the following: 'The provision of a newsletter would ensure that parents are better informed about the school'.

Be careful about making judgements about plans for the future when evaluating institutions. The mere presence of plans does not in itself guarantee its successful implementation.

Avoid making hidden recommendations. In the body of the report avoid phrases like 'There is a need to...'

Avoid commendations as in 'Staff should be congratulated for...' and other similar phrases.

Before you submit a draft for editing, it is always a good idea to do the following:

- (1) Read the first sentence of each paragraph. Does each one have the main point or evaluation as the first sentence?
- (2) Look at the size of the paragraphs on the page. Are some paragraphs too dense and complex? Can you divide the paragraphs into smaller units?
- (3) Use the spell-checker. Consider each choice carefully.
- (4) Look at the readability statistics. How many passive sentences are there? Have you got 5% or less? Is there more you can do to make your text clearer? (For further guidance on readability, see later in this guide)

Guidance on style

The following guidance on style aims to foster clear communication and to make Estyn's reports as readable as possible.

Active rather than passive

The active voice is nearly always more direct and clear than the passive voice. Put the person doing the action first and use an active verb. So, rather than writing 'students are assessed every term', change this to 'teachers assess students every term'. Sometimes, the passive is useful, so this is not a blanket rule. However, you should be aware of your use of the passive and know why you are using it. See the section on 'Readability' later.

Adverbs

Avoid putting adverbs in front of verbs, e.g. 'Teachers effectively plan lessons and fully involve pupils in discussions'. Instead, change this sentence to 'Teachers plan lessons effectively and involve pupils fully in discussions'.

Apostrophes

These probably cause more confusion than any other punctuation mark.

Apostrophes either show that a letter is missing or they show possession.

In inspection reports, it is very unusual to see a need for the first type of apostrophe, as in 'don't' or 'isn't'. The style required in reports means that these would change to a more formal form, as in 'do not' and 'is not'.

The second type of apostrophe, showing possession, causes more difficulty, often because some writers use one where it is not needed.

There is no apostrophe where the word is plural, ends in s, and there is no idea of possession.

'Learners enjoy their work' – more than one learner, no idea of possession, therefore no apostrophe. The same is true of 'Learners achieve well' and 'Employers take the view that training their staff is important'.

However, an apostrophe is required when there is an idea of possession.

'Learners' portfolios are of good quality' – there is more than one learner, they 'possess' the portfolios, so there is an apostrophe after the person or persons that possess the portfolios, i.e. after 'learners'.

As a general rule, the apostrophe goes after the person or thing that possesses the object. So, 'the employers' premises' means the premises belong to the employers

(plural), whereas 'the employer's premises' means the premises belong to the employer (singular).

Audience

Assume as your intended audience a lay person with a general interest education or training, but with no knowledge of specialist terms and abbreviations.

Avoid offensive language

Avoid language which may cause offence. So, use chair, chairperson, or chair of governors, rather than chairman or chairwoman. Use headteacher or principal (where this is appropriate) not headmaster, or headmistress. Use 'they' instead of phrases like 'his or her', 'he or she', or just try to rephrase the sentence. Avoid phrases such as 'Christian name', use 'first name' instead. Use positive language about disability. For example, do not write 'pupils suffering from autism', use 'pupils with autism' instead.

Commas

The general rule nowadays is to avoid using too many commas.

However, always use a comma after 'however' when it starts a sentence, and use commas to separate 'however' from the rest of a sentence when used mid-sentence, as in the following examples: 'However, standards in Year 3 are poor' or 'In Year 3, however, standards are poor'.

Always use a comma before 'but' when it links and contrasts two parts of a sentence, for example: 'Standards are good in Year 4, but they have many shortcomings in Year 5'.

Use a comma before 'for example' or 'e.g.'.

Use a comma before any qualifying term or phrase at the start of a sentence, as in 'In general,...' and 'Overall,...' and 'As a result,...' and 'Currently,...' and 'In many of the classes inspected, the learners...'

Use a comma when introducing a year group or a subject or learning area at the start of a sentence, as in: 'In Year 3, standards are good' and 'In history, standards are outstanding' and 'In performing arts, learners achieve good standards in dance'.

Common, familiar words

These will often be clearer and more direct, so use 'buy' rather than 'purchase', 'start' rather than 'commence', 'finish' or 'complete' instead of 'finalise'. See 'Guidance on specific words and phrases' later in this guide.

Dictionaries and spell-checking

If you consult a dictionary, in hard copy or on your computer, make sure it is a British/UK dictionary and that it is up-to-date. Some dictionaries are more generous

than others in their acceptance of current usage. A good way to gauge their stance is to look at their attitude to hyphens as these tend to get dropped as words become more current within the language, so 'electro-magnetic' becomes 'electromagnetic'. The same is true of capital letters. You can see both factors at work in the evolution of 'email' from first 'E-mail' to 'e-mail' then 'email'. As a rough guide, go with the more current usage.

Evaluative words

Certain words are more usually associated with certain grade than others. The following is a list of words and phrases that may help inspectors to reflect the grades they have awarded. The use of any one word or phrase does not of itself make any specific grade inevitable, as this will depend on the balance of strengths and shortcomings overall, but they are here as a rough guide:

Grade 1: Outstanding, excellent, very good, innovative, exceptional, superior, exemplary, superb, very high standard, high quality, perfect, extensive, highly creative, highly imaginative, well above expectations, highly effective

Grade 2: Good, lively, successful, skilful, worthwhile, beneficial, valuable, able, thorough, useful, powerful, comprehensive, used well, consistently good, effective, particularly (plus appropriate word from grade 3 below)

Grade 3: Satisfactory, appropriate, suitable, efficient, competent, relevant, adequate, sufficient, enough, valid, solid, sound, average, consistent

Grade 4 or 5: Unsatisfactory, poor, insufficient, inefficient, none, no, inappropriate, ineffective, unsuitable, unable, weak, inconsistent, irregular, limited

Hyphen or no hyphen

Overall, we tend to use fewer hyphens than in the past. Please note the following hyphenated and non-hyphenated words:

action plan	community-based
action planning	CD-ROM
Advanced level	co-operate
A level	co-operation
asylum seeker	co-ordinate
benchmark	co-ordination
bilingual	day-to-day
case study	drop-in workshops
childcare	e-commerce
child minder	e-learning
classroom	extra-curricular
coursework	first-hand
day release	full-time
email	fund-raising
field work	in-house
first aid	inner-city school

<p>flexistudy form teacher group work handout (noun) healthcare homepage interactive interrelated jobcentre landbased laptop Learndirect less able lifelong mixed ability more able motor vehicle multicultural multimedia newsletter no one noticeboard ongoing online peer assessor peer assessment postcode postgraduate rearrange rebuild reconsider reiterate restructure reuse schoolchildren Skillbuild Step-up subcommittee SureStart taskforce teamwork textbook timescale timetable underachievement under-fives underdeveloped undergraduate underperform underperformance</p>	<p>in-service long-term multi-agency multi-ethnic newly-qualified off-site off-the-job on-the-job one-to-one over-emphasis part-time post-16 pupil-teacher ratio purpose-built record-keeping re-examine re-inspection role-play roll-on roll-off school-based self-assessment self-evaluation self-esteem short-term sixth-form (as an adjective, e.g. 'Sixth-form provision') target-setting three-quarters (and in all fractions) two-fifths (and in all fractions) up-to-date vice-principal vice-chairman vice-president well-behaved (hyphen before noun) well-planned (hyphen before noun) well-organised (hyphen before noun) Welsh-medium wheelchair-user whole-school work-based</p>
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video conferencing website well behaved (no hyphen after noun) wellbeing well planned (no hyphen after noun) well organised (no hyphen after noun) wheelchair whiteboard word processing workload workplace work placement worksheet Workstep youth work	
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Numbers, quantities and proportions

It is important to be careful when writing about various proportions of learners. Terms and phrases linked to proportions may mean different things to different readers. Often in writing overall evaluations of standards and quality it is unhelpful to be absolutely precise about exact proportions. In Estyn reports, please use the following terms and make sure you reflect the broad proportions shown below. However, please recognise that they are indicative relationships only.

nearly all	= with very few exceptions
most	= 90% or more
many	= 70% or more
a majority	= over 60%
half	= 50%
around half	= close to 50%
a minority	= below 40%
few	= below 20%
very few	= less than 10%

Try not to use the word 'number' in a vague way, as in 'A number of lessons have many shortcomings'. Be more specific and use a word which gives more of an idea of the quantity of lessons involved.

Use majority and minority in contexts where there is clearly a significant difference between the two. Technically, a majority may be 51% with a minority of 49%, but there is in effect little difference between the two. In this case, it is best to write in terms of half or around half. See above.

Some difficulties arise when sentences contain a singular noun which in itself denotes more than one thing (collective nouns). Words like class, committee, corporation, council, department, government, majority, minority, number and staff fall into this group. Such words may be singular or plural depending on the context and this is an area where it is difficult to set hard-and-fast rules.

The plural verb should follow the most common words for specifying quantities and groups, such as nearly all, most, many, a majority, half, around half, a minority, a few and very few.

Use the plural verb for proportions and fractions of groups, as in '20% of pupils achieve a high grade at GCSE' and 'a third of students come from deprived wards'.

Use the singular verb when there is a word that clearly identifies each group, as in 'Each class receives four periods of French' or 'Every council in Wales has a strategic plan'.

The word 'number' is an exception to these guidelines. Use the singular verb when the word has a definite article, as in '**The** number of pupils in the school has dropped a great deal'. When it is introduced with an indefinite article, use the plural, as in '**A** number of schools in the LEA have falling rolls'. However, in both these cases, try to avoid using the word 'number' and be more specific instead.

If it is necessary to draw distinctions between the actions of the group as a whole and the individuals within a group, then try to use a pronoun to make it clear. The pronoun will also force the verb into the singular or the plural, as in 'the council agrees **its** strategic priorities every year' (singular) or 'the council agree **their** strategic priorities every year' (plural). The emphasis in the first is more on the council as a whole whereas in the second the emphasis tends to fall more on the collective actions of individual councillors.

Plural verbs should always be used after plural nouns. In this context, note that monitoring and evaluation are two separate things, as are leadership and management. Each of these pairs requires a plural verb, as in 'Leadership and management **are** good'. However, 'The quality of leadership and management **is** good'. This correctly has a singular verb because the subject of the verb is a single item (the quality) even though the sentence is actually about the quality of two things (leadership and management).

Readability

This is a feature within Microsoft Word and it can help you to get a feel for how complicated your writing may appear to a reader. It usually comes up when the spelling and grammar check is finished. This is not an exact science, and using a lot of bullet points can confuse Word's calculations. However, it does help to concentrate the mind on making writing clearer. You can also use the highlighting function to look only at a selected piece of text, so you can avoid any bulleted text if you want to.

To use the readability check, go to Tools within Word and click on Spelling and Grammar. You will need to make sure that the program is set to analyse the readability statistics. You can check this by going to Tools, then Options, then the Spelling and Grammar tab and making sure there is a tick in the readability box.

The readability check will give you a number of useful statistics. The two most useful ones are the Flesch scale of reading ease and the information on passive sentences.

The Flesch scale of reading ease runs from 0 to 100. In basic terms, the higher the score, the plainer the writing you have produced. Try to aim for a score of 40-50 at least.

The readability score will also tell you the number and percentage of passive sentences you have used. Aim to use as few as possible.

Short sentences and paragraphs

Be prepared to rewrite and simplify any long sentence or paragraph. Often, the longer the sentence or paragraph, the more complex it is for a lay reader. Usually, it is only a matter of creating two or three clearer sentences out of one over-complex sentence.

Split infinitives

Make sure you do not put anything between 'to' and the verb it comes with, so do not write 'to effectively assess the work of learners, but write 'to assess the work of learners effectively'.

Verbs rather than abstract nouns

It is more helpful to use verbs rather than abstract nouns. So, try to write 'students use learning resources well' rather than 'students make good use of learning resources' or 'the use students make of learning resources is good'.

Words and phrases to avoid

Words we use in our everyday language within education and training can appear alien to a lay reader. We may not even recognise such words as jargon. A good example is a word like 'differentiation'. We know what we mean by the term, but a lay person may struggle to understand its specific meaning within an educational context. It may be better to recast the sentence to avoid the word or you may have to use a much longer phrase to explain your meaning, e.g. 'adapting work to meet the individual needs of the learners'.

Writers should avoid words that are ambiguous or sloppy, esoteric or jargon, fashionable, clichéd or patronising. Writers should articulate their thoughts and evaluations clearly and unambiguously.

The following list is not exhaustive by any means, but it is a list of the kinds of words and phrases that writers should generally avoid:

'classroom situation'
'learning environment'
'meaningful learning situations'
'structured learning experiences'
'meaningful'
'didactic'
'traditional'
'fine motor skills'

'table top activities'
'structured play'
'problem-solving investigations'
'differentiated input'
'teacher-directed learning'
'teaching input'
'need', 'must', 'should'
'There is a need to...'
'...should be reviewed...'
'proactive'
'seemed', 'appeared'
'It is possible...'
'One might question whether...'
'commendable', 'disappointing', 'pleasing'
'multidisciplinary'
'ongoing'

Also see the section on 'Language which may cause offence' above and the section on 'Guidance on specific words and phrases' later.

Further guidance on Plain English

'The Plain English Guide' (Oxford, 1996) by Martin Cutts provides an excellent introduction to the principles of Plain English.

'The Complete Plain Words' (HMSO, 1954) by Sir Ernest Gowers is still very useful and entertaining.

The Plain English Campaign website is a useful source of information:
www.plainenglish.co.uk.

Guidance on format

Abbreviations

At the end of this guide there is a list of abbreviations from the fields of education and training. If the abbreviation appears in the list, write it out in full first time and then use the abbreviation after that. Other abbreviations should be avoided and they should appear in full unless it is very common, as in UK, GB, USA, EU, MP, AM, MEP, NHS, BBC, ITV, HTV, S4C.

Do not use full points in any abbreviations. For example, always write BBC, not B.B.C.

Avoid using abbreviations in the titles of reports.

To turn an abbreviation into an appropriate plural, just add lower case 's' to the abbreviation, as in LEAs, NVQs and GCSEs. In effect, you make the abbreviation plural.

If you have to abbreviate words which contain hyphens, in most cases use capitals for both elements in the hyphenated word and drop the hyphen in the abbreviation, so 'Work-Based Learning for Adults' becomes 'WBLA'.

You can start sentences with abbreviations, as in 'GNVQs were originally designed to resemble NVQs', 'A level results improved last year' and 'DCELLS published its guidance in 2008'.

An **acronym** is an abbreviation you can say as a word. It is becoming common to see acronyms written as words rather than as abbreviations (as in Ofsted and Nato instead of OFSTED and NATO). However, unless a specific form is listed in this guide, please use capitals for all acronyms apart from those that have entered the language in lower case and exist as words in their own right, egg laser, radar.

Addresses

Set out addresses in running text like this: Estyn, Anchor Court, Keen Road, Cardiff CF25 5JW. Note there is no punctuation before the postcode.

When addressing mail on envelopes, the Royal Mail recommends that you avoid using commas and full-stops and do not centre or stagger each line of the address. The post town should be in capitals and the post code on a separate line.

Bullet points

This advice on bullets follows the appropriate conventions.

When using bullets to introduce lists:

- introduce the bullet using a stem sentence and a colon;
- indent bullets at 0.3cm and indent the text at 0.8cm;
- leave the text aligned on the left;
- use double spacing;
- use round bullets;
- put a semi-colon after each bullet;
- follow the penultimate semi-colon with 'and' (no comma); and
- put a full-stop after the last bullet.

Do not use bullets within bullets.

Do not use bullets for lists of recommendations. See guidance under Recommendations.

Capital letters

Use initial capital letters for proper names and titles linked to a specific person or place, e.g. Janet Davies, Head of Bryn Comprehensive School, or John Jones, Principal of Cwm College. For general titles use lower case, e.g. principals, headteachers, directors, work-based learning companies.

Use initial capital letters for most titles of qualifications, for example General Certificate of Secondary Education, National Diploma, First Diploma, but note; A levels.

Use initial capitals for names of learning areas, for example Engineering. Use lower case for the titles of subjects, e.g. mathematics, geography, physical education. (However, remember to use capitals for languages, e.g. English, French, German, Welsh).

For titles, headings and sub-headings see above.

If in doubt about the use of capitals, use lower case.

Citing publications

Use single quotation marks around the name of the publication followed by the publisher and date in brackets, as in 'Literacy and Numeracy Skills in Wales' (Basic Skills Agency, 1997).

Emphasising text

Use bold only. Do not underline text or use italics for emphasis.

Font

Use the Arial font at 12 pitch for all documents. This document uses the Arial font at 12 pitch.

Footnotes

Try to avoid using footnotes. If you have to use them, use them sparingly.

Use standard numbers in superscript for the footnote symbols and place the footnote text at the bottom of the page. Make sure that the footnote text is in the Arial font and the font size is 10.

Microsoft Word handles footnotes quite well. Go to Insert, then Reference, then Footnote. Place the footnote at the bottom of the page and use the standard number format (1, 2, 3 and so on) and make sure the font type and font size are those required.

Place the footnote symbol in the main text immediately where you wish the reader to refer to the footnote at the bottom of the page. When you wish to refer the reader to a footnote at the end of a sentence, place the footnote symbol immediately after the full stop.

Foreign words

Use single speech marks to identify foreign words that have not entered the English language. For example, in a report on modern foreign languages, indicate the foreign words as follows, 'Learners understand well which French verbs use 'etre' or 'avoir'.

Hyphenation

Do not break words at the end of lines if you can help it. Try to use a 'hard' hyphen (Ctrl+Shift+Hyphen) when you type a hyphenated word. This will make Word keep the two hyphenated parts together rather than break them if they appear at the end of a line. Try not to leave hyphens hanging, as in 'part- and full-time students', say 'part-time and full-time students' instead.

Line spacing

Use single line spacing for all documents, but use 1.5 line spacing for press releases and double line spacing for bulleted lists and lists of recommendations.

Monetary values

Express monetary values in as short a form as possible, using 'bn' for 'billion', 'm' for 'million' and 'k' for 'thousand'. This will avoid the use of long numbers. For example, write £1m rather than £1,000,000. Try to use fractions for numbers above a million, as in £1.25m, but below this try to avoid them, if possible, so write £250k (for £250,000) rather than £0.25m.

Numbers, including fractions, and numbered lists

When using numbers within the text of a document:

- spell out numbers from one to nine, including ordinals (e.g. 'ninth');
- use number symbols after nine (10,11...999), including ordinals (e.g. '10th');
- spell out in full any number if it begins a sentence (even those after nine), e.g. 'Seventy per cent of pupils passed the test'; and
- use number symbols to refer to grades and levels, e.g. grade 1, level 3.

In numbered lists, use standard number symbols rather than roman numerals, and set them out in line with the body text, with the text indented at 1cm like this:

- (1) use bracketed numerals in line with the main text; and
- (2) indent text at 1cm.

Remember that some numbers have hyphens, e.g. twenty-one, one hundred and forty-four. The same goes for fractions, e.g. one-third, three-quarters.

Page numbers

When you use page numbers, place them at the centre and at the bottom of each page (as on this page).

Paragraphs

Paragraphs should be numbered consecutively through the text of a report or survey. Do not use tiers of numbering for paragraphs, such as 1.2, 1.2.3 and so on. These tend to clog up text and become confusing for readers.

When numbering paragraphs, indent the numbers at -1cm and set out the text in line with the body text.

Do not use a full stop or any other symbol to separate the numbering from the text.

Percentages

When writing percentages, use the number followed by the percentage symbol (%). Also use the percentage symbol (%) in tables, even when the legend already indicates that all numbers in the table are percentages.

Never start a sentence with a percentage in number format, for example '70% of pupils passed the test'. Instead, write it out in full, where possible, as in 'Seventy per cent of pupils passed the test'. Try not to use a detailed fraction, such as 77.6%. In these cases, think about using 'almost' or 'about' and round the fraction up, as in 'Almost 78% passed the test'.

Remember an increase from 30% to 33% is a three percentage point increase, not a 3% increase (it is in fact a 10% increase).

Quotation marks

Use single quotation marks in most cases, unless you are actually quoting the spoken words of someone, in which case use double quotation marks.

Recommendations

Lists of recommendations should be introduced by a stem sentence followed by a colon. The stem sentence should be a numbered paragraph, but each recommendation should not be numbered as separate paragraphs.

Use 'R' followed by a standard number symbol and set them out in line with the body text, with the text indented at 1cm, and with double spacing, like this:

R1 use R1, R2, R3 and so on in line with the main text;

R2 use double spacing; and

R3 indent text at 1cm.

Spaces after punctuation

Use one space after commas and semi-colons. Use two spaces after full-stops, colons and question marks.

Text alignment

Left align all main body text and all headings and sub-headings.

Do not justify any text. Justification alters the distance between words and letters and is less easy to read. It also makes it harder to pick up any spacing errors at the editing stage.

Times and dates

When referring to a specific time, use am and pm after the hours and minutes with no space, as in 9am, 8.15pm. Do not use the 24-hour clock.

Write dates in full in the order of day, month and year, e.g. 3 September 2008. Do not use ordinals, such as 3rd, in dates.

Always refer to years in full, e.g. 2007-2008, rather than in any abbreviated form.

Try not to spread the date across two lines. If it is unavoidable, split the date after the month, not the day.

On rare occasions, it might be important to differentiate between an academic, financial and calendar year. If so, write 'during the year' for the calendar year and add 'academic' or 'financial' when required (for example 'during the academic year 2007-2008'). In most cases, the type of year will be clear from the context.

Refer to decades just by adding 's' to the first year of the decade, e.g. the 1990s. Note there is no apostrophe.

Titles, headings and sub-headings

For titles of documents, use capitals for the first letters of titles and lower case for any short connecting words, such as 'and', 'of' and 'in'. An example of this is 'The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales'.

For headings and sub-headings, use capitals for the first letter of the first word, but use lower case for all other words. An example of this is the heading for this section.

Titles, headings and sub-headings do not need final full stops

Agreed list of abbreviations and acronyms

This page contains a list of abbreviations that you might reasonably expect an interested lay person to know and understand. Write these in full when they first appear in the report with the abbreviation in brackets and then just the abbreviated form after that.

All other abbreviations (i.e. not on this page) should be written in full every time, unless they are very common and in everyday use, for example UK, GB, USA, EU, MP, AM, MEP, NHS, BBC, ITV, HTV, S4C.

AM	Assembly Member (after name)
BTEC	Business and Technician Education Council
DCELLS	Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HMC	Headmasters and Mistresses Conference
HMCI	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
liP	Investors in People
IT	Information Technology (the National Curriculum subject)
LEA	Local Education Authority (now use Local Authority only)
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament (after name)
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OCN	Open College Network
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
WJEC	use just WJEC; they have re-branded themselves as WJEC only