Blogging on Saltire and gov.scot

How to write blogs

When writing a blog, think about who you are writing for and plan how you will set out your page.

Style/tone of voice

The style and tone of a blog varies widely. It's not a formal piece of writing, but written in the voice of the author – write it how you speak, as an individual. You're talking about what you or your team did, and you can write it in the first person. People are interested in people. Here you can talk about your work. Blogs are not news releases or policy information.

What makes the perfect post?

Audience (persona)

This is not 'everybody'. Who do you want to read your post? Put yourself in your target audience shoes. If you were that person, why would you start reading this post, and what would keep you reading?

Editorial calendar

Plan your posts so you're not always writing about the same thing - it helps you stick to a deadline and keep your blog regularly updated. You can keep track of ideas and you can identify posts you can recycle or repurpose.

Brainstorm

What's the purpose of the post – to educate, celebrate a piece of work, to entertain? Get your ideas down on paper. There are lots of techniques for doing this such as a spidergram, mind map, list of bullet points, Post-Its on a whiteboard. Do whatever works for you.

Organise your thoughts

Once you've brainstormed or mind-mapped you need to organise how you'll lay out the post, what you will write first, second, third and how each part of it will flow into the next. This will make it easier to write as well as easier for your audience to read.

Write

Follow your plan, but at this stage don't worry about grammar or sentence structure, and don't stop to fix typos. This is just your first draft and right now the important thing is to get the raw story down. You have a storytelling brain and an editing brain but only one of them can be in control at any one time.

Introduction and ending

Your introduction should grab attention and encourage your audience to keep reading. It's up to you how you do this. Maybe you have an anecdote, or you start with a question, an analogy or interesting fact.

Your conclusion should summarise the post without introducing any new ideas, but you can ask a question, pose a thought to encourage comments or a call to action such as a link to a another blog post. On the Scottish Government blog platform you can ask readers to subscribe to your blog.

Titles/headlines

The headline should be less than 60 characters (around six words) long, grab attention, and tell readers clearly what the post is about. It's tempting to be clever or play on words, but remember that search results are based on keywords and phrases so should make sense even when taken out of context.

Break up the text with subheadings. Lists are a great way to put across information in an easily digestible format. Shorter paragraphs are easiest to read on a screen.

Fonts and links

Don't use multiple fonts and be careful when copying from Word or the internet as it may copy fonts as well.

Users tend to scan web pages. Links stand out and can be used for emphasis. Use good descriptive link text rather than a full web address (URL). Never make a link 'click here'.

Read the [accessibility guidance](#) for more details about appropriate fonts and links.

How to write well

Introducing write well, write less

This guidance applies to all written communications.

Writing well begins with thinking clearly. Know what you want to say, then write it. Keep it short, simple and clear.

Write in a style and tone which is appropriate. Writing a web page is different from an email, report or formal letter. Follow the writing style guide, use good grammar, check your spelling and avoid using jargon.

Ask your colleagues to read what you have written and be open to suggestions. Read it out loud to check that it makes sense. Decide what to leave out. Writing less is usually better.

The commissioning code

If you have asked someone to write something, give a clear, detailed brief and answer any queries they might have. When it is written:

decide if it is up to standard, in the right style and give feedback if necessary
ask for more information if it is incomplete
be ready to talk it through

If you have been asked to write something, make sure you understand the brief. When you have finished writing:

check you have made it the best it can be
be prepared for feedback
be ready to talk it through

Clear, brief, simple

Our written communications should be clear, brief and simple.

Clear – making it easy to understand

Get straight to the point. The first few sentences matter as this is where you deliver what you want to say. A clear introduction will reassure your readers that they have found what they are looking for.

You are communicating Scottish Government policies and activities. Make it the best it can be, but leave the fancy writing and technical perfection to poets and novelists. Use active language and be positive.

Decide whether to use the first person 'We said...' or the third person 'The Scottish Government said...'.

Make it engaging, authoritative and credible.

Brief – delivering your message effectively

Keep it short. Writing well usually means writing less. Short sentences and concise paragraphs usually work best.

Choose the words your audience would use themselves. Don't waffle or use jargon. Be precise.

Think about the advice and support your colleagues give you but decide for yourself what works. Take the time to create less – it will deliver a clearer message.

Simple – writing well

Know your subject, know your audience and check your facts. Use a simple layout which helps the reader to scan the information.

Use neatly ordered sentences and paragraphs. Break up text with sub-headings.

Grammar and style

The Scottish Government speaks with many voices but they should all have a consistent tone and style. We use common standards in our communications including good grammar. As well as the examples below, you should refer to the full writing style guide.

Acronyms

Spell out acronyms such as COSLA on first mention with the initials in brackets:

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)

Thereafter you can use COSLA or refer to 'the Convention' in your copy.

The NHS and the BBC are exceptions as they are so well known.

Don't use capital letters for things like 'working groups' or 'review bodies'. If in doubt use lower case.

Addresses

Addresses have no commas: 3 Regent Road

Don't abbreviate Road, Street, Avenue etc.

Always leave a space in postcodes: EH1 3DG

Ages

Ages normally in digital form: Mrs Smith, 45...

Alternatively: 45-year-old Mrs Smith...

Children aged nine and under: Young Jenny, 7...

But as: seven-year-old Jenny (following numbers style)

Apostrophes

Apostrophes denote possession (the minister's speech) or a missing letter (it's, meaning it is).

Possessive pronouns don't need apostrophes: his, hers, its, yours, ours

Acronyms don't need an apostrophe in the plural: CDs, DVDs

Bullet points

Bullet points are typically short phrases or single sentences introduced by a colon. They do not begin with capital letters or end with semi-colons or full stops.

The Scottish Government has:

been elected by the people
published its policy proposals
delivered on its promises

Bulleted paragraphs with several sentences should end with a full stop.

Use a numbered list when the order of points is important.

Commas and colons

Commas are punctuation marks used to divide up a sentence. If you would pause during saying a sentence, that's when a comma is often needed.

A colon introduces direct speech, which should always be contained with double inverted commas. For example:

He said: "Hello there..."

Paragraphs with direct speech begin with inverted commas, but are only closed once the final paragraph is reached.

A colon can also be used to precede a list of items. For example:

There are five senses: sight, smell, touch, hearing, taste.

Single inverted commas are used to denote a short quote within a sentence when it is not direct speech. For example:

The minister said the situation was 'unacceptable'.

Dates and numbers

Dates format: 21 March 2008.

...spoke at a conference on 21 March.

Always use a hyphen rather than a slash (/) in dates: 2016-17

Numbers - one to nine are written out in full: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine

From 10 upwards use digits: ...there were 15 people present...

Thousands, tens of thousands, and hundreds of thousands use an internal comma: 2,500 or 10,678 or 650,400

Millions (and billions) are a combination of letters and digits: 25 million (not 25m)

Follow the same style for money references:

£25,000,000 or £25 million

To start a sentence with a number, convert it to letters: Ten thousand people met... (not 10,000 people met...)

Never start a sentence with a monetary amount unless it can be prefixed by: More than £5 million... or around £13 million will be spent...

Hyperlinks and URLs

A hyperlink is a reference to information that is available online in another place. When the link is clicked the new information is displayed.

If you want to include a hyperlink in web content you should highlight appropriate descriptive words rather than the full URL or web address.

Make the text the hyperlink. For example:

The **official report** has been completed ahead of schedule.

A printed document like a letter can't contain functioning hyperlinks but can display URLs which can be typed or pasted into the address line of a web page.

Some URLs are long and look untidy on the page. Ask the web publications team how to create shortened URLs.

Hyphens

Hyphens are inserted into composite words when the two joining letters in the middle are the same.

pre-empt
film-maker

We don't use a hyphen in the word 'email'.

Naming conventions

Cabinet secretaries and ministers should always have their titles written out in full on first mention.

First Minister Joe Public then becomes the FM or Mr Public on second and subsequent mention.

Secretary can be used on its own, for example Justice Secretary.

CS should not be used as an acronym of Cabinet Secretary.

Only FM and DFM can be written as acronyms.

Ministers with more than one portfolio should use the element of their title relevant to the subject in question. Cabinet Secretary for the Environment and Rural Affairs becomes Environment Secretary or Rural Affairs Secretary.

Common pitfalls to avoid

The language you use should avoid clichés such as:

at this moment in time
baseline our thinking
blue sky thinking
close of play
going forward
horizon scanning
in the round
root and branch review
step change
touch base

Always read over what you have written and redraft as necessary:

- the Scottish Government is not 'it' or 'they'
- the Scottish Government is always capped up, while government (generally) is lower case
- priorities and findings don't always have to be 'key'
- people meet other people, not 'meet with' other people
- impact, action, task, gift are nouns not verbs
- heavy lifting equipment 'gains traction' – ideas and public opinion don't
- avoid overusing phrases like 'ground breaking initiatives'
- make sure any 'world class development' is worthy of the description

Email, texts and social media

Our standards for written communications also apply to emails, text and social media.

Emails tend to be informal unless they are used to deliver official letters or Freedom of Information replies. Add a clear, descriptive subject in the email title. It can also be useful to include a deadline for action that can be viewed in the preview pane.

Texts (also referred to as SMS) are restricted in length so need to be short and clear. Know your audience – don't use lots of acronyms and abbreviated text language.

It's also good to keep your messages clear, brief and simple on social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Twitter is limited to 280 characters including any link you want to add. Keep messages short and snappy. Use a link shortener such as bit.ly to maximise your character count. Deliver your message in as few words as possible.

Social media content should be easy to read and accessible to everyone. Read more about social media accessibility.

Creating accessible documents

We're committed to providing inclusive communications. This means sharing information in a way that everyone can understand. When creating a document for publication or sharing, you need to make sure that it meets accessibility standards.

Find out more

accessibility - an introduction
creating accessible communications
creating accessible Word documents
creating accessible Excel spreadsheets
creating accessible PowerPoint presentations
creating Easy Read documents

Publishing a document on gov.scot

Titling and summaries

When creating titles and summaries for a document, think about how these will look in search on gov.scot and on search engines.

Titles

- keep them short (around 60 characters max)
- front-load keywords to make it easier for users to scan and decide if it's the right content for them – for example: 'income tax reform: impact assessment' works better than 'an assessment of the impact of proposed reforms to income tax'
- should be clear and descriptive and provide context so people can easily see if they've found what they're looking for such as 'Potato growers' guidance' not 'potatoes'
- if you need to use a separator to break up a long title use a colon (it helps users to scan), for example 'Planning appeal procedures: technical review'
- remember that there will be additional ways of clarifying the content so that it doesn't all need to be fitted into the title. Use the summary field to provide more detail
- use sentence case. Only the first word and any proper nouns should have a leading capital letter
- if there are multiple similar documents already published (such as minutes) then use a date (year, or month and year are usually sufficient) in the title after a separating colon so that users can pick up the distinction easily. The full date is included in the template, so isn't needed here
- if in doubt, look at the site for other similar documents and make the titling consistent with them

Summaries

The summary is what users see in internal and external search results. It sits just below the title and is used to give more information on what the content is about.

It should help people see quickly whether the content will have the information they want.

See more examples on gov.scot

- should be around 130 to 140 characters. Don't just repeat the title
- must end with a full stop. This is for people who use assistive technology like screen readers
- shouldn't contain redundant introductory words which don't give users any more information, for example: 'The purpose of this document is...'
- include keywords
- use plain English
- only use acronyms if they are very common, for example EU, NATO

Good example: 'Steps that we and our public sector partners will take to improve mobile connectivity across Scotland'.

Bad example: 'Ensuring high quality digital connectivity across all of Scotland is a priority for the Scottish Government (SG).'

The digital communication team in communications directorate has editorial control of gov.scot and may adapt document titles and summaries to fit the site style and make them more user-focused.

You can ask digital communications for advice by emailing the [website mailbox](#).

Publishing coronavirus (COVID-19) information on gov.scot

We need to ensure that all coronavirus content on gov.scot is clear, consistent and user-focused.

With an increasing volume of advice and guidance on the site, we aim to streamline content where possible so it is easier for users to find the right information.

You should discuss any content requirements with digital communications so we can advise whether your publication should be handled by APS who provide design, print and publishing services, or can be created in-house.

Notice periods for gov.scot

Inform the team of any updates to existing guides or requirements for new guides as follows:

- 7 days' notice (or as soon as you know) of updates to guides - this ensures it is added to our planner
- a minimum of 3 days' notice with the cleared content supplied - it can take up to 3 days to process your content request

Urgent requests should be an exception. We can't gurantee that we will be able to meet your request.

Please share an early draft of any content with digital communications so we can advise on presentation and structure, and ensure any material is accessible and meets the gov.scot style. You should do this before the content is agreed with stakeholders, and sent to legal, ministers etc.

Requests should be sent to gov.scot with the subject matter clearly describing the nature of the request.

How to create effective content

You should always follow the gov.scot style guide when creating or updating content.

We must also ensure that our information is accessible. Read more about creating accessible communications.

Titles and summaries

Use the title style: Coronavirus (COVID-19): XXXXXX

The summary should briefly state who the content is for and what it will help them to achieve, for example: Guidance to help couples planning to get married or form a civil partnership.

Structuring your content

When structuring your content:

- avoid using FAQs - instead, use headings and sub-headings which are easier and quicker to scan. For example, instead of saying 'What are the rules for meeting friends and family indoors?' just use a heading: 'Meeting family and friends indoors'
- make titles and headings sentence case
- don't use paragraph numbers, footnotes or annexes
- use short sentences and paragraphs

What to include – and what to leave out

Most people are accessing gov.scot on mobile and have something they need to know or do, so you should:

- think about who will be using the content and what they need to know, and try to get your message across quickly rather than telling them everything you can
- avoid duplicating information already available on gov.scot or another website – just provide a link

Writing the content

You should:

- use words that people commonly use to help them find the content – digital communications can help advise on this
- be inclusive - use plain English, even if you think the content is for a specialist audience
- address the user directly where possible, referring to them as 'you'
- use active rather than passive language - 'Use this guidance to …..' rather than 'this guidance should be used to...'
- say 'we' or 'our' and don't keep repeating Scottish Government, if writing from our point of view
- keep sentences and paragraphs short - use sub-headings and lists to break up walls of text
- remove ambiguity - if people 'must' do something then make this clear rather than saying 'should' or 'could' which add an element of doubt
- remove hesitancy – for example, say 'this guidance provides information about..' rather than 'Our intention is that this guidance should aim to provide information about'
- be consistent - choose what you are going to call things and stick to it
- ensure all headings and subheadings are short and precise, to help users decide whether to read on:
  Good: Visiting care homes and hospitals
  Bad: Further information
- ensure any links are descriptive of the place it's taking the user - do not use text such as 'here' or anything that does not make sense out of context

- only use tables for data - there are often more effective ways of displaying the information
- review the information regularly to ensure it is still relevant and up-to-date
- avoid the use of bold and do not capitalise whole words or phrases

Structure of news releases

Not every news release will be the same but as a general rule they should be structured as follows. Stages one to three are critical for getting attention, so don't waste space by repeating words or phrases. Remember you are also writing for the web so make sure you include relevant key words/phrases that people will likely search for.

1. **Headline:** up to 50 characters – keep it unambiguous and to the point

2. **Sub-heading:** up to 75 characters – this should give more context to the main newsline

3. **Introduction:** opening sentence with no more than two lines of text – sets out key focus

4. **Scene-setting:** two or three paragraph to succinctly explain (use bullets if appropriate)

5. **Quotes:** ministerial quote, followed by brief supporting quote(s), if required

6. **Background:** additional explanation with web links so journalists can find out more

7. **Notes to editor**: use this field only when extra information needs shared with journalists, for example, case studies (this won't publish online but is included in the email)

Development and clearance

Decide which type of content is merited – with agreement from your team leader

Prepare an initial draft and consult policy officials, ensuring you adhere to house style

Share for Newsdesk clearance, then adapt and update the content based on any changes made by Newsdesk

Ensure the final version is proofread again, signed off by your team leader and special advisers before progressing (where needed) for ministerial clearance

If the content is further amended during these final stages, re-clearance by Newsdesk is required

Specialist content, invites and trails

For specialist interest news, proactive quotes, media invites or trails without a newsline, issue via the 'op note' template in PRGloo (these will therefore not feature on the gov.scot news page).

Trails of visits or announcements (e.g. 'the minister is expected to say') should issue using this approach. When of sufficient news value, they can publish as a news release (put in to the past tense) on the appropriate day.

House style

Write well, write less

All Scottish Government content should be easy to read, jargon-free and concise, in line with the Write well, write less guidance on Saltire. In particular:

- Spell out acronyms the first time
- Follow the correct date format - day month year (e.g. 1 January 2019)
- No punctuation at the end of bulleted lists
- Avoid unnecessary initial capital letters
- Spell out numbers from one to nine, after which use numerals

Other points…

- Use of the first person (we, our, etc) should only be in attributed quotes
- Any claims made must be substantiated and/or attributed
- Avoid excessive use of 'Scottish Government', 'Scotland' or 'Scottish' – it is already clear who the content is being issued by and that the country of relevance is Scotland!
- Try not to bamboozle the reader with statistics. Be decisive about which are the most newsworthy and include upfront. Additional figures, if required, can be included in background
- Keep background brief, ideally a few bullet points, and wherever possible link to relevant web pages. Avoid long lists or large blocks of text

Quotes

- All quotes should be brief, relevant and avoid repetition. Ministerial quotes should ideally be a couple of paragraphs (up to 100 words), and certainly not more than four paragraphs
- It would be rare for us to quote more than one minister – decide who is most relevant and go with them. Media are unlikely to quote two SG ministers in the same story
- Include supporting quotes, where they add value and offer a different perspective. Always give stakeholders a clear word count limit (up to 70 words is a good guide)
- We would not routinely have more than two stakeholders quoted. Where multiple quotes can't be avoided, reduce word count for all those quoted accordingly (ministers included)

Website links

- Links to gov.scot topic pages and external sites are important for signposting to more information and should be included in background and embedded in the text – do not include URLs in full

- Make the link descriptive and hyperlink the key word or phrase; for example – 'the Scottish Government has published content guidance for all communications staff'
- Avoid hyperlinking a whole sentence and don't use generic terms like 'click here' or 'read more' as these don't make sense out of context (and are not accessible for visually impaired people using a screen reader)

Ministerial job titles

- Use abbreviated versions of ministerial titles, highlighting the most appropriate aspect of their role
- For example – 'Culture Secretary' rather than 'Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs'

Letters

- If you are highlighting a letter written by a minister (for example, to the UK Government) there is no need to produce separate quotes
- Simply give the release a headline, sub heading and very brief introduction before sharing the text of the letter

- Consider carefully whether these releases merit a place on the news site – often they are trails or of specialist interest

Why we use a writing style guide

It's important that every team writes in a consistent way. Follow these style, spelling and grammar conventions when writing content at work, for example for the Scottish Government website (gov.scot), the Saltire intranet or for general correspondence.

The guidance includes:

style points, such as abbreviations and numbers
style for spelling, hyphenation and capitalisation of specific words and phrases

If there's a point of style not covered here, email the website mailbox with your suggestions.

If you want to download and save these pages as a PDF, select 'Print this page' on the top right hand side of the page and choose 'Save as PDF' from the printing options.

Further reading

If you are interested in developing your writing and for the evidence behind items included in this style guide, you can read more on the Readability Guidelines website which is a collaborative, universal style guide.

A to C

Below are our writing styles for letters A to C - from abbreviations to courts.

A

abbreviations/acronyms

don't use full stops in abbreviations: BBC, not B.B.C.
spell out on first mention, including the abbreviation or acronym in brackets
use upper case for all abbreviations and acronyms. e.g. Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) or Director General (DG). After the first mention always use the acronym. e.g. COSLA, DG
VAT, NHS and BBC are exceptions as they are so well known
use lower case for standard measurements: kg; km; mph but use upper case for KB; GB; MB.
spell out metres to prevent confusion with abbreviation for million
don't include a space between the number and the unit: 20km; 50kph; 100KB
never add an 's' to measurements: 20km, not 20kms
use lower case for i.e. and e.g. but these should be limited or replaced by simpler alternatives

Acts

As in '... of Parliament' always capped, whether fully identified or not.

acting

Always lower case: acting First Minister, acting committee chairman.

active voice

Use the active rather than passive voice. This helps us write concise, clear content.

Active: Scottish Ministers promote the welfare of the people.

Passive: The welfare of the people is promoted by Scottish Ministers.

adviser

For example, special adviser. Not advisor, but advisory is the correct adjective.

ages

Are normally in digital form: Mrs Smith, 45...

Alternatively: 45-year-old Mrs Smith...

Children aged nine and under rendered as: Young Jenny, 7...

But as:

...seven-year-old Jenny (following numbers style)

addresses

No commas in 3 Regent Road.

Do not abbreviate Road, Street, Avenue etc.

Always leave a space (no hyphen) in postcodes: EH1 3DG.

Stack over multiple lines, taking a new line for the postcode. Do not add commas. For example:

Pentland House
47 Robbs Loan
Edinburgh
EH14 1TY

adverbs

A joining hyphen is rarely needed when they are used to qualify adjectives e.g. Smartly dressed, heavily laden, beautifully formed. Hyphen to be used only when meaning would otherwise be ambiguous.

adviser

Not advisor.

aeroplane

Not airplane.

airbase, airstrip, airspace

No hyphen.

alignment

Only use left aligned text (not fully justified).

alternative

Of two, choice of three or more.

Americanisms

Do not use Americanisms. You fill in a form, not fill out a form.

Exceptions include where it's part of a specific name: 4th Mechanized Brigade, for example.

Use the -ise rather than -ize suffix: organise not organize, for example (this is not actually an Americanism but is often seen as such).

amid

Not amidst.

among

Not amongst.

ampersands

Never use an ampersand in place of 'and' in text. It should only be used in logo designs. The exception to this is when writing Q&A.

Where an ampersand is used in a directorate logo, replace this with 'and' in text. For example:

Children and Families Directorate

an

'An' precedes any word beginning with a vowel and any word beginning with an 'h' if the 'h' is silent, so 'a hotel' but 'an honour'.

An exception to this is words beginning with 'u' which are pronounced as if they begin with a 'y' such as UK and union which would be 'a UK' and 'a union'.

animal health

Lower case.

antisocial

No hyphen.

apostrophe

The apostrophe has three functions:

Function 1: To denote possession

The Minister's speech (meaning the speech of the Minister).

Think logically. If a phrase such as 'the Minister's speech' can be turned round as 'the speech of the Minister' then an apostrophe is required.

If the word already ends in s then the apostrophe goes after the s that is already there. This applies mostly to plurals.

the dogs' bowls (meaning the bowls belong to some dogs)
the boys' coats (meaning the coats belong to some boys)
the cars' wheels (meaning the wheels belong to some cars)

But it can also apply to the singular.

James' dog (James's is also grammatically correct but James' is the preferred version).

Possessive pronouns don't need apostrophes: his, hers, its, yours, ours.

Function 2. To denote a missing letter or letters

It's (meaning it is).

Think logically. An apostrophe is required where a letter or letters are missing. Imagine the full version and put the apostrophe in the place of the missing letter or letters.

Its and it's are two entirely separate terms. Its is a possessive pronoun (same as his and hers) while it's denotes a missing letter (it's pouring rain - it is pouring rain).

Function 3. To denote the plural in cases when a letter is used as a word e.g. there are two l's in bell.

Wrong: SME's, CD's, DVD's, MoT's

Right: SMEs, CDs, DVDs, MoTs

B

banned words

See words to avoid.

baseline

One word, lower case.

Bill(s)

As in Parliamentary Bill always capped (as with Acts above).

blackspot

One word; similarly, troublespot, hotspot.

blog post

Use two words when referring to an article published on a blog. A 'blog' is the site on which a blog post is published.

board

Always lower case unless it's part of a proper title: so upper case for the Judicial Executive Board, but lower case for the DFT's management board.

bold

Don't use bold to emphasise text. It makes it difficult for users to know which parts of your content they need to pay the most attention to.

To emphasise words or phrases, you can:

front-load sentences
use headings
use bullets

brackets

Use round brackets ( ). Square brackets [ ] should only be used to contain explanatory text inserted in quoted speech.

Do not use round brackets to refer to something that could either be singular or plural, like 'Check which document(s) you need to send to DVLA.'

bridges

Cap when referring to name, as in Forth Bridge, Erskine Bridge

British vs American English

Use British English throughout.

You should also opt for 'ise' spellings over 'ize' versions (generally seen as an Americanism) – e.g. organise, supervise, advise, realise.

Don't use the Oxford (or serial) comma, unless adding a comma before the 'and'/'or'/'but' in a series is essential to avoid confusion.

budget

Cap the Scottish Budget, otherwise lower case.

bullet points and steps

You can use bullet points to make text easier to read. Make sure that:

you always use a lead-in line
the bullets make sense running on from the lead-in line
you use lower case at the start of the bullet
you don't use more than one sentence per bullet point - use commas or dashes to expand on an item
you don't put 'or' or 'and' after the bullets
if you add links they appear within the text and not as the whole bullet
you don't put a semicolon at the end of a bullet
there is no full stop after the last bullet point

Bullets should normally form a complete sentence following from the lead text. But it's sometimes necessary to add a short phrase to clarify whether all or some of the points apply. For example, 'You can only register a pension scheme that is (one of the following):'

steps

Use numbered steps instead of bullet points to guide a user through a process. You do not need a lead-in line and you can use links and downloads in steps. Steps end in a full stop because each

should be a complete sentence.

Burns Night

Caps, no apostrophe.

burned

Not burnt.

business continuity management

Lower case.

business plan

Lower case. Do not use upper case even in the title of a business plan publication.

by-election

With hyphen.

bypass

No hyphen.

C

Cabinet

Always capped up (as with Act and Bill).

Cabinet secretary

Cabinet secretaries and ministers should always have their titles written out in full on first mention.

First Minister Joe Public then becomes the FM or Mr Public on second and subsequent mention.

Secretary can be used on its own e.g. Justice Secretary.

CS should not be used as an acronym of Cabinet Secretary.

Only FM and DFM can be written as acronyms.

Minister for Environment/Community Justice is interchangeable with Environment/Community Justice Minister.

Ministers with more than one portfolio should use the element of their title relevant to the subject in question.

Cabinet Secretary for the Environment and Rural Affairs becomes Environment Secretary or Rural Affairs Secretary.

capital letters

DO NOT USE BLOCK CAPITALS FOR LARGE AMOUNTS OF TEXT AS IT'S QUITE HARD TO READ.

Always use lower case, even in page titles. The exceptions to this are proper nouns, for example:

titles

job titles (when used with an individual's name)

ministerial titles (when used in full)

directorates and divisions (when used in full)

buildings and place names

the Earth

brands and business names

faculties, departments, institutes and schools

committee, group and organisation names

names of schemes or initiatives

the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament

titles of acts or bills, when written in full

headers used in tables

publication titles (enclosed in single quotes)

Other exceptions are:

departments (specific government departments - see below)

the Civil Service, with lower case for 'the'

job titles, ministers' role titles: Minister for Housing, Minister for Mental Health

titles like Mr, Mrs, Dr, the Duke of Cambridge (the duke at second mention); Pope Francis, but the pope

Rt Hon (no full stops)

buildings

place names

brand names

Parliament, the House

titles of specific acts or bills: Climate Change Bill (but use 'the act' or 'the bill' after the first time you use the full act or bill title)

names of specific, named government schemes known to people outside government: Right to Buy, Queen's Awards for Enterprise

specific select committees: Public Administration Select Committee

header cells in tables: Annual profits

titles of books (and within single quotes), for example, 'The Study Skills Handbook'

World War 1 and World War 2 (note caps and numbers)

Do not capitalise:

government

minister, unless part of a specific job title, like Minister for Mental Health

budget, autumn statement, spring statement, unless referring to and using the full name of a specific statement - for example, '2016 Budget'

sections or schedules within specific named acts, regulations or orders

director general (no hyphen), deputy director, director, unless in a specific job title

departmental board, executive board, the board

policy themes like sustainable communities, promoting economic growth, local enterprise zones

general mention of select committees (but do cap specific ones - see above)

the military

All government departments and directorates should take title case when the name is used in full. For example:

Scotland Office
Planning and Environmental Appeals Directorate

Cap in specific cases, such as the 1901 Census, the 2001 Census, but lower case generally.

Civil List

Initial caps.

Civil Service

Upper case.

civil servants

Lower case.

classwork

One word.

click

Don't use 'click' when talking about user interfaces because not all users click. Use 'select' or see links for more information about creating accessible hyperlinks.

co-

A hyphen is required to separate vowels.

colons

A colon can also be used to precede a list of items. There are five senses: sight, smell, touch, hearing, taste.

Use lower case after a colon, except where a colon is followed by a proper name.

A colon introduces direct speech.

He said: "Hello there ..."

Paragraphs within direct speech begin with inverted commas, but are only closed once the final paragraph is reached:

"Hello there and how are you?

"The Scottish Government is the devolved government for Scotland and the First Minister has his official residence at Bute House.

"That is generally how it works."

See also semi-colons.

commas

Are punctuation marks used for indicating a division in a sentence.

Think verbally. If you would pause during saying a sentence, that is when a comma is often required. Technically it indicates divisions within the grammatical structure of a sentence.

Although sitting on the mat, the cat was nowhere to be seen.

The people arrived, left their coats in the cloakroom, and went through the main hall.

Wild horses, imported from the west, could not drag him away.

Direct speech (quoting somebody) should always be contained within double inverted commas.

Commission, Commissioner

Initial caps.

committee

Lower case unless referring to a named committee i.e. Health Committee.

coronavirus (COVID-19)

For Saltire, use this style on first mention, then use coronavirus on its own after that. If you're writing for gov.scot or mygov.scot, use COVID-19 for subsequent mentions.

councils

Cap in full title e.g. Edinburgh City Council, otherwise lower case.

Courts. Cap all courts when specific e.g. Dunfermline Sheriff Court: always cap the High Court but lower case sheriff court or youth court etc.

D to F

Below are our writing styles for letters D to F - from data centre to funding agreement.

D

data centre

Not 'datacentre'.

data

Treat as a singular noun: The data is stored on a secure server.

data set

Not 'dataset'.

dates

dates in the format of day month year
use upper case for months: January, February
do not use a comma between the month and year: 4 June 2017
when space is an issue - in tables or publication titles, for example - you can use truncated months: Jan, Feb
we use 'to' in date ranges - not hyphens, en rules or em dashes. For example:
tax year 2011 to 2012 (not 2011/12)
Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm (put different days on a new line, don't separate with a comma)
10 November to 21 December

a hyphen can be used when listing years in reports or titles: 2006-2007 (not 2006-07)
don't use quarter for dates, use the months: 'department expenses, Jan to Mar 2013'
when referring to today (as in a news article) include the date: 'The minister announced today (14 June 2012) that...'
don't use suffixes (st, nd, rd, th) with dates, e.g. 10 October 2014
if abbreviating individual dates, use forward slashes: 01/12; 01/12/06 not 01-12; 01-12-06
don't use an apostrophe for decades, except when using the possessive form: the hospital was opened in the 1960s but it is a 1960's hospital
use midday and midnight instead of 12am/12pm

daytime

But night-time.

department

Lower case except when in the title: the Department of Health and Social Care.

desktop

No hyphen.

devolved administrations

Lower case.

Director

Director is capped up when it is associated with a proper name e.g. Director Joe Public - otherwise lower case.

Directorate

Directorate is capped up when it is associated with its function e.g. Health Directorate - otherwise lower case if it is just a generic description.

Director General

Director General (the plural of which is Directors General) is capped up when it is associated with a proper name e.g. Director General Joe Public - otherwise lower case.

E

early years

Lower case.

EC

Is the abbreviation for the European Commission, not the European Community. Cap the Commission throughout as a noun, but lower case when adjectival e.g. a commission ruling: cap the commissioner only when referring to a specific person (e.g. Mario Monti, the Competition Commissioner; thereafter, the commissioner). The President of the European Commission is capped throughout (as with all foreign Presidents).

e.g.

With points - not eg.

eg can sometimes be read aloud as 'egg' by screen reading software. Instead use 'for example' or 'such as' or 'like' or 'including' - whichever works best in the specific context.

elections

general election always lower case; similarly by-election, European election etc.

email

One word.

email addresses

All email addresses should be written:

in full
in lower case
as active links

Don't include any other words in the link text.

embassy

Same style as for Ambassador e.g. the French Embassy in Rome, thereafter the embassy.

etc.

With a point, not etc

etc can usually be avoided. Try using 'for example' or 'such as' or 'like' or 'including'. Never use etc at the end of a list starting with these words.

euro

Lower case.

EU Exit

Upper case.

European Commission

Leave unabbreviated to distinguish from the European Community. Write out in full at first mention, then call it the Commission.

European Union vs European Community

Use EU when you mean EU member states: EU countries, EU businesses, EU consumers, goods exported from the EU, EU VAT numbers.

EC should be used when it's EC directives, EC Sales List.

Excel spreadsheet

Upper case because Excel is a brand name.

executive director

Lower case in text. Upper case in titles: Spencer Tracy, Executive Director, GDS.

extra-curricular

Hyphenated.

F

FAQs (frequently asked questions)

Abbreviation for frequently asked questions (no apostrophe).

Avoid using FAQs. If you write content by starting with user needs, you wont need to use FAQs.

figures

Never start a sentence or title with a figure. If a sentence or title begins with a number, it must be spelled out.

Also see numbers.

finance and procurement

Lower case.

First Minister's Questions

Initial caps. Same for Question Time etc, but questions (lower case) to the First Minister, etc.

focused

Has only a single 's'.

foot and mouth disease

Lower case.

Freedom of Information

You can make a Freedom of Information (FOI) request, but not a request under the FOI Act.

full stops

Should be followed by a single space and not a double. See also sentences.

funding agreement

Lower case.

G to I

Below are our writing styles for letters G to I - from general election to italics.

G

general election

Lower case.

gender neutral language

Use gender neutral language wherever possible.

For instance, use tradesperson, actor or manager – not tradesman, actress or manageress.

Instead of saying 'a manager should discuss changes with his staff' or 'a manager should discuss changes with his/her staff', say 'managers should discuss changes with their staff'.

Other words and phrases to watch out for include mankind (humanity or people), manpower (staff or workers) or manmade (synthetic or artificial).

geography

Note the difference between the United Kingdom (includes Northern Ireland) and Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales only).

Use UK/United Kingdom over Britain/British wherever possible. But note exceptions, e.g. British citizen, British embassy.

regions and compass directions use lower case, e.g. the north, north-east Scotland, western Europe. capitals are used for East Dunbartonshire, North Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, West Lothian, etc.

governing body

Singular noun.

The governing body is meeting today. It will decide who to appoint.

government

Use upper case only when referring to a specific government: we work for the Government. Use lower case when referring to local government or when using in an adjectival context: government expenditure; government funding.

government offices

Lower case.

guidance

Lower case: national recovery guidance.

H

headers

All page headers (whatever level) should be sentence case. Only the first word and any proper nouns included should have a leading capital letter.

For example, the header 'Flexible Working Hours Policy' refers to a proper name, whereas 'Flexible working' is a generic description (and so takes sentence case).

Use a colon in headers that feature a sub-clause or are lengthy. This will help you to front-load the header with eye-catching keywords and keep it compact.

The first word after the colon should begin with a lower case letter (unless it's part of a proper name).

headteacher

One word. You can use head if the context is clear.

helpdesk

Not 'help desk'.

Holyroodhouse, Palace of

Or Holyrood Palace (interchangeable).

homepage

Lower case.

honours

People are appointed Privy Counsellor, Baronet, KBE, CBE, OBE, MBE etc; never say made, received, were awarded, or got the OBE etc. Peers and above (viscounts etc) are created, not appointed etc. At investitures, those honoured receive the insignia of the award, not the award itself.

HTTPS

Upper case. No need to explain the acronym if it's used in content for a technical audience.

hyphenation

Hyphenate:

re- words starting with e, like re-evaluate
co-ordinate
co-operate

Do not hyphenate:

email

override

overrule

reapply

redesign

redo

refit

reinvent

rejoin

reorder

reopen

reshape

reuse

Use hyphens to form compound adjectives: five-year plan, air-conditioned room. Other composite words should not be hyphenated: Grandmother, takeover, knockout.

Do not use a hyphen unless it's confusing without it, for example, a little used-car is different from a little-used car.

Use 'to' for time and date ranges, not hyphens.

Always use a hyphen in preference to a slash (/) in dates: 2009-10

Do not use hyphens after adverbs ending in 'ly'.

Hyperlinks

See links.

I

ID

In technical writing, don't write 'identification' or 'identifier', unless it's part of a standard abbreviation. For example, 'unique identifier (UID)'.

i.e.

Use points - not ie

ie - used to clarify a sentence - is not always well understood. Try (re)writing sentences to avoid the need to use it. If that is not possible, use an alternative such as 'meaning' or 'that is'.

inpatients

No hyphen.

inquire, inquiry

Not enquire, enquiry.

internet

Lower case.

into

Is one word but 'on to' are two separate words.

intranet

Lower case.

Inverted commas

See [quotation marks](#).

IP

When used in the technical context (for example 'internet protocol'), there's no need to explain the acronym.

-ise endings

Use 'ise', not 'ize': emphasise, realise (not emphasize, realize). The only exceptions are capsize and proper nouns (e.g. company names).

italics

Do not use italics. Use 'single quotation marks' if referring to a document, scheme or initiative.

J to M

Below are our writing styles for letters J to M - from jargon to multimillion.

J

jargon

Avoid jargon and waffle.

Instead of 'implementation of the team's collaborative role has been initiated' say 'we have started work'.

See also words to avoid.

job titles

Use upper case when referring to a specific role or named person: the Director; Joe Bloggs, Marketing Manager.

Use lower case if writing generally: catering staff, site managers.

When quoting a named individual, no comma is required if referring to a person by title: First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said: '...'.

However, commas must be used to separate a descriptive title: Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister said: '...'.

justified text

Don't use justified text. Use left aligned instead.

K

KB

Acceptable abbreviation for kilobyte. Don't include a space between the number and the measurement: 120KB

key stage

Lower case and numeral: key stage 4.

L

law

Lower case even when it's 'the law'.

learned

Not learnt.

legal aid

Lower case.

legal content

Legal content can still be written in plain English. It's important that users understand content and that we present complicated information simply.

If you have to publish legal jargon, write a plain English summary.

Where evidence shows there's a clear user need for including a legal term (like bona vacantia), always explain it in plain English. See also legal terms.

legal requirements

When writing about a legal requirement, use 'must'. For example: 'To waive the 48-hour limit, you must complete the Working Time waiver form'.

For more emphasis, you can use 'legal requirement', 'legally entitled', 'legal obliged' or similar. But this is generally only necessary where failure to take action, for example, might result in an offence being committed.

'Need to' should be used in place of 'must' where a legal requirement is purely administrative, e.g. 'You need to submit a copy of your passport with your application'. (The worst that can happen if instructions are ignored is a failed application).

legal terms

Scottish	English
Accused	Defendant
Aliment	Alimony
Arbiter	Arbitrator
Co-accused	Co-defender
Culpable homicide	Manslaughter
Defender (civil)	Defendant
Expenses	Costs

Fire-raising	Arson
Housebreaking	Burglary
Interdict	Injunction
Continued (judgement)	Reserved
Confirmation	Probate (wills)
Pursuer	Plaintiff
Uttering (presenting)	Receiving Forgery

LGBTI

Stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex. All initials should be used.

life cycle

Not 'lifecycle' or 'life-cycle'.

links

Front-load your link text with the relevant terms and make them active and specific. Always link to online services first. Offer offline alternatives afterwards, when possible.

Don't overuse hyperlinks - keep them relevant. For example, you don't have to create a link to the Scottish Government 'About' section every time you refer to the Scottish Government.

Links must be specific and explicit to be accessible. For example: 'Find out more' is useless to someone using a screen reader. But 'Apply for flexible working' or 'Download our Flexible Working policy' tell you exactly where the link will take you.

Always spell out what the link is about and do not use urls for links. For example: more information on child protection issues, not http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/protecting/child-protection

Never use 'click here' - it is unnecessary and can be confusing for assisted technologies that read out links on the page.

lists

Lists should be bulleted to make them easier to read. See <u>bullets and steps</u>.

Very long lists can be written as a paragraph with a lead-in sentence if it looks better: 'The following countries are in the EU: Spain, France, Italy...'

local authority

Lower case. Do not use LA.

Use local council instead of local authority where possible.

log in

Verb: you will need to log in.

login

Noun/adjective: you will be issued with a login

looked-after children

Hyphenated.

M

MB

Acceptable abbreviation for megabyte. Don't include a space between the number and the measurement: 2.2MB.

measurements

Use numerals and spell out measurements at first mention.

Use lower case for standard measurements: kg; km; mph but use upper case for KB; GB; MB.

Exception: spell out metres to prevent confusion with abbreviation for million.

Note: do not include a space between the number and the unit: 20km; 50mph; 100KB.

Never add an 's' to measurements: 20km, not 20kms.

Do not use a space between the numeral and abbreviated measurement: 3,500kg not 3,500 kg.

If the measurement is more than one word, like kilometres per hour, then spell it out the first time it's used with the abbreviation. From then on, abbreviate. If it's only mentioned once, do not abbreviate.

Use Celsius for temperature: 37°C.

member states of the EU

Lower case.

memorandum of understanding

Lower case.

metadata

Not 'meta data'.

metres

Write out in full to prevent confusion with million.

midday, midweek

No hyphens.

ministers

See naming conventions.

millions

Always use million in money (and billion): £138 million.

Use millions in phrases: millions of people.

But do not use £0.xx million for amounts less than £1 million.

Do not abbreviate million to m.

money

When referring to round sums of money, do not add '.00': £3, not £3.00.

Thousands, tens of thousands, and hundreds of thousands of pounds Use internal comma:

£2,500 or £10,678 or £650,400

Spell out million and billion in full unless it's being used in a headline:

£25,000,000 or £25 million

Never start a sentence with a monetary amount unless it can be prefixed by:

more than £5 million...
around £13 million will be spent...

months

See [dates](#).

multimillion

No hyphens.

N to P

Below are our writing styles for letters N to P - from naming conventions to public holiday.

N

naming conventions

Use upper case for named departments, initiatives, networks, organisations, projects and schemes: Group IT Services; Edinburgh Tram Initiative; Low Emission Zone.

Cabinet secretaries and ministers should always have their titles written out in full on first mention.

First Minister Joe Public then becomes the FM or Mr Public on second and subsequent mention.

The terms Cabinet Secretary and Minister should always begin with upper case initials even when the mention is without a name.

The only time lower case initials would be used is in generic non-Scottish Government references (e.g. There were cabinet secretaries and ministers from 10 different countries at the conference).

Secretary can be used on its own e.g. Justice Secretary. CS should not be used as an acronym of Cabinet Secretary. Only FM and DFM can be written as acronyms.

Minister for Environment/Community Justice is interchangeable with Environment/Community Justice Minister.

Ministers with more than one portfolio should use the element of their title relevant to the subject in question. Cabinet Secretary for the Environment and Rural Affairs becomes Environment Secretary or Rural Affairs Secretary.

numbers

Spell out numbers one to nine in full. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine.

Use numerals for numbers 10 and above. 'There were 15 people present ...'

Exceptions include if you're describing:

a step

a numbered example

a point in a list

a series of numbers (follow the rule of the largest number for all numbers in the series)

a per cent number

Add a comma for numerals of 1,000 or more: 2,500 or 10,678 or 650,400.

Exception: To start a sentence with a number convert it to letters: Ten thousand people met ... NOT 10,000 people met ...

Millions (and billions) as combination of letters and digits: 25 million NOT 25m.

Follow same style for money references: £25,000,000 or £25 million.

Never start a sentence with a monetary amount unless it can be prefixed by:

more than £5 million...
around £13 million will be spent...

Always use a hyphen (-) in preference to a slash (/) in dates: 2009-10.

Don't use an apostrophe when referring to decades or plurals as this makes them possessive: 1980s not 1980's; under-16s not under-16's.

Use numerals with measurements, including hours and minutes (e.g. 11 hours 6 minutes).

Spell out common fractions, like two thirds.

Use the £ symbol for money (use decimal places only if necessary, e.g. £55.25 but £56).

Spell out ordinal numbers up to ninth, then use 10th etc. Exceptions include descriptions of floor numbers, for example, '1st to 7th floors'.

Use the % symbol rather than spelling out 'per cent' in full.

For number ranges, spell out 'to' or 'and' instead of using a dash. For example: '500 to 1,000', 'between 500 and 1,000', '56 to 64 Leith Walk'.

For 1,000,000 and greater, use the style '1 million'. Add a decimal point if necessary: '2.6 million'.

O

online

One word when referring to the internet or a website. Don't use 'on-line' or 'on line'.

P

Paragraph alignment.

Only use left aligned text (not fully justified).

Parliament

Always cap, parliamentary lower case.

people and teams

Avoid referring to 'staff', 'employees' or even 'individuals'. Use 'colleague' where necessary.

Don't refer to the 'HR team'. Use 'People Directorate'.

per cent

Use per cent not percent. Percentage is one word. Always use % with a number even if the number is under 10.

plurals

Don't add an apostrophe when making a word or abbreviation plural as this makes it possessive: under-16s not under-16's; DVDs not DVD's; 1990s not 1990's.

policymaking/policymaker

One word.

practice

Noun: it is standard practice; piano practice.

practise

Verb: he practises playing the piano every day; she is a practising doctor.

Private Member's Bill

Use initial caps.

public holiday

Always use lower case.

Q to S

Below are writing styles for Q to S - from Queen to summary of consultation responses.

Q

Queen

Initial cap. HM the Queen.

quotation marks

Also known as inverted commas.

Double inverted comms can be use for containing direct speech (quoting somebody).

A colon introduces direct speech: He said: 'Hello there ...'

Paragraphs within direct speech begin with inverted commas, but are only closed once the final paragraph is reached:

'Hello there and how are you?

'The Scottish Government is the devolved government for Scotland and the First Minister has his official residence at Bute House.

'That is generally how it works.'

Single inverted commas are used to denote a short quote within a sentence of text.

The Minister said the situation was 'unacceptable'.

Single quotation marks are also used to enclose publication titles and also unfamiliar terms that require further explanation.

R

re-

Where possible, run the prefix on to the word it qualifies e.g. readmission, remake, rework, etc: but there are two main classes of exceptions:

where the word after re- begins with an 'e' e.g. re-election, re-emerge, re-examine, re-enter etc
where there could be serious ambiguity in compounds such as re-creation (recreation), recover (recover)

Register of Members' Interests

Use initial caps.

Royal Assent

Use initial caps.

roads

M8 not 'the M8 motorway' as 'the A91 road', but correct to say 'the M8 Edinburgh to Glasgow motorway'.

royal, royalty

Lower case for royalty but cap the Royal Family; royal is usually lower case when an adjective; royal approval, the royal wave, but takes the cap in titles such as Royal Assent, Royal Collection, Royal Household, Royal Yacht etc.

S

same-sex schools

Hyphenated.

scientific names

Capitalise the first letter of the first part of the scientific name. Do not use italics.

Scottish Government

First initial caps. Use 'we' or 'us' rather than 'the Scottish Government' wherever possible.

Scrum

Upper case when referring to the framework and method for developing products, otherwise use lower case.

seasons

spring, summer, autumn, winter are lower case.

security classifications

Official, Secret, Top Secret.

Upper case when referring to government security classifications, otherwise lower case.

If it's not clear from the context, you may need to clarify that it's a classification not a general description: 'information classified as Official' rather than 'Official information'.

semi-colons

Don't use semicolons as they are often mis-read. Long sentences using semicolons should be broken up into separate sentences instead.

sentence length

Do not use long sentences. Check sentences with more than 25 words to see if you can split them to make them clearer.

sentence spacing

Use a single space at the beginning of sentences as double spaces can be problematic for visually impaired readers and readers.

SMEs

This acronym means small and medium-sized enterprises. Use SME for the singular.

south, the south of Scotland

Lower case.

south-east, south-west

Lower case, hyphenated.

speech marks

See quotation marks.

Stage 1, Stage 2

Of a Bill etc, caps also with Section 2, Article 8, etc.

State

Cap in context of the State as a wide concept, but not in the welfare state, or used adjectivally such as state benefits.

statistics

Read Style.ONS to find out how to write about statistics. This has been produced by the Office for National Statistics for all members of the Government Statistical Service.

Upper case National Statistics for the official statistics quality mark. Lower case for anything else, including statistics that are national in scope.

strategy

Lower case. Do not capitalise a named strategy: national health and welfare strategy.

summaries

On gov.scot, the summary is what users see in internal and external search results. It sits just below the title and is used to give more information on what the content is about.

It should help people see quickly whether the content will have the information they want.

Summaries should:

be 140 characters or less
end with a full stop
not repeat the title or body text
be clear and specific
use plain English
include keywords
only use acronyms if they are very common, for example EU, NATO
not contain redundant introductory words which don't provide useful information e.g. 'the purpose of this document is...'

Good example: 'Steps that we and our public sector partners will take to improve mobile connectivity across Scotland'.

Bad example: 'Ensuring high quality digital connectivity across all of Scotland is a priority for the Scottish Government (SG).'

summary of consultation responses

All lower case.

T to Z

Below are writing styles for T to Z - from technical terms to written statement.

T

technical terms

Use technical terms where you need to. They're not jargon. You just need to explain what they mean the first time you use them.

telephone numbers

Use Telephone: 011 111 111 or Mobile: - not Mob:.

Use spaces between city and local exchange. Here are the different formats to use:

0131 244 4000

0300 244 4000 (Central Enquiry Unit)

+44 (0)131 244 4000

When a number is memorable, group the numbers into easily remembered units: 0800 80 70 60.

temperature

Use Celsius: 37°C.

text alignment

Only use left aligned text (not fully justified).

times

use 'to' in time ranges, not hyphens, because it's easier to read: 10am to 11am (not 10-11am)
5:30pm (not 1730hrs)
midnight (not 00:00)
midday (not 12 noon, noon or 12pm)
6 hours 30 minutes

Midnight is the first minute of the day, not the last. You should consider using '11:59pm' to avoid confusion about a single, specific time.

For example, 'You must register by 11:59pm on Tuesday 14 June.' can only be read one way, but 'You must register by midnight on Tuesday 14 June' can be read in two ways (the end of Monday 13, or end of Tuesday 14).

titles

When creating titles and summaries for a document on gov.scot, think about how these will look in search on gov.scot and on search engines.

Titles should:

be short - around 60 characters maximum
be unique - if there are multiple similar documents already published (such as minutes) then use a date (year, or month and year are usually sufficient) in the title after a separating colon so that users can pick up the distinction easily
be consistent with other, similar documents - if in doubt, look at the site for other similar documents and make the titling consistent with them
remember that there will be additional ways of clarifying the content so that it doesn't all need to be fitted into the title - use the summary field to provide more detail
should be clear and descriptive and provide context so people can easily see if they've found what they're looking for such as 'Potato growers' guidance' not 'potatoes'
be front-loaded and optimised for search e.g. 'income tax reform: impact assessment' works better than 'an assessment of the impact of proposed reforms to income tax'

use a colon to break up longer titles for example 'Planning appeal procedures: technical review'
not contain dashes or slashes
not have a full stop at the end
not use acronyms unless they are well-known, like EU
not use initial caps for every word and use sentence case as much as possible - only the first word and any proper nouns should have a leading capital letter

tone

It is important to strike a balance between a tone that is authoritative and formal, and one that is friendly and engaging.

Make sure it sounds like it comes from an individual, not an anonymous organisation.

Write as if you are speaking.

Use plain English, avoid jargon, technical language or 'management speak', don't waffle, be gender neutral, avoid ambiguity and be precise.

All correspondence, for both internal and external audiences, should be in the first person rather than the third person. For example 'we' or 'us' rather than 'the Scottish Government'.

Your communications should adopt a tone that shows we care about improving people's experiences on Saltire/SG website:

when talking about improvements, be proud of what we're doing
if we're celebrating our successes, write in an upbeat style

Twitter account

Upper case. Twitter is a trademarked name.

type size

Use a minimum of 12pt for all printed documents.

type style

don't use capitals for whole sentences
avoid using italics
avoid using bold (use the heading styles available)
avoid using underlining to prevent confusion with hyperlinks

U

underlining

Avoid underlining text.

URL

Accepted abbreviation for 'uniform resource locator'. It refers to the web address of a particular page. See links.

W

web

Lower case.

website

One word - not web-site or web site.

weights and measures

Abbreviations: context will determine when to shorten kilometres, grams, feet, etc. 'He was 6ft 7in' (not ins, and no space between number and abbreviation), but 'she stood two feet from the kerb'. Similarly, 'she weighed 8st 12lb' (not lbs), but 'he was several pounds overweight'.

who, whom

Which of these to use is determined solely by its function in the relative clause.

Remember that whom has to be the object of the verb in the relative clause.

words to avoid

We aim to use Plain English as much as possible on gov.scot. Here are some suggestions for words to avoid:

agenda (unless it's for a meeting)
advancing
collaborate (use working with)
combating
commit/pledge (we need to be more specific - we're either doing something or we're not)
countering
deliver (pizzas, post and services are delivered - not abstract concepts like improvements or priorities)
deploy (unless it's military or software)
dialogue (we speak to people)
disincentivise (and incentivise)
empower
facilitate (instead, say something specific about how you're helping)
focusing

foster (unless it's children)

impact (do not use this as a synonym for have an effect on, or influence)

initiate

key (unless it unlocks something. A subject/thing is not key - it's probably important)

land (as a verb only use if you're talking about aircraft)

leverage (unless in the financial sense)

liaise

overarching

progress (as a verb - what are you actually doing?)

promote (unless you're talking about an ad campaign or some other marketing promotion)

robust

slimming down (processes do not diet)

streamline

strengthening (unless it's strengthening bridges or other structures)

tackling (unless it's rugby, football or some other sport)

transforming (what are you actually doing to change it?)

utilise

Avoid using metaphors – they do not say what you actually mean and lead to slower comprehension of your content. For example:

drive (you can only drive vehicles, not schemes or people)

drive out (unless it's cattle)

gains traction (unless it is heavy lifting equipment)

going forward (it's unlikely we are giving travel directions)

in order to (superfluous - don't use it)

one-stop shop (we are government, not a retail outlet)

ring fencing

With all of these words you can generally replace them by breaking the term into what you're actually doing. Be open and specific.

Avoid using clichés such as:

at this moment in time

baseline our thinking

blue sky thinking

close of play

horizon scanning

in the round

root and branch review

step change

touch base

World War 1, World War 2

Upper case and numbers.

written ministerial statement, written statement

Lower case.