

IET Writing Guide

Basic writing style guide rules

- The IET is singular, not plural: the IET 'is' not the IET 'are'
- When writing about 'the IET', always write it out in full first, with IET in brackets at the end: The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET). Any subsequent mentions can then use the abbreviation
- When writing in continuous text, you do not need to capitalise the initial 't':
 - This is a report from the Institution of Engineering and Technology
NOT
 - This is a report from The Institution of Engineering and Technology
- Avoid using too many acronyms. If you do use them, write any acronym in full the first time you introduce it in a piece of writing
- Capitalisation should be used for job titles, e.g. President, and unique product or brand names, e.g. Career Manager, Professional Home for Life, but should be avoided elsewhere, e.g. professional registration
- Italics should be used for report, publication and programme names
- Double quotation marks should only be used for reported speech, and single quotation marks should be kept to a minimum
- When reported speech runs for more than one paragraph, there should be a double quotation mark at the beginning of each paragraph, and then at the very end
- Dates should be written as Thursday, 10 April 2014
- Please be mindful of the difference between hyphens (shorter – to separate words) and dashes (longer – to separate phrases)
- Use first and second person, e.g. you and we, wherever possible / appropriate
- When mentioning someone's name and job title in a sentence, only use (two) commas if the sentence would make sense without their name e.g. The IET's President, Barry Brooks, will be at the event. If the sentence would not make sense without their name, use this format: IET President Barry Brooks will be at the event.

Getting started – some things to remember

To get your message across, think about:

- what you want to say
- who you want to say it to and why they need to know
- what you want the reader to do as a result (a 'call to action')

Make sure your writing is clear, simple and compelling to read. The style should be targeted at the reader but always be thoughtful, professional and authoritative.

Always use plain English and avoid jargon, 'technospeak' or a bureaucratic style of writing.

Writing checklist:

- is my style appropriate for the audience? (e.g. is your communication targeted at a technical audience or a more general audience)
- does it deliver a clear benefit or message?
- is it intelligent and easy to read?
- does it support the broader IET mission, vision and values?
<http://www.theiet.org/vision>

Top tips to make writing clear and compelling

Follow these six key principles:

- use short sentences (15-20 words is a good rule of thumb)
- active verbs (rather than passive verbs)
- avoid unnecessary words
- use 'you' and 'we'
- write with verbs rather than nouns
- use a strong headline to grab attention

Short sentences

Long sentences, like this one, are difficult to follow and understand because they mean the reader has to go back to the beginning after reaching the end of the sentence to fully understand what you are saying, which they will find irritating. You should write an average sentence length of 15-20 words. But try to vary the length of your sentences by using some very short sentences too. This will make your writing easier and more interesting to read.

Use active verbs and avoid unnecessary words

This will make your writing confident and easy to understand. It also means you have people driving actions, not things happening by themselves.

The IET has made several recommendations to Government around transport policy in the last few months.

Not

Several recommendations to Government about transport policy have been made by the IET this year.

Or worse still

Several recommendations to Government about transport policy have been made this year.

In the final example, the IET is left out of the sentence altogether – which tends to happen when using the passive tense. Instead, by using active verbs, you have to include 'the IET' or 'we'.

Use 'we' and 'you'

You may want to make it clear in your writing that the IET is a 'people' and 'inclusive' organisation. For example, when trying to highlight policy successes to members, you can make them feel 'part of the success' by using 'we':

For example:

We have made several recommendations to Government around transport policy in the last few months.

Use verbs rather than nouns

Using too many nouns like implementation, decision, provision can make your sentences dull and longer than necessary. Where possible, use verbs (and avoid any surplus words).

The IET provides engineering information to members and organises events for engineers.
NOT

The IET is responsible for the provision of engineering information to its members and for the organisation of engineering events for the wider engineering community.

Headlines

Every headline should communicate a key benefit. It should be expressed in a way which is direct, compelling and relevant.

Those headlines should also be surprising, challenging or bold to better reflect the innovative nature of the IET.

Bullet points

All IET materials should use square bullets:

- both the first bullet
- and further indented bullets.

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

If your bullet points are simply items in a list such as:

- bananas
- pomegranates

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.

If you have a list of phrases or clauses, each of which is a continuation of the introductory phrase or clause (as in this example), exactly the same applies. In these cases:

- begin each bullet point with a lower case letter
- no punctuation is needed at the end of each phrase (the bullet format makes it unnecessary)
- except that the last one has a full stop at the end if it is the end of the sentence (as this is).

Where the introductory sentence is a complete sentence, and each bullet point is a full and complete sentence, each point should, like any other sentence, start with a capital letter and end with a full stop. You might, for example, have a set of points like these:

- It is generally accepted amongst the accounting profession that all cats have four legs.
- Our observations have confirmed Fido has four legs.
- We therefore confidently conclude that Fido is a cat.