

Writing skills

This section considers:

- A. Correspondence – emails and letters, addresses, titles.
- B. CV writing – guidelines and templates.
- C. Style – guidelines for reports, theses and dissertations.
- D. Style – commenting, link words, lists, numbers, repetition, sexist language.
- E. Formal English – avoiding slang and contractions.

A. Correspondence – emails and letters

Guidelines to writing emails, letters and faxes

Irrespective of whether you send an email, or post or fax a letter, these guidelines still apply.

- *Use either the BE or AE standards.* There are differences between BE and AE customs in standard salutations in email and letter writing (see below).
- *Use a salutation.* In most cases this will be 'Dear Mr Jones' or 'Dear John'. Occasionally in emails just use the first name: 'John'. The exception is letters of recommendation or similar that usually start: 'To whom it may concern'.
- *Use the ending that matches the salutation.* If you are unsure, follow the guidelines given below.
- *Use '-ing forms' in the verbs at the end.* This stresses that you have an ongoing relationship and that there is unfinished business. Some examples are: 'We are looking forward to receiving your comments on this report, by the end of April.' 'We are considering your proposals and are looking forward to discussing matters with you on 12 April.' Naturally this does not apply to all types of emails.
- *Write the month in letters or use the ISO standard for international contacts.* Use the format, 2 May 2009, or the ISO standard for all-digit dates (CCYY-MM-DD). In ISO 8601, 2 May 2009 is written 2009-05-02. See [DATES](#).
- *Never write a date as 02.05.09 if it is going to read by an international company.* To Europeans, this probably means 2 May 2009; but most Americans will understand it as February 5, 2009.
- *Avoid exclamation marks (!) in formal business letters.* An exclamation mark in English is used to express astonishment or surprise.
- *Avoid short forms like 'I'm' and 'don't' in business letters.* These should only be used in informal, conversational writing and when reporting another person's exact words. Sometimes they are used in personal emails to stress closeness and informality. See [CONTRACTIONS](#).

- *Never treat a business email differently from a business letter.* Although many people try to avoid using the formal salutation (see **FORMAL EMAILS AND LETTERS**, below), its use is recommended if the name of the recipient is not known. Though emails tend to be friendlier than letters, a salutation should always be used. A typical email starts with 'Dear Mary', or sometimes 'Mary', and ends 'Regards'. A *Financial Times* survey of 2000 business people in the UK a few years ago found that 60 per cent objected to the lack of salutations in emails and were irritated by the use of a casual tone in many mails. Emails from a company or institution should not be too informal and a safe rule is to avoid salutations like 'Hi!' and endings like 'love and kisses'. Some standard salutations and endings are listed below.

Standard openings (salutations) and endings in emails and letters in BE

Formal emails and letters, where you are writing to an institution or an unnamed person

These start with the following salutations:

<i>Dear Sirs,</i>	when you write to a company, organization, university.
<i>Dear Sir,</i>	to an unnamed person, who you know is male.
<i>Dear Madam,</i>	to an unnamed person, who you know is female.
<i>Dear Sir or Madam,</i>	the safe option to an unnamed person, such as a Personnel Manager.
<i>Dear Editor,</i>	in a letter to a newspaper.

These end:

Yours faithfully,

Normal business emails and letters, where you know the recipient's name

These start:

<i>Dear Mr Jones,</i>	to a named man. Never use 'Mister'.
<i>Dear Ms Jones,</i>	to any named woman, without referring to her marital status. This is becoming more and more usual for any woman.
<i>Dear Mrs Jones,</i>	to a named woman who is married. Some women write (Mrs) after their names in letters so that their correspondent knows that this is the expected salutation to use in their reply.
<i>Dear Miss Jones,</i>	to a named woman who is unmarried.
<i>Dear Professor Jones,</i>	used for all professors, including assistant and associate professors. Avoid using the slangy Prof. and always capitalize Professor.
<i>Dear Dr Jones,</i>	can be used for someone holding a PhD or other doctoral degree.

These end:

Yours sincerely,

Note that in British English, you do not use a stop after abbreviations like *Mr*, *Ms* (pronounced miz /mɪz/), *Mrs*, and *Dr*, as is the custom in American English. If you are writing to someone where it is difficult to determine whether you should use *Mr* or *Ms*, one solution is just to use the first and last name: *Dear Sam Smith* or *Dear Li-Ching*.

Emails and letters to colleagues, associates and friends, etc.

These start:

- Dear Jim,* if a person signs his email or letter with 'Jim', use this in your reply. If you use 'Dear Mr Jones', you signal coldness and distance to Jim.
- Dear Mary,* as for 'Dear Jim'.
- Dear colleagues,* useful in group mailings, but you could be more personal.

There are many endings. Here are some on a scale from a businesslike tone to close friendship:

- Yours sincerely,* even though you start 'Dear Jim,' you show that this is a businesslike email or letter.
- Regards,* although frequently used in emails, this is too informal for most business letters.
- Kind regards,*
- Best wishes,* used to signal friendliness.
- Warm regards,* more friendly, frequently used for friends.
- Love,* only used for close friends.

Example of a formal letter

Southern Customer Services
PO BOX 277
Tonbridge TN9 2ZP

12 Hills Road
Haywards Heath
RH16 4XY

12 November 2009

Dear Sir or Madam,

IMPROVED SERVICE ON SOUTHERN RAIL

This is not a letter of complaint about your rail services. In fact, it is quite the reverse. I wish to compliment you on your rail services. Getting to London and back is so much more comfortable than it was a few years ago when another company was running the service. I regularly go to Victoria and your staff are extremely helpful. I have also noted that the service staff keep the carriages clean and tidy. Keep up the good work.

Yours faithfully,

George Smith

Example of a business letter

78 Wingate Road
Trumpington
Cambridge
CB2 2RF

The University of Exeter,
The Queen's Drive,
Exeter,
Devon,
EX4 4QJ

2 November 2009

Dear Ms Smith,

APPLICATION FOR POSITION AS ASSISTANT OFFICE MANAGER IN STUDENT SERVICES,
UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

I wish to apply for the above position that was advertised in *The Daily Telegraph* on 28 October 2009. I have a bachelor's degree in business studies from the University of Nottingham in 2005 and since then I have worked at The Grand Hotel in Eastbourne with responsibility for updating their booking systems (2006–2007). At present I am working as an assistant office manager in the RSA Examinations Syndicate at Cambridge. This is only a temporary position until the end of the year.

The position you advertise seems to be an excellent opportunity for me to apply my knowledge of business studies and work in a university environment which is a central objective in my career plans.

I have attached my CV where I feel that my education and skills should make me a candidate worth consideration. I speak and write excellent French which I have noted is one of the skills you require. My computer skills correspond with what you specify in the above advertisement. My tutor and present employer have kindly agreed to provide references and their contact details are given on the CV.

I am a serious-minded person who works conscientiously and diligently. I get on well with colleagues and like to be part of a team. Outside working life I enjoy sports, especially rugby which I play at Old-Boys level, although I have appeared twice for the Eastern Counties team.

I am available for an interview in Exeter at any time in November or December.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Slater

Example of an email to a business contact

Subject line: Interview at University of Exeter

Dear Mr Birnet,

Thank you very much for inviting me for an interview. I confirm that I will be at your offices at 10.30 on Thursday 19 November.

I am very grateful that you have offered to cover my travel expenses.

Looking forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely,
Colin Slater

Example of an email to a friend

Subject line: Exeter calling . . .

Hi Jane,

How are things in Bath? I tried to ring you just now but your mobile must be on the blink so I decided to send this mail. Last week, we talked about spending a weekend together. Guess what? I've been picked for an interview for that job in Exeter. I'll be there on Thursday next week. How about making it a weekend trip and we can see a bit of Devon? I can pick you up on Wednesday afternoon, if you can get time off work.

Love,
Colin

Standard openings (salutations) and endings in emails and letters in AE

Formal emails and letters, where you are writing to an institution or an unnamed person

These start with the following salutations:

- Dear Sirs:

when you write to a company, organization, university.
- Dear Sir:

to an unnamed person, who you know is male.
- Dear Madam:

to an unnamed person, who you know is female.
- Dear Madam or Sir:

always the safe option for an unnamed person.

These often end:

Sincerely, / Sincerely yours,

Note the use of the colon after the salutation in AE. Some American letters and emails of this type also omit the 'Dear' in these types of salutations, and just open *Madam or Sir*:

Another such salutation is *Ladies and Gentlemen*: (to a company, etc.) Many feel that *Truly* has become overused as an ending and should be avoided. *Respectfully* is very formal and is rarely used today.

Normal business emails and letters, where you know the recipient's name

These start:

- Dear Mr. Jones:* to a named male, never use 'Mister' in a letter.
- Dear Ms. Jones:* to a named female, without reference to her marital status.
- Dear Mrs. Jones:* to a named female, who is married.
- Dear Miss Jones:* to a named female, who is unmarried.
- Dear Professor Jones:* use for all professors: also assistant and associate professors. Write *Professor* in full, do not use the slangy *Prof*.
- Dear Dr. Jones:* can be used for someone holding a PhD, or other doctoral degree.

These often end:

- Sincerely,*
- Sincerely yours,*

Note that in American English, a stop is used after abbreviations like *Mr.*, *Ms.* (pronounced miz /mɪz/), *Mrs.*, and *Dr.*, and a colon placed after the name (as an alternative, a comma is sometimes used). Some Americans use just *Dear M. Jones:* to avoid the gender specific greeting. *Dear M./M. Jones:* is also sometimes used for the same reasons in place of 'Mr. and Mrs.' in emails and letters.

Emails and letters to colleagues, associates and friends, etc.

These start:

- Dear Jim,* if a person signs his email or letter with 'Jim', use this in your reply. If you use 'Dear Mr Jones', you signal coldness and distance to Jim.
- Dear Mary,* same comments as for 'Dear Jim'.
- Dear colleagues,* useful in group mailings, but you could be more personal.

The endings vary on a scale that indicates a business tone to close friendship:

- Sincerely,* even though you start 'Dear Jim', you show that this is a businesslike email or letter.
- Regards,* although frequently used in emails, this is too informal for most business letters.
- Kind regards,*
- Best wishes,* used to signal friendliness.
- Warm regards,* getting slightly 'hotter', frequently used for friends.
- Love,* only used for close friends.

Note that a comma is frequent after such salutations and endings.

Addresses in letters

In modern English, all addresses are written with as few stops and commas as possible. Companies and organizations have their name on the top line of a letterhead followed by the address. However, personal letters only have the address placed at the top. (When the recipient does not know the writer, the writer’s name should be printed underneath his or her signature.) The address of the recipient is normally placed under the address of the sender. Many people place both addresses against the left-hand margin of the letter. Note that although the street number is placed before the street name in the UK, the USA and elsewhere, there are many other countries in which this order is reversed. Try to follow the practice of the destination country:

Visclar Ltd.
169 Orange Street
New Haven
CT 06510, USA

Clovn Corporation
Bahnhofstrasse 19–21
DE – 63543 Neuberg, Germany

Common short forms in addresses are: *Ave* (Avenue), *Blvd* (Boulevard), *Rd* (Road), *Sq.* (Square), *St* (Street).

ISO 3166-1 ‘Codes for the representation of names of countries and their subdivisions – Part 1: Country codes’ is a list of the international two-letter codes for about 240 countries (details about ISO can be obtained from www.iso.ch).

Titles for appointed or elected officials

Ambassadors (BE model)

In letters

Envelope: *His Excellency John Smith, Ambassador of the Republic of Ireland, Irish Embassy*

Salutation: *Dear Ambassador,*

Close: *Yours sincerely,*

In meetings

Introduction: *Her Excellency Jane Smith, British Ambassador to Spain*

When meeting her: *Ambassador*

When referring to her: *Your Excellency*

Ambassadors (AE model)

In letters

Envelope: *The Honorable James/Jane Smith, Ambassador of the United States, American Embassy*

Salutation: *Dear Mr Ambassador: / Dear Madam Ambassador:*

Close: *Sincerely yours, / Sincerely,*

In meetings

Introduction: *The Ambassador of the United States of America*
 Reference: *Mr Ambassador, Madam Ambassador*

Government ministers (BE model)

In letters

Envelope: *The Rt. Hon. John Smith, MP, Minister for . . .*
 Salutation: *Dear Sir, Dear Madam,*
 Close: *Yours faithfully,*

In meetings

When meeting: *Minister*
 Introducing: *Mr Smith, Minister for . . .*

MPs/MEPs

In letters

Envelope: *Mr John Smith, MP*
 Salutation: *Dear Sir, Dear Madam,*
 Close: *Yours faithfully,*

In meetings *Mr Smith,*

Senators (AE model)

In letters

Envelope: *The Honorable James/Jane Smith, United States Senate*
 Salutation: *Dear Senator Smith:*
 Close: *Sincerely yours, / Sincerely,*

In meetings

Introduction: *Senator Smith from Nebraska*
 Reference: *Senator Smith*

Representatives (AE model)

In letters

Envelope: *The Honorable James/Jane Smith, United States House of Representatives*
 Salutation: *Dear Mr. Smith: / Dear Ms. Smith:*
 Close: *Sincerely yours, / Sincerely,*

In meetings

Introduction: *The Representative from New Jersey*
 Reference: *Mr Smith, Ms Smith*

B. CV writing – guidelines and templates

A skills-based CV is one way to show what you can offer the job market. There is a template and instructions for completing this type of CV (in most European languages) which can be downloaded at <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/home/hornav/Downloads/navigate.action>.

These notes may also help you to match your skills to the advertised job or appointment.

Use headings, such as:

<i>Personal information</i>	<i>Desired employment</i>
<i>Work experience</i>	<i>Education and training</i>
<i>Personal skills and competences</i>	<i>Social skills and competences</i>
<i>Organizational skills and competences</i>	<i>Technical skills and competences</i>
<i>Computer skills and competences</i>	<i>Artistic skills and competences</i>
<i>Other skills and competences</i>	<i>Additional information – References</i>
<i>Annexes</i>	

A CV should be as concise as possible, and limited to a maximum of two pages.

Personal information

Name: (on both pages of the CV)

Address: **Home:** **Term:** (give dates)

Phone: **Email:**

Date of birth:

Work experience

Start with the most recent activities and tailor this section to each job you apply for.

- Use complete sentences and active constructions:

<i>became proficient in . . .</i>	<i>gained experience in . . .</i>
<i>acquired skills in . . .</i>	<i>responsible for . . .</i>
<i>conducted research in . . .</i>	<i>in charge of . . .</i>

- Explain any gaps:

2006 to 2007 Unemployed, used this time for retraining (ICT skills).

Education and training

- Start with your most recent education.
- Explain grading systems in international CVs.

Personal skills

This is to be written in complete sentences and is where you can describe your transferable skills such as teamwork, adaptability, communication skills, innovative skills, organization skills and leadership.

Language skills

English – native language; German – good; French – basic.

The term *excellent* is often used for language skills that are between *native language* and *good*. Some people rank their written and spoken language skills separately.

The *Europass Language Passport* allows you to describe your language skills and is useful for those interested in studying or working elsewhere in Europe. For details, search for *Europass Language Passport* or <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/home/vernav/Europass+Documents/Europass+Language+Passport/navigate.action>.

This is based on the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* developed by the Council of Europe.

Organizational skills

Use active constructions, such as:

Responsible chemical engineer with good organizational skills (give examples).

The ability to work independently (give examples), and successful experience of working in a project team (give examples).

Strong background in ICT (see Skills), matched by three years of international experience in (country) working for (name) – a leading software company.

Choose positive language.

- Your level of expertise:

<i>competent in</i>	<i>skilled in</i>	<i>qualified in</i>	<i>specialized in</i>
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- Your type of expertise:

<i>practical</i>	<i>theoretical</i>	<i>analytical</i>	<i>responsible</i>
<i>successful</i>	<i>articulate</i>	<i>informed</i>	<i>diplomatic</i>

- Your outlook on life:

<i>adaptable</i>	<i>flexible</i>	<i>versatile</i>	<i>enterprising</i>
<i>innovative</i>	<i>creative</i>	<i>positive</i>	<i>enthusiastic</i>

Technical skills

List your skills that are relevant to the job advertised: Social science, specializing in . . . ;

Computer skills

Programming experience in C++, desktop publishing.

Artistic skills

Other skills

Your interests indicate a lot about you. Say what you can do, no one else will.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| – sport | (healthy, well trained) |
| – leisure (swimming, snowboarding) | (healthy, well trained) |
| – politics | (engaged, aware) |
| – developing countries | (engaged, generous) |
| – achievements | (stamina, determined) |

Additional information – References (if requested)

- One academic and one personal reference.
- Check that the people you state agree (phone them).
- Take their names and full contact details to the interview.

C. Style guidelines for reports, theses and dissertations

Many journals have their own guide to authors which states how some of the material covered below is to be presented. Some universities also have well-formulated style guidelines for academic writing. Such documents naturally take precedence over the following. These guidelines are suggestions that may help solve a stylistic problem.

Acknowledgements

This is the part of a thesis or report in which the author lists or thanks those who have helped in its production. Remember to be formal in the acknowledgements:

- I **acknowledge** the invaluable assistance of my supervisor Professor John Smith at the Department of XZY, University of Nottingham.*
- I would **also like to thank** . . .*
- I **appreciate** the assistance of . . .*
- Special thanks** are given to . . .*
- Gratitude** is also expressed to . . .*
- I am grateful** for the help of Anne Jones, research technician and other department staff in preparing the FEM analysis.*
- Finally, I **acknowledge** the generous financial support from the . . .*

Capital letters

Always capitalize:

- Proper nouns or adjectives. Use initial capital letters for proper nouns and for adjectives derived from proper nouns (a proper noun is the name and title of a specific person, a company, institution, place, location, country, month, day, or a holiday):

... *the volt is named after Count Volta*
 ... *he is Professor Gibbs from University College*
 ... *Northern Ireland*
 ... *French Canadian*
 ... *in late December on the Friday before Christmas Eve*

- Structural words like:

<i>Appendix</i>	<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Equation</i>
<i>Figure</i>	<i>Section</i>	<i>Table</i>

are capitalized when followed by a number or letter: *Equation 3.2 and Section 4.2.*

Do not capitalize:

- Names of elements (except as the first word of a sentence): *This is a mixture of iron, aluminium and copper.*
- Names of methods, unit symbols (except for the proper name part): *pattern recognition, kilometre, degree Celsius.*

Capitalization – the King or the king? The West or the west?

When referring to a specific person, capitalize king, queen, prince, bishop, ambassador, professor and similar titles. References to the institution such as the Crown and the Monarchy are capitalized. However, if a general group is being referred to, use lower case: *all the kings of Spain; all the professors in the Department.* A capitalized reference to the Prime Minister means a specific person, but *just like a typical prime minister* means like many of them and is not capitalized.

This is also the general pattern to follow with parts of recognized political units. Thus, Northern Territory, in Australia, is capitalized but northern Queensland is not, as the latter refers to a general area, not a defined political unit. Capitalization is correct for *the West* as a force in American history, the West Bank, the West Country in the UK and the West when it refers to North America and Europe. Otherwise, *west* is lower case when the direction towards the setting sun is being referred to: *They moved west.* Referring simply to *the South* may mean different things to different people: the south-east part of the USA to many Americans, the developing countries to some and the southern hemisphere to others.

Words that are derived from a geographical name where there is only a distant connection with the original place are written in lower case. Examples: *bohemian* (referring to a lifestyle), *italics* (print font) and *morocco* (fine leather). Note that these words are used alone. When such words are used in fixed phrases like *Danish pastry*, *French window*, *Arabic numerals* and *Roman numerals*, upper case should be used for the nationality word. See **NATIONALITY WORDS**.

Capitalization in report and publication titles

1. Titles of books and reports

The general standard in scientific and academic work is to use upper case for the first letter of the main words in the titles of books and reports. Use lower case for *a, an, the, and, or, for, nor* and prepositions, unless they are the first or last word in a title. Examples:

A Brief History of Time
The History of the New West
Cancer and the Symptoms to Look For

2. Chapters and sections

In scientific and academic papers, reports and doctoral theses, there are few general standards about when to use capitals in chapter or section headings. Follow the Guidelines for Authors of the specific journal, or the house style of the organization. If there are no such guidelines, there is a general trend towards using block letters (all capitals) for the level 1 headings (chapter titles). Level 2 headings (such as Section 2.1, Section 2.2) have the main words capitalized. Level 3 headings (Section 2.1.1, Section 2.1.2) have the first word and only proper nouns capitalized. Examples of level 3 headings: *Section 2.1.1 Modelling of Cartesian coordinates* or *World history from a German perspective*.

3. Brochures, press material, web

Many people feel that capital letters shout at the reader, and that titles without capitals are softer and easier to read. As a result sales brochures, press material and text on the Internet show a clear movement away from capitals in titles when they are optional. A study of various guides to authors shows that some scientific journals are also moving in this direction.

4. Hyphenation and capitalization in report and publication titles

The general rule is to capitalize only the first element in the hyphenated phrase:

Low-pressurized Aircraft Design
Near-critical Values
Moscow's English-speaking Community

There are a couple of exceptions to this rule:

1. Capitalize both the first and second elements in a hyphenated phrase in a title when they have equal force:

Vapour-Liquid Compounds
Regional-National Legislation

2. Capitalize the second element in a hyphenated compound in a title when it is a noun or proper adjective:

Non-American Election Principles
Anti-Christian Thinking

See **HYPHENATION (PUNCTUATION GUIDE)**.

Equations

References to specific equations are to be capitalized. Many prefer the format 'Equation 2.1'. An alternative is: 'Eq. 2.1.' Do not mix these two formats in the same report.

Verbs that are often combined with 'equation' include: *indicate, establish, present, give, prove*.

Figures

As figures are visual, use the term *figure* for all illustrations that are not tables.

In many major journals, the guidelines to authors suggest that:

- The captions are placed under or at the side of figures.
- In a figure caption, the following model is recommended, note the punctuation:

'Figure 2. Schematic representation . . .'

- References to specific figures are to be capitalized. Many prefer the format *Figure 2.1*. An alternative is: *Fig. 2.1*. Do not mix these two formats in the same report.

Verbs that are frequently combined with *figure* include: *show, present, illustrate, demonstrate*.

Introduction

The introduction presents what you are writing about

Thus it should **not** contain information you know as a result of having completed the work you are about to report.

The introduction should be a presentation of the nature/scope of the subject matter

- explains what the situation was before you began the work that you are about to report.
- your objectives and strategy in writing the report.
- your assumptions about the audience's expertise/needs.

Relevant literature for guidance

- how the report relates to other sources of information.
- a review of previous work and theoretical considerations.

Explain how the thesis/report is organized

Use variety in your outline of the chapters in a thesis: too many people use *show* and *describe*. The following link words are useful here:

Chapter 2 considers . . . and states how . . .

Then, Chapter 3 turns to the issue of . . . and illustrates how . . .

After this, Chapter 4 demonstrates . . . and provides a comparison with . . .

This is followed by Chapter 5 which **presents** the conclusions and **explains** the applications of this work for the . . . industry. Finally, Chapter 6 **outlines** the implications and potential for further work.

References

In running text

There are two main methods of referencing articles in journals and other publications. These are known as the *Harvard* (author–date) and *Vancouver* (author–number) reference systems. Many journals have their own house style. If you are using the author–date system and a comma is placed between the author and date, a semicolon is necessary between two references. Example: *Other researchers (Jones, 2005; Kimberly, 2001) have found that . . .*

Some style guides suggest that a comma is not to be placed between the author and date and here a comma is necessary between two references. Example: *Other researchers (Jones 2005, Kimberly 2001) have found that . . .*

In the Vancouver system the author–date is replaced by a number which is found in the reference list at the end. In some journals, all these numbers are listed in the reference list in order of appearance in the text. Thus in the text the references will appear as: *This is indicated in another paper (1). Other writers have commented on related issues, notably Smith (2,3) and Jones (4).* Other journals ask authors to use an alphabetical order for the references in the reference list. This means the references in the text will appear as: *This is indicated in another paper (45). Other writers have commented on related issues, notably Smith (67,68) and Jones (34).* In other journals the author(s) are not named and the reference number comes in square brackets often in superscript: ^[34].

In reference lists

All reports and theses should have a reference list that indexes the references in the text. The reference list comes last in the document on a new page with the heading *Reference list* or *References*. In most cases the references are arranged alphabetically according to the family name of the first author. When there are several works by the same author(s), sort them chronologically. If an author has two or more publications in the same year that are both referred to, add lower case a, b, etc. after the year: Smith, Arthur (2007a), Smith, Arthur (2007b).

Note that chapters in books are referenced with the pages following the abbreviation pp.:

Smith, J., ed. *The rise of new governments in Eastern Europe*, pp. 167–173. London: AC Publications.

But papers in journals indicate the page numbers after a colon and do not use pp.:

Smith J., Industrial marketing concepts need revision. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 12(2): 156–157.

While *et al.* is used after the first author in the text if there are three authors or more: Jones *et al.*, 2000, it should not be used in a reference list as all the authors are to be cited.

Referencing electronic documents

As more publications and other documents become available in electronic form, often without a paper version, it is necessary to reference these electronic resources so that researchers are able to document their work. ISO 690-2 has addressed this issue (ISO 690-2: *Information and documentation – Bibliographic references – Part 2: Electronic documents or parts thereof*).

Electronic documents differ from printed publications in a number of ways:

- First, online electronic documents have no page references, volumes or edition numbers; sometimes the absence of publishers means that there has to be a system of identification. The location of the source of the document cited is also to be provided for online documents. This information should be given by the words *available from* or an equivalent phrase. Example:

Available from Internet: gopher://info.lib.uh.edu.

- Second, online electronic documents can be instantly updated, which necessitates the use of *citation* in references. Citation means the date on which the electronic document was actually seen. The word 'cited' or an equivalent term is written in square brackets before the date. Examples:

[cited 3 September 2007], [cited 2007-09-03; 21:15 GMT]

- Third, the type of electronic medium has to be established in the reference list. This is to be given in square brackets. The following words or their equivalent should be used:

[online], [CD-ROM], [magnetic tape], [disk]

ISO 690-2 gives some examples of how to write references to electronic documents:

- Reference to off-line electronic documents:

Passano E; Igland R T; Mirza S; Larsen C M. In *Petroleum Abstracts* [CD-ROM]. California: Knight-Ridder Information Inc., 1998. ISBN: 0-7918-1952-3.

- Reference to online electronic documents:

Talker, Petter. Stochastic resonance in the semiadiabatic limit. In *New Journal of Physics* [online]. Bristol, UK. Institute of Physics Publishing, 12 March 1999 [cited 2003-07-01]. Available from Internet: <<http://njp.org/>>. ISSN: 1367-2630.

Structure

In long reports and theses, the **chapter** is the basic structural unit. Chapter is capitalized when it is followed by a number: *This is discussed in Chapter 4*, but not otherwise: *The present chapter contains the conclusions*.

In short reports, the **section** is the basic structural unit: *See Section 1 and Section 4*. Note that this is capitalized when it is followed by a number, but not otherwise. In long reports use **section** for all levels below *chapter*: *See Sections 1.2, 1.3.2 and 3.2.1.4*.

Tables

Use the term *table* for all tabular material. In many journals, the guidelines to authors suggest that:

- Captions are placed over tables
- References to specific tables are to be capitalized. Many prefer the format *Table 2.1*. Note that *Tab. 2-1* is non-standard.

'We' tips for authors

Academic papers, dissertations and theses written by a single author should use the word *we* with care. *We* is a powerful word as it sets the tone. At worst, *we* can irritate readers into thinking the writer has an inflated opinion of himself or herself as it conveys the impression that this is the opinion of the entire department or research group. At best, it can rivet the reader's attention to a valuable contribution to knowledge.

Editorial 'we'

Use *we* when it refers to the view of a board or a collective body: *We recommend this solution.* . . . It is recommended that sentences like *as we have indicated in Section 2* should be avoided and replaced by *as is indicated in Section 2* since it is unnecessary to involve the actor here.

'We' for reader involvement

The use of *us* and *we* in contexts like: *Let us consider these results in detail.* . . . *We now turn to the applications of this,* is encouraged by many style guides as a way of involving your reader in the discussion.

Royal 'we'

Referring to oneself as *we* is known as the *Royal we*. This used to be a way to distance the monarch from the people. Nowadays this is avoided, even in formal contexts, by the British monarch.

D. Style

Commenting to your readers

Useful words when discussing facts in a paper

- This paper starts by . . .*
- . . . making some observations about . . .*
- . . . giving some facts about . . .*
- . . . outlining national policy.*

Useful words when presenting a theory

- Useful nouns: *notion, concept, theory, idea, hypothesis, principle, rationale.*

- Useful verbs: *indicate, illustrate, point out, present, develop, embody, elaborate, state, establish, formulate, accept, reject, reveal, support.*

Avoid words such as *thing, tell, say.*

Link words

A moderate use of link words improves the readability of documents.

A simple check of the readability of something you have written is counting how many sentences start with *The*. '**The** paper presents . . .'. '**The** challenge was . . .'. '**The** work involved . . .'. One way to liven up such 'machine-gun' style is to use link words or transitions that give signposts to your reader. However, do not throw the baby out with the bathwater. A text where every sentence starts with a link word is just as difficult to follow as a road where the signposting is overdone. Note that the typical position of a link word is at the beginning of a sentence, but this is not compulsory. The advantage of the preliminary link word is that the reader is not slowed down by a comma, link word and a second comma in mid sentence. Compare: '*Research in reducing emissions, as a rule, has provided . . .*' with: '*As a rule, research in reducing emissions has provided . . .*'. Here are some examples of link words and where to use them.

- When **comparing** things, useful link words include:

<i>By contrast,</i>	<i>Conversely,</i>	<i>However,</i>	<i>In contrast,</i>
<i>In spite of,</i>	<i>Instead,</i>	<i>Likewise,</i>	<i>Nevertheless,</i>
<i>Otherwise,</i>	<i>On the contrary,</i>	<i>On the one hand,</i>	<i>For the most part,</i>

- When **generalizing**, use:

<i>As a rule,</i>	<i>As usual,</i>	<i>For the most part,</i>	<i>Generally,</i>
<i>In general,</i>	<i>Ordinarily,</i>	<i>Usually,</i>	

- When **describing a sequence**, useful link words for a linear progression are:

<i>First, . . .</i>	<i>Second, . . .</i>	<i>Third, . . .</i>	<i>Next, . . .</i>
<i>Then, . . .</i>	<i>Finally, . . .</i>		

Note that most English style guides recommend: *First, . . . Second, . . . Third, . . .* rather than: *Firstly, . . . Secondly, . . . Thirdly, . . .*

Also, once *First, . . .* is used as a link word, your reader will expect *Second, . . . Third, . . .* and *Next*

- Sequences can be signposted by link words that point backwards, like:

Having completed step one, the next step is . . . After stage one, . . . Previously, . . .

- Link words to describe simultaneous actions include:

During this stage . . . While . . . At the same time . . . Simultaneously . . .

- Finally, there are link words to end a sequence. Make sure that these are used at the very end:

Finally, . . . In the last stage, . . . The report finishes with, . . . In conclusion, . . .

Lists

Use a colon to introduce a list. If the items in a list are in a sequence or hierarchy, show this by numbering them:

1. *time*
2. *money*
3. *skilled staff*

or by placing a lower-case letter before each item:

- (a) *time*
- (b) *money*
- (c) *skilled staff*

Do not place commas, semicolons or stops after keywords in a list or at the end of the list. If the items in a list are separate and parallel, but in no significant order or hierarchy, use bullets, dashes, or some other symbol before each item.

In modern English style, the items in a list are only followed by a stop if they are full sentences:

- *Sufficient time will be allocated for training.*
- *This is backed by the financial resources to give adequate training.*
- *The staff we recruit have a sound academic education and relevant work experience.*

Numbers in numerals or words

It is normal to write numbers as Arabic numerals in scientific and technical contexts. Otherwise, a general rule is to write numbers below 10 as words and larger numbers as numerals. Avoid mixing numerals and words in the same range: *The boys were from 7 to 15* (not from seven to 15). However, large numbers are written as words at the beginning of a sentence: *Seventy-two thousand people are in hospital*. To avoid starting a sentence with 72,000, which is generally considered poor style, the sentence can be rephrased either by starting *A total of 72,000 . . .* or by moving the number to another part of the sentence: *The hospitals have admitted 72,000 people*.

The house style used for this book has the comma as a thousand marker which is customary in BE. However, when writing for an international audience where many languages use the comma as a decimal marker, the figure 3,456 could be understood as a decimal rather than almost three and a half thousand. See [COMMA \(PUNCTUATION GUIDE\)](#).

The ISO standard 31-0 (1992), tries to resolve this by recommending the use of a space as the thousand/million/billion marker: 35 500 and 45 500. Another convention is to use a space for thousands, millions, etc., only for numbers greater than 9999.

Numerals – Arabic and Roman

Arabic numerals such as 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. are almost always preferred to Roman numerals – I, II, III, IV, etc. or i, ii, iii, iv, etc. which are only used in limited applications. These include

designating the number of names of kings, queens, emperors, popes, etc.: Henry IV and Henry V are also plays by Shakespeare (read as ‘Henry the Fourth’, ‘Henry the Fifth’); giving dates of films, and paginating the numbers of introductory pages in books. When filmmakers produce a sequel to an earlier film, the title is often written in Roman numerals (Rocky II, Rocky III, etc.) but is read as ‘Rocky Two’, ‘Rocky Three’, etc. The pronunciation of the number in a ship’s name indicates the origin of the name: the Queen Mary II, for instance, is pronounced ‘Queen Mary Two’, rather than ‘Queen Mary the Second’, because there was a previous ship called ‘Queen Mary’, and not because of the British Queen Mary the Second who reigned 1688–94.



Repetition of words

- Repeat a keyword rather than use another term such as ‘it’ that might be misunderstood:

The technical malfunction began before the last inspection, a month before the breakdown. It was an obvious human error (‘It’ refers to what? The malfunction, inspection or breakdown?)

The advert below shows the confusion that can result from not repeating a keyword.

- Avoid placing similar sounding words together if they have different meanings:

*Figure 7 **showed** that the temperature **showed** an increase* (use ‘indicated’, ‘increased by’).
*These clear **effects** will **affect** our budget* (use ‘effects’, ‘influence’).

- Avoid repetition of several words containing the same sounds:

*There is to be no **variation** in **hyphenation** and **capitalization*** (use ‘in the use of hyphens and capitals’).

Many major man-machine manifestations may . . . (rewrite).

Although repetition is often boring, it can be used for a special effect. An example is one of Churchill’s speeches in the Second World War: ‘We shall fight on the beaches, we shall

fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.'

'German Shepherd for sale, obedient and will eat anything. Fond of children.'
(Classic dog ad.)



Sexist language

Sexist language is to be avoided in politically correct, modern English. Here are some of the problem areas and solutions.

Generic terms like **mankind** and **man** when used to mean people of both sexes are criticized because they are old-fashioned, and also because they make males more central than females. One solution is to use *people*, *humanity* and *humankind* instead. *Humankind* is not a new term. It has existed since the seventeenth century. Today, **mankind** should be used for males exclusively.

It follows from this that 'the man in the street' could be replaced by *the average person*; 'a man-machine interface' could be *a human-machine interface*; 'manpower' could be *workforce*, *workpower*, *personnel* or *human resources*; 'man's achievements in space' could be *human achievements*. When **man** occurs in expressions such as 'time and tide wait for no man' this could be rephrased into *time and tide wait for nobody*.

-man also occurs in some occupations or roles. Modern dictionaries suggest that unless you mean a male and only a male, 'businessman' becomes *business person*, 'chairman' becomes *chair/chairperson* (*chair* is now the official designation adopted by some British societies), 'fireman' becomes *firefighter*, 'foreman' becomes *supervisor*, 'layman' becomes *layperson*, 'policeman' becomes *police officer*, 'postman' becomes *postal worker* and 'sportsman' becomes *sportsperson*, and so on. Even though 'a Frenchman and Frenchwoman are present' is better than using 'Frenchman' for both sexes, another solution is writing *two French people are present*.

The verb **to man** is more difficult to replace by a single standard accepted alternative. Unless you are referring only to males, it should be avoided. Here are some suggestions. An office can be *staffed*, a phone service can be *operational*, not *manned*. Avoid 'manning a ship' by rephrasing and use *the ship's crew* or *the crew on the ship*.

-ess is a feminine suffix which has never been used widely, and is quickly losing ground. *Actor-actress*, *author-authoress*, *steward-stewardess* are all pairs which are being replaced, either by *actor*, *author* (whether a man or a woman) or by another term completely, such as *flight attendant* for *air steward(ess)*. The pairs *host-hostess* and *governor-governess* still show useful distinctions in meaning and there is no real masculine equivalent for the term *seamstress*. However, some titles such as *duchess*, *marchioness*, *countess*, *viscountess* and *baroness* still survive. See [AUTHOR](#), [HOST](#), [GOVERNOR](#).

Examples of sexist writing and how to avoid it

Man and his intellectual development. (Use: *People and their intellectual development.*
Alternatively: *Intellectual development in humans.*)

The *men* and *girls* in the office. (Use parallel terms: *men and women*, or *boys and girls*, perhaps even reverse the traditional order.)

The *girls* at the reception desk. (Use: *secretaries*, *office assistants* or just *staff*.)

Woman doctor, *lady lawyer*. (Use: *doctor*, *lawyer*. If it is necessary to mention the sex of the person, use *female doctor* and *female lawyer*.)

The *child* may notice *his* surroundings. (Change *his* to *its*.)

Each person was interviewed and *his* statement was checked. (Use the plural: *people . . . their statements were*. Otherwise, keep the singular and use *his* or *her*.)

The traditional use of *Mr and Mrs James Green* is found on wedding invitations and in other formal contexts. Otherwise use *Mr and Mrs Green* or *James and Mary Green* in less formal contexts.

The traditional use of *Mrs James Green* may be found on wedding invitations and in other very formal contexts. Otherwise use *Mrs Green*, if she still uses 'Mrs', *Ms Green*, or *Mary Green*, which is the most informal of these.

E. Formal English

The formal, written English that is expected in reports, business correspondence and documents is different from spoken everyday English. Here are three features of formal English.

Suitable vocabulary

Formal vocabulary is mainly based on classical words. These are more often found in written English.

- arrange (dinner)*
- by coincidence*
- collect (someone)*
- commence*
- conceal*
- consider*
- construct*
- donation*
- endeavour*
- enquire*
- finalize (a contract)*
- inspect*
- reserve*
- position*
- purchase*
- review (problems)*
- settle (matters)*

Informal vocabulary is mainly short Anglo-Saxon words. These are typical of spoken English or used in informal notes.

- lay on (dinner)*
- by chance*
- pick up (someone)*
- begin, start*
- hide*
- weigh up*
- build*
- gift*
- try*
- ask*
- tie up (a contract)*
- look over*
- book*
- job*
- buy*
- look at (problems)*
- sort out (matters)*

Avoiding slang expressions or jargon

Slang and jargon are typical characteristics of oral English. They are verbal short cuts when speakers and their audience share common assumptions and knowledge. Using slang can cause irritation and make what is written appear very casual. Compare the formal, *please do this as soon as possible* with *do this ASAP*; or the formal *we will rectify the malfunction in the computer system* with *we will fix the hard disk foul up*. Slangy expressions like *belt and braces* (meaning taking extra care to make sure something is successful) and the use of text messaging abbreviations from mobile phones can also cause misunderstanding. Thus a formal report, a letter or even an email written as a representative of a company or organization is no place for smiley symbols such as :-) or :-(or cryptic SMS (Short Message Service) abbreviations like *Which one r u?* See [JARGON, SLANG](#).

Avoiding contractions (I'm . . . won't . . . , etc.)

Contractions or short forms are to be avoided in official letters, reports and other types of formal English. They should only be used in informal, conversational writing and when reporting speech. Compare the formal English with corresponding contractions:

<i>We are looking forward to this</i>	<i>We're looking forward to this</i>
<i>The contract does not commence until . . .</i>	<i>The contract doesn't start until . . .</i>

Using short forms in the wrong context looks sloppy and may also lead to mistakes such as confusing *it's* with the identical sounding possessive pronoun *its*. See [CONTRACTIONS, ITS](#).