Defining our principles

Writing rules and guidance

The Institution of Engineering and Technology

August 2019 | Version One
Introduction

How we write creates an impression of our brand.

The following guide summarises the common areas to help you write consistently. It should be used in conjunction with our Tone of voice guidelines to ensure we are creating the correct tone of voice: straightforward and precise, refreshing and insightful, personable and relevant.

Welcome to our writing guide.

A few pointers

- This guide is not extensive and there will be many areas where you want further guidance. If so, use the Guardian style guide www.theguardian.com/guardian-observer-style-guide-a. If there is a discrepancy, our guide always takes precedence. The main rule, however, is to adopt a common-sense approach and above all, be consistent.

- Our official language is British English. For spelling queries, use the first spelling given in the Oxford English Dictionary (www.askoxford.com), or use the Chambers Science and Technology Dictionary.

- Remember to write for a global audience and avoid implying that the IET is UK-centric.

- Finally, ask someone else to proofread copy before it is used. Line managers are responsible for assuring the quality of outbound correspondence and should be asked to check ad hoc letters and emails before these are sent.
### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our writing principles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 04 Abbreviations and acronyms  
   Ampersand (&)/and |
| 05 Apostrophes  
   Brackets and dashes |
| 06 Bullet points  
   Capitalisation |
| 07 Commas |
| 08 Dates and Time |
| 09 Contractions  
   Exclamation marks |
| 10 Fonts (primary and system) |
| 11 Hyphens  
   Inverted commas (quotation marks) |
| 12 Italics (emphasis)  
   Lists |
| 13 Money  
   Numbers |
| 14 Post nominals  
   Split infinitives |
| 15 The Institution of Engineering and Technology |

### Contact information

| 16 Who to contact for further help |

**Please note:**

These guidelines cover **Writing rules and guidance** only.

For more details on how to speak and write, please see ‘IET: Tone of voice’ guidelines on our [Branding and corporate marketing page](#).

For IET masterbrand communications, or any of our other endorsed brands or sub-brands (such as IET Inspec, IET Venues, etc), please contact our marketing team for their separate guidelines.

For further detail on how to use our brand on the iet.org website please see the ‘IET Website style guide’. by contacting the brand team - see p17.

© The Institution of Engineering and Technology
Our writing principles

04 Abbreviations and acronyms
   Ampersand (&)/and
05 Apostrophes
   Brackets and dashes
06 Bullet points
   Capitalisation
07 Commas
08 Dates and Time
09 Contractions
   Exclamation marks
10 Fonts (primary and system)
11 Hyphens
   Inverted commas (quotation marks)
12 Italics (emphasis)
   Lists
13 Money
   Numbers
14 Post nominals
   Split infinitives
15 The Institution of Engineering and Technology
Abbreviations and acronyms

General
As a general rule, try and avoid abbreviations and acronyms whenever possible. The exception is when the abbreviation or acronym is so familiar that it has become part of our everyday language. Do not use full points or commas between or after the letters:

- For abbreviations where individual letters are pronounced, such as BBC, CEO, US, VAT we use capitals.
- For acronyms (pronounced as a word), such as Nasa, Nato, Unicef, etc. we spell it out with an initial capital.
- For abbreviations that have become everyday words such as awol, asbo, pin number we use lowercase.

Latin abbreviations
- eg
- ie
- etc

Where accessibility is an issue replace the abbreviation as follows:
- eg with for example or such as
- ie with that is or in other words
- etc with and so on though it might be better to complete the list.

Ampersand (&)/and

Unless an ampersand forms part of a company or brand name, ‘and’ should be used.

Ampersands should not be used when writing our full name: ie The Institution of Engineering and Technology, not The Institution of Engineering & Technology. They should not be used in job titles, ie Chief Executive and Secretary, or in names of Boards or Committees either.
Apostrophes show missing letters, ownership or possession.

**Missing letter or letters:**
- It’s instead of it is or it has
- Can’t instead of cannot or don’t instead of do not

**Showing possession or ownership:**
- The IET’s building
- The member’s jumper

Use the normal possessive ending ‘s after singular words or names that end in s: boss’s, St James’s, Jones’s.

- Use it, too, after plurals that do not end in s:
  children’s, solicitor’s, Frenchmen’s, media’s.
- Use the ending ‘s on plurals that end in s:
  Danes’, bosses’, Joneses’.
- Including plural names that take a singular verb:
  Reuters’, Barclays’, Lloyds’.

Use brackets in pairs around a group of words to keep them separate from the rest of the sentence. If you remove the text in the brackets, the rest of the sentence should still make sense.

- We have sent a report (five copies are enclosed) to all managers.
- Human Resources have passed responsibility for authorising leave (annual, special and flexi) to managers.

Only use round brackets. Don’t over-use brackets; they interrupt the flow of a document. You can also use em dashes in pairs, like brackets, to separate a group of words from the rest of the sentence, for example:

- The meeting with the events team — Bill, Martin, Jas and Molly — finished at 3pm.

Brackets and em dashes are interchangeable, but brackets mark the strongest division.
Bullet points

Always introduce a list of bullet points with a colon as shown below.

- bananas
- pomegranates

If your bullet points are simply items in a list, as above, begin each bullet point with a lower-case letter. There is no need for any punctuation after each item, but if the last item in the list finishes the sentence, put a full stop after it. Where the introductory sentence is a complete sentence, and so is each bullet, then start with a capital letter and end with a full stop.

Capitalisation

Use capitals when making a specific reference versus general reference. Use capitals for proper nouns. Capitals should never be used in body text for EMPHASIS. If in doubt use lower case unless it looks absurd. Adopt a common-sense approach and above all be consistent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific reference</th>
<th>General reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President Donald Trump</td>
<td>The US president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pope Francis</td>
<td>The pope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department for Transport (DfT)</td>
<td>One of the many departments of state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Executive and Secretary Nigel Fine</td>
<td>Our current Chief Executive and Secretary was appointed in 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HM The Queen</td>
<td>The monarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of Trustees</td>
<td>Members of the board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Charter and Bye-laws</td>
<td>A charter is the grant of authority or rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Network Committee</td>
<td>Join your local network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© The Institution of Engineering and Technology
Commas

Use a comma to divide items on a list or separate adjectives in a sentence.

Avoid overuse. Sentences should not contain multiple clauses — if you have a lot of commas you probably need to simplify the text.

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

Incorrect:
They took a short necessary break.

Correct:
They took a short, necessary break.

Sometimes it is essential. Compare:
I dedicate this book to my parents, Martin Amis, and J K Rowling

I dedicate this book to my parents, Martin Amis and J K Rowling

If you decide to use one, be consistent throughout what you are writing.
Dates
Day, month, year, in that order, with no commas.

13 November 2017
Don’t use ‘th’ or ‘nd’

If the day is needed it should be separated with a comma for example:

Thursday, 10 April 2014

Only abbreviate dates if you are using them in a table, when you can use:

4 Dec 2017

Time
We prefer to use a 12 hour clock. If you have to give an exact time, you should write 6.25am, 11.15pm, and so on. Use 5pm instead of 5.00pm.

In some cases, such as international conferences, it maybe preferential to use a 24 hour clock. In this case use 11.00, 13.00, 19.30 to 23.00 etc. Use GMT/BST/PST etc time zones accordingly.

Don’t abbreviate seconds, minutes or hours, or use colons to separate the numerals. Links between times should use ‘to’. For example, 8am to 5.30pm.
Contractions

They make us more accessible and human. Therefore, we use contractions such as don’t, can’t, couldn’t, in writing. However, always think of your audience and the nature of what you are writing, and use common sense to adapt the formality of your tone accordingly.

Generally speaking, you should write as if you are actually talking to your customer, rather than formally addressing them. It should make your copy flow more easily to the reader, without making it difficult to understand or appearing uneducated. However, if you are writing a white paper or addressing government, for example, it may be more appropriate to use a more formal tone to ensure you convey authority.

Exclamation marks

The exclamation mark is used to express surprise, irony or strong feelings. Use sparingly and avoid use altogether in formal text.

If you feel that an exclamation mark is required, limit it to once only every so often - no more than a few in your entire piece of writing, and not in consecutive sentences wherever possible.

In each instance, use only one exclamation mark ie How exciting! not How exciting!!!
Fonts
(primary and system)

Primary font
Europa is our primary brand font. It has been chosen for its high level of legibility and open proportions.

Europa is available to all design professionals using Adobe Creative Cloud through Adobe Fonts.

Europa should be used in light, regular and bold weights.

System font
There will be occasions when Europa is not available and you will need to use a system font instead, for example in Microsoft Office applications. In these instances, please use Arial instead of Europa.
Hyphens

The main use of a hyphen is to join two or more words together which could otherwise have a different meaning. For example, ‘we honoured eighty-odd engineers’ is very different to ‘we honoured eighty odd engineers’.

In general, try to avoid putting hyphens into words formed of one word and a short prefix, for example:

- Biplane, declassify, email, geopolitical, neoclassicism, neoconservative, overeducated, preoccupied, preordained, realign, redirect, reopen, reorder.

Long words that may be created with unfamiliar combinations, especially if they would involve running several consonants together, may benefit from a hyphen, for example:

- Cross-reference, over-governed, under-secretary.

En dashes are used only when joining a prefix with a proper open noun (pre-World War II), we do not use en dashes to show range.

Inverted commas (quotation marks)

Use double inverted commas for quotes from people or texts, and single inverted commas for quotes within quotes.

“When I say ‘immediately’, I mean some time before April,” said the spokesman.

Full stops and commas go inside the closing quote mark. If a complete sentence in quotes comes at the end of a larger sentence, the final stop should also be inside the inverted commas.
Italics (emphasis)

May be used sparingly for emphasis. Don't overuse as it can interrupt the clear flow of your text.

Italicise non-English words and phrases, with appropriate accents, unless they are so familiar that they have become anglicised (status quo).

By convention, titles of newspapers, published books, periodicals and programme names are italicised, including E&T. Only italicise 'The' if it's part of the official name, eg The Times, The Guardian.

*Note: bold and italics used for emphasis and clarity in this document - italics only should be used in actual practice.
Money

Sums of money below £1m are expressed in numbers, eg £1.50 or £10,000.

For prices under a pound, use the word pence with the numeral: 89 pence. Don't include the pound sign and the leading zero (for example, £0.89) unless:

- They make sense in the context (for example, in a price list or a shopping cart).

- They provide consistency within a series, table, or list (for example, ‘We spent only £4.99 on the centrepiece: The candles cost £0.25 each, the condiments £3.74’).

Larger amounts are like this: £1m, £1.1m, £100m, £1bn, £1tn.

Numbers

Think about the channel you are using and adapt depending on the channel convention, but as a rule we aim to spell out numbers from one to nine, and use numbers for 10 onwards, for example:

- We interviewed over 30 engineers but only decided to use three of them.

Use figures for more complex numbers. Don't start a sentence with a figure. Use numbers combined with the symbol % to express a percentage in text, for example:

**Incorrect**

Approximately 85% of members were satisfied this year.

**Correct**

Approximately 85% of members were satisfied this year.

Use the symbol % in graphics.

Use commas in numbers over 999, for example 1,000 and 5,850,000.

Use 'first, second, third' not 'firstly, secondly, thirdly'

Fractions should be hyphenated (one-third, three-quarters, two-and-a-half, but just 'a half'), and spelled out in words unless attached to whole numbers.
Split infinitives are still regarded as poor grammar and should be avoided where possible – but don’t force yourself into linguistic contortions just for the sake of a rule.

An infinitive is the basic form of a verb: ‘to go’, ‘to eat’, ‘to perform’, etc. A split infinitive has the two parts separated by one or more other words. ‘You have to really watch him’ should be ‘You really have to watch him’.
We refer to ourselves in the first person – it’s more inclusive and personable.

There are times however, when we need to refer to our name in full. When we do, we write it out in full the first time with IET in brackets at the end: The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET). Any subsequent mentions can then use the abbreviation, although using ‘we’ is preferable.

The IET is singular, not plural: the IET is, not the IET are. We, however is plural.

When used adjectively we drop the ‘the’: IET CEO Nigel Fine...

An ampersand should never be used for the Institution of Engineering and Technology.
Who to contact for further help

For any questions or queries about our brand, please get in touch using the following details.

Using our brand enquiries email address, please direct your questions and queries to one of the following people.

Please email brandenquiries@theiet.org

The Institution of Engineering and Technology
Michael Faraday House
Six Hills Way
Stevenage
SG1 2AY
United Kingdom

Chris Hird
Graphic Designer
T +44 (0) 1438 765 628

Design, layout, colour, imagery and related graphical enquiries.

Simon Timmis
Brand, Digital and Impact Marketing Lead
T +44 (0) 1438 767 417
M +44 (0) 7710 320 764

High-level brand implementation, strategy and decisions, products, and services.

Natalie Boon
Marketing Campaign Manager
T +44 (0) 1438 767 277
M +44 (0) 7710 724 454

Corporate marketing, products and services, awards, advertising, and other queries.