

# Writing effectively

ICO style guide version three



## Introduction

Writing plainly and effectively is a skill, and it's a skill we all need at the ICO. This style guide is designed to help you write as effectively as possible. You'll find that the booklet offers lots of useful advice on writing clearly and avoiding the most common grammar, spelling and punctuation mistakes.

The ICO style guide is important for two reasons. Firstly, adopting a corporate style helps us to present one recognisable ICO to the outside world. This consistency helps to position the ICO as a reliable provider of high-quality information. Secondly, writing plainly is fairer to our colleagues, customers and stakeholders. Jargon, abbreviations and legal terminology often lead to confusion. People don't want to spend precious time and effort deciphering our brand of jargon or shorthand, and this guide will help to ensure they don't have to.

All staff must follow the ICO style guide. I hope, however, that we won't need to wave the rule book at you, and that all ICO staff will be keen to learn and demonstrate effective writing skills.

**Susan Fox, Director of Corporate Affairs**



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In preparing the guide, we drew on the **Guardian stylebook**, which is available on the Guardian website.

# Part one

## Corporate style rules

### 1 Abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviations can save time and space. But if you use too many, they can also be distracting and difficult to remember or understand. Write out names in full the first time, adding the abbreviation in parentheses if you will be using it later in the document. You only need to include the abbreviation if you use the abbreviated form later in the document.

#### Examples

- Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO)
- Executive Team (ET)
- Ministry of Justice (MOJ)

eg

#### Acceptable abbreviations include:

- Mr
- Mrs
- Ms
- eg
- ie
- BBC
- ITV

ie

These abbreviations are so familiar that they don’t need writing out in full.

**Avoid** ‘etc’ if you can, as it usually means ‘and other items I cannot be bothered to list’. Also note that neither ‘eg’ nor ‘ie’ includes full stops.

In external documents, ‘data protection’ and ‘freedom of information’ should be written in full with initial lower-case letters. However, the abbreviated form in capitals is acceptable in internal documents: data protection (DP) and freedom of information (FOI).

### 2 Alternative spellings

Some words can be spelt in different ways. To ensure consistency, the ICO recommends a standard approach to spelling the following words.

#### Avoid

advisor  
dispatch  
e-mail  
home page  
inquiry\*  
learnt  
on-line  
web site

#### Use

adviser  
despatch  
email  
homepage  
enquiry  
learned  
online  
website

\*Though a formal government inquiry would be spelt this way.

### 3 -ise or -ize

In UK English both the 's' and 'z' forms are acceptable spellings of many words, eg 'recognise' and 'recognize'. For the sake of consistency we have decided to adopt the former – eg 'recognise'.

#### Other examples

- organisation
- realisation
- supervise
- televise

### 4 Bullet points

#### There are two main types of bullet-point list:

- One with a complete introductory sentence and a list of separate points.
- One with an incomplete lead-in statement that is completed by the points in the list, which are therefore part of the same sentence.

**For the first type of list** (as below), you should start each bullet point with upper case and end each point with a full stop.

#### Example

Bullet points can be an extremely useful tool for writers.

- They highlight the main areas of interest to the reader.
- They can help break down long sentences that would otherwise be difficult to read.
- They provide talking points that the audience might like to consider. This is why they are often used during presentational slides.

**For the second type of list**, like this one, you should:

- put a colon at the end of the lead-in statement;
- start each bullet point with lower case;
- put semi-colons or commas at the end of each point;
- put 'and' or 'or' after the penultimate point; and
- end the final point with a full stop.

In lists like those in the next section, the items are too short to warrant closing punctuation.

## **5 Capital letters**

Use these sparingly. The following require initial capital letters:

- Data Protection Act
- Environmental Information Regulations
- Freedom of Information Act
- Information Commissioner
- Information Commissioner’s Office
- Information Tribunal
- Parliament
- Parliamentary Ombudsman
- Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations
- the Act
- the Regulations



Always use an initial lower-case letter for words such as:

- applicant
- complainant
- council
- data
- data protection
- data protection principles
- decision
- decision notice
- departments
- enforcement notice
- freedom of information
- government
- high court
- information
- internet
- local authority
- managers
- model publication scheme
- notice
- officers
- parish council
- police
- practice recommendation
- preliminary enforcement notice
- public authority report
- section 50
- the press
- undertaking

The above rules should be followed except when writing particular job titles, names or department names, which take initial capitals.

### Example

- Joe Bloggs, Information Manager  
Corporate Affairs Directorate  
Anywhere Council

Headlines, titles and subheadings should have only one initial capital letter, unless of course they include proper nouns such as names of people.

### Examples

- How to contact us
- An interview with Roger Jones

You can make an exception and use a capital for the initial letter of each word in the heading if you feel the title is important enough.

### Examples

- Annual Report
- Fire Safety

### 6 Dates

Dates must be presented in the same format: day followed by month followed by year.

Use cardinal numbers (1, 2, 3) rather than ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd) as ordinals can be hard to read, especially for people with sight difficulties.

### Examples

- 24 May 2010
- Friday 3 November 2010

For financial years, write 2010/11.

### 7 Numbers

One to nine are written in full. For larger numbers, use figures.

#### Examples

- This story has appeared in six national newspapers.
- Since last year, 56 people have joined the company.

The same rule should apply when a number under 10 features in the same sentence as a number over 10.

#### Example

- I've met 23 people today and will need to see seven of them again tomorrow.

To make large numbers easier to read, use commas in numbers with four or more digits. Reading from the right, a comma should be placed after every third digit.

#### Examples

- 64,000
- 1,432,567

Numbers above 999,999 should be written as figures with 'million' or 'billion' in full.

#### Examples

- 10 million
- 25 billion

Never begin a sentence with figures. If necessary, reword the sentence to avoid starting with a figure. You can start with a number spelt out, eg 'Twenty-six officers attended the meeting'.

## 8 Singular and plural

Certain nouns can be treated as singular or plural. We need to be consistent in how we use them. An organisation is treated as singular, eg 'The ICO has an office in Wilmslow'.

Treat these as singular:

- council
- committee
- data
- department
- government
- group
- the ICO
- team

Treat this as plural:

- staff

Don't use apostrophes with decades or for plurals of abbreviations.

### Examples

- 1990s
- GCSEs
- MPs
- FAQs

## 9 Symbols

Don't use an ampersand (&) in place of 'and' unless it forms part of a company's trading name, as in 'Marks & Spencer'. Ampersands can be hard to read, especially for people with sight difficulties.

Avoid the oblique ('solidus' or 'forward slash'). Instead of 'he/she' write 'they'. And instead of 'and/or', write 'or', adding 'or both' where appropriate. For example, 'journey by rail or bus, or both'.

In general, words are clearer than symbols, but one exception is the % sign. It's OK to write '50%'.

### **10 Information Commissioner or Information Commissioner's Office**

We are the Information Commissioner's Office and Christopher Graham is the Information Commissioner.

When referring to Christopher Graham you should say the 'Information Commissioner'.

When referring to us as an organisation you should say the 'Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)' or 'the ICO'.

We are not 'the office'. But it's fine to say 'we' or 'us' when meaning the ICO.



**ico.**  
Information Commissioner's Office



**ico.**  
Information Commissioner's Office



**ico.**  
Information Commissioner's Office



**ico.**  
Information Commissioner's Office

### 11 Corporate identity

Guidelines on the ICO's corporate identity are available on **ICON**. Below is a basic guide.

- Our corporate font is Verdana 12pt.
- Georgia 14pt can be used for headings.
- Verdana 12pt bold can be used for subheadings.
- The only logo you should use is the ICO logo. It must not be altered.
- Use one space after full stops and commas.
- Avoid block capitals.
- Avoid underlining.
- Limit the use of italics (although they are useful for quotations, for example if you want to show you are quoting from legislation).

**Colours.** A good contrast between text and background is advisable as it makes the text easier to read. The best contrast is achieved through dark text on a solid light background. The use of any colours should be in line with the **corporate identity manual**.

**Text** should be left justified (aligned in a straight line on the left margin). This is because people with sight difficulties tend to find it harder to read text that is justified on both margins, which causes uneven spacing between words.



# Part two

## Writing effectively

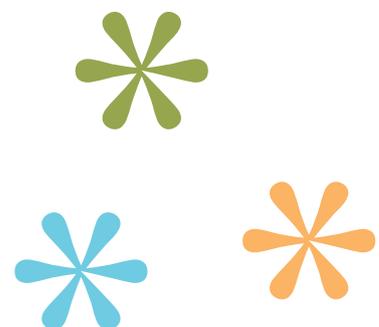
### 1 Tips for writing effectively

- **Plan your communication.** Before writing any text you should have a good understanding of what you plan to write. This includes the length of the text and the final layout as well as the content. Before you start, write a list of the points you want to make.
- **Know what you want to achieve.** As well as knowing what you plan to write, you should understand what you want to achieve. For example, are you aiming to educate the reader? Are you aiming to influence their point of view? Write with your aim in mind.
- **Write for the reader, not yourself.** You should aim to write your text in a manner that the reader will understand and will find helpful.
- **Keep it short and simple.** The length of the average sentence is 15-20 words. If your sentence is over 30 words then you should consider rewriting the sentence or breaking it down into two separate sentences.
- **Use plain language.** Don't use jargon. Make sure your text is understandable to your target audience. If you are unsure, ask a colleague to read what you've just written and see whether they have any difficulty understanding it.
- **Vary the length of your sentences.** This helps to maintain the reader's interest. Short snappy sentences mixed in with longer passages will help to break up the text and make it more readable.

- **Put your conclusions first**, then your explanation – leave detail to the end. Your introductory section should make the reader want to spend the time reading the rest of your text. Try to grab their interest from the start.
- **Give clear instructions and recommendations** – show the ICO's position. Make it clear if the reader or you need to take action. A bullet point list is useful here.
- **Tell the reader what to do** (rather than what not to do). Where possible, put things in positive rather than negative terms.

### What about writing for an audience with special needs?

If you are writing for readers with a disability or with dyslexia, following this style guide will help you to meet their needs. You may also want to think about adapting the layout or format, for example by increasing the size of the text to font size 14 or above for those with reading difficulties.



## 2 Language myths

All sorts of myths continue to exist about using the English language. This guide can't dispel all of these for you, but here are some of the most common misconceptions.

**MYTH 1:** Never start a sentence with 'and'.

**FACT:** Good sentences can and often do start with 'And', 'But', 'So', 'Because' or 'However'.



**MYTH 2:** You should never place a comma before the word 'and'.

**FACT:** A view held by many but still incorrect. It's often useful to place a comma before 'and' when you want to show a slight separation between phrases or between different types of item in a list. For example: "That's all," he said, and died.  
'Music by Mozart, Bach, and Gilbert and Sullivan.'



**MYTH 3:** A paragraph should contain at least two or three sentences.

**FACT:** A paragraph of only one sentence is fine, especially where you want to make it stand out. However, most paragraphs will contain three to five sentences.



**MYTH 4:** You should never refer to the reader as 'you'.

**FACT:** You should usually address the reader as 'you', where it is clear who you are referring to. It's a way of getting your point across and holding their attention in a simple, direct manner.

**MYTH 5:** You should not end a sentence with a preposition.

**FACT:** As in ordinary speech, written sentences may end with a preposition and they sound more natural that way, eg 'What are you waiting for?'.

For more on this subject, read the 'Oxford Guide to Plain English' by Martin Cutts. This book provides further details about some of the myths mentioned above, and also discusses other peculiarities of English that affect the way we communicate.

### 3 Keep it uncluttered

Layout is a question of balance. Long unbroken passages of text look forbidding, so they should be split into shorter paragraphs with plenty of white space. Where appropriate, you can add interest and variety to page layout with forms, tables and bullet lists. On the other hand, too many boxes or tables can clutter the page, and too many signs and symbols can look distracting.

As a general rule:

- ensure the words flow;
- use symbols and layout features sparingly so that you enliven the page without cluttering it;
- avoid unnecessary punctuation such as exclamation marks;
- use brackets and dashes for their intended purposes;
- avoid underlining, as it interferes with descenders such as g and y; and
- use italics sparingly, as they are hard to read in large chunks.

### 4 Write 'read-me-once' sentences

If people have to re-read one of your sentences because its meaning is unclear at first reading, you need to rewrite it.

Aim to write short and simple sentences with simple structures. Avoid writing sentences with multiple clauses or clumsy structures. Avoid footnotes and references except in academic papers or speeches; they can be distracting.

Bear in mind your readers may include:

- people with literacy or learning disabilities;
  - people for whom English is a second language;
  - people who are completely new to data protection or freedom of information;
- or
- people who are very busy and distracted, with little time to read wordy or over-complex documents.

### **5 Active not passive**

Try to use the active voice rather than the passive voice, as active verbs are usually clearer, briefer and easier to understand at first glance.

#### **Examples of the active are:**

- The cat is killing the mouse.
- I will send the document.

#### **Their passive equivalents are:**

- The mouse is being killed by the cat.
- The document will be sent by me.

The passive version is generally longer and less direct, so we recommend you avoid it when possible. The active makes it clear who is doing the action.

Note that 'passive' does not mean 'past'. A passive verb can be in the present, past or future tense.

The main uses of the passive are as follows:

- When the doer is obvious, unknown or does not need to be stated, eg 'The prisoner was given a longer sentence.'
- When you are developing a statement in a previous sentence, eg 'In 1938 Europe stood on the brink of war. This had been brought about by x, y and z.'

### **6 Sentence and paragraph lengths**

Try to vary the length of your sentences and paragraphs. There is nothing wrong in writing the occasional three-word sentence or a very short paragraph. You can use Microsoft Word to check that you are keeping to the following averages.

#### **For the web or intranet:**

- Sentences 15–20 words
- Paragraphs 45 words

#### **For paper-based documents:**

- Sentences 15–20 words
- Paragraphs 60 words

Try reading your sentence aloud. If you need to take a breath before the end of the sentence, it is probably too long.



### 7 Unnecessary words

Some words sound impressive but simply pad out the text and add nothing to the meaning. In most cases you can delete them without affecting the meaning of the sentence.

The following words are widely overused and can generally be removed.

- accommodation as in 'housing accommodation'
- agenda as in 'reform agenda'
- basis as in 'on a regular basis' (regularly)
- community as in 'business community'
- environment as in 'work environment'
- experience as in 'training experience'
- issues as in 'health and safety issues'
- period as in 'during the autumn period'
- purposes as in 'for cooking purposes'.

Many phrases in everyday language can be pruned because they say the same thing twice.

#### Examples

- blue in colour
- completely eliminate
- future plans
- glaringly obvious
- large in size
- maximise as much as possible
- 9am in the morning
- 11pm at night

### 8 Summarise long documents

A summary should include:

- the purpose of the report
- main facts
- conclusions
- recommendations
- actions.

For more on this subject, read the 'Oxford Guide to Plain English' by Martin Cutts. Other books that focus solely on writing summaries and reports include John Bowden's 'Writing a report: How to Prepare, Write and Present Really Effective Reports'.

### 9 Abstract nouns

Words like justice, freedom and leadership are abstract nouns – ideas that cannot be experienced directly through the five senses. They usually stand for things like a condition or quality.

Please use abstract nouns sparingly. This is because our brains process them more slowly and they may mean different things to different people. The reader has to work harder and take longer to understand them.

#### Examples

- accountability
- completion
- registration
- attention
- compliance
- implementation
- reliability
- performance

Here are four things you can do to stop abstract nouns clogging up your writing.

- Avoid having too many close together.
- Convert them into verbs. For example, you can adjust the sentence to use 'implement' rather than 'implementation' or 'comply' rather than 'compliance'.
- Convert them into adjectives. For example, you can adjust the sentence to use 'accountable' rather than 'accountability' or 'confidential' rather than 'confidentiality'.
- Remove them completely if they are unnecessary.

### 10 Plain versus formal

If there is a plain or a formal way of expressing the same idea, always choose the plainer option. Here are some unnecessarily formal words and phrases, with their plainer alternatives. But take care that the meaning of the alternative is precise enough for your needs.

#### Instead of

#### Consider using

---

adjacent to

next to

---

ascertain

find out

---

as per

in line with, as shown on

---

assist

help

---

beverage

drink

---

commence

start, begin

---

concluded

ended

---

co-operation

help

---

despatched

sent

---

despite the fact that

despite, although

---

discontinue	stop
due to the fact that	because
engage in a consultative process	consult
expenditure	expense, payment, cost, spending
for the purpose of doing	to do
further to	following
head up	head
in a work environment	at work
in conjunction with	with
incorrect	wrong
in order to	to
in partnership with	with
in respect of	about
in the recent past	recently
meet up with	meet
meet with	meet
negotiations	talks, discussions
participate	take part
police officers	police
prior to	before
purchase	buy
re/regarding	about
remuneration	pay
reside	live
retain	keep
stipulations	rules
sufficient	enough
take into consideration	consider
take preventative measures	prevent, stop

those with management responsibilities	managers
to be in compliance with	to comply with
undertake a leadership role	lead
utilise	use

## **11 Foreign words**

Use Latin and other words of foreign origin sparingly.

Many words from other languages have been accepted into English. Examples include bungalow, cliché, graffiti, kiosk and ombudsman.

However, many foreign words are not commonly used in English and may confuse or alienate our readers.

### **Avoid**

### **Use**

ad infinitum	for ever
a priori	based on what we know
caveat emptor	let the buyer beware
circa	about
contretemps	mishap, embarrassing incident
de facto	in fact, whether with a legal right or not
de minimis	too minor to be of interest to the law
de rigueur	required, necessary
en route	on the way
ergo	therefore
ex officio	by virtue of one's status or office

imprimatur	official approval
in situ	in place, in its original place
inter alia	among other things
modus operandi	way of working
per se	in itself
pro forma	as a matter of form; an invoice sent before goods are despatched
QED; quod erat demonstrandum	what we were trying to prove
quid pro quo	compensation; one thing in return for another
sine qua non	precondition
vis-à-vis	relating to, in relation to

## 12 Jargon

Jargon is useful internal shorthand but can be confusing in the outside world. Try these alternatives.

### Avoid

### Use

best practice	good examples
comply	follow the rules, act legally
data subject	person or individual
deliver	achieve, provide
engage	talk to, involve, work with
enhance	improve
joined-up	working with, consulting, co-operating, streamlined
window	slot, opportunity, appointment, date

## Part three

# Punctuation, grammar and spelling

### 1 Apostrophes

Apostrophes are used to show possession.

#### Examples

- Tom's book
- My brother's car



The main exceptions are personal pronouns, where no apostrophe is used for the possessive (its, hers, yours, ours, theirs).

#### Example

- The dog wagged its tail.

Apostrophes should be used **after** plurals where there is possession.

#### Examples

- MPs' expenses
- The boys' football

Apostrophes are also used to indicate where letters are missing in contractions.

#### Examples

- it's = it is
- don't = do not

### 2 Semi-colons

Semi-colons are used to join phrases and sentences without having to use a conjunction (such as 'and' or 'but'), where the phrases or sentences are independent but have a linked theme. They introduce new clauses, often where a full stop would otherwise be used.

#### Example

- In some circumstances you might be subject to the UK Act; for example, if you use equipment in the UK to process the information, the processing will be subject to the Act.

### 3 Quotation marks and quotes

#### Quotation marks

As a general rule quotation marks should be limited to direct quotes unless absolutely necessary. However you can use single quotation marks to indicate that a word or phrase has a special meaning or usage. But try to do this sparingly and consider rewriting the sentence in plainer words if possible.

Use double quotation marks at the start and end of a quoted section, with single quotation marks for quoted words or short phrases within that section.

Place full stops and commas inside the quotation marks for a complete sentence. Otherwise the full stop comes outside.

### Examples

- “Anna said: ‘Your style guide needs updating’ and I said: ‘I agree.’”

But:

- “Anna said updating the guide was ‘a difficult and time consuming task’.”

When beginning a quote with a sentence fragment that is followed by a full sentence, punctuate according to the final part of the quote.

### Example

- The minister called the allegations “blatant lies. But in a position such as mine, it is only to be expected.”

In headlines and captions, use single quotation marks.

### Quotes

Take care with direct speech. Our readers should be confident that words appearing in double quote marks accurately represent the speaker’s actual words.

## 4 Comparatives and superlatives

Comparing things – taller, tallest or the taller?

A comparative is a word or phrase used to indicate that something has more of a quality than something else:

- Joe is **taller** than his brother.
- Joe is the **taller** of the two brothers.

A superlative can be used to indicate that something has more of a quality than anything else in a group:

- Joe is the **tallest** in his family.

It is considered poor grammar to use a superlative with only two things, so the statement 'Joe and his brother are tall, but Joe is the tallest' would be considered incorrect. Some correct alternatives would be:

- Joe and his brother are tall, but Joe is **the taller**. (although this is quite formal)
- Joe and his brother are tall, but Joe is **taller**.

'Few' refers to individual items, 'less' to unspecified amounts of things:

- Joe saw **fewer** people today and made **less** money than his brother.

### 5 Grammar

Here are a few of the most common errors.

#### As such

- **Wrong:** The AGM is almost upon us and as such we are asking for motions to be submitted in advance.
- **Right:** I am a dancer, and as such I enjoy music.

In the first example, 'as such' refers to the AGM, so the clause that follows should continue to describe the AGM. Instead, the subject changes to 'we', making 'as such' meaningless. 'As such' does not mean 'therefore'.

The second, correct, example is shorthand for 'I am a dancer, and as a dancer I enjoy music'.

#### That or which?

The words 'that' and 'which' are often thought to be interchangeable, but they are not always. When deciding which to use, try the following test:

- Omit 'that' if you don't need it.
- Use 'that' if both 'that' and 'which' would give the meaning you want.
- If the above don't work, use 'which'.

#### Example

Both of these sentences are correct.

- We chose wallpaper that matched the jet-black window-blinds.
- The wallpaper, which matched the blinds, made it hard to see where the windows were.

### Mixing a singular noun with a plural verb

- **Wrong:** Our relationship with the developers of our major systems were not managed as professionally as they could have been.
- **Right:** Our relationship with the developers of our major systems was not managed as professionally as it could have been.

### Using 'myself' or 'yourself' instead of 'me' or 'you'

- **Wrong:** If you need more information, please contact myself. If I need more details, I'll contact yourself.
- **Right:** If you need more information, please contact me. If I need more details, I'll contact you.

### Using 'I' or 'me'

- **I:** If you are the subject of the sentence.
- **Me:** If you are the object of the sentence.

People rarely make mistakes with sentences of the type 'It was fun for I'. A more common error is:

- It was fun for Mary and I (where the speaker is in the object position, with another person).

The correct form is:

- It was fun for Mary and me.

A tip is that if you remove the other person and the sentence makes sense, you've got it right.

### 6 Puzzling pairs

Certain pairs of words are easily confused with each other, because they have similar spellings or related meanings. Here are some of the best-known pairs, with examples of how they should be used:

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<b>accept</b>	to take or receive something offered
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<b>except</b>	other than; apart from
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<b>advice</b>	eg She gave him some good advice. (noun)
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<b>advise</b>	eg I would probably advise against it. (verb)
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<b>affect</b>	to act upon or influence, especially in an adverse way (to alter)
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<b>effect</b>	to do or to bring about. 'Effect' is also a noun meaning 'result', eg The policy had serious effects (results).
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<b>altogether</b>	with everything included
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<b>all together</b>	in a group
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<b>appraise</b>	estimate the value or quality of something
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<b>apprise</b>	inform, eg 'be apprised of' means to be made aware of
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<b>bare</b>	unclothed; exposed
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<b>bear</b>	to carry; to withstand; to hold
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<b>biannual</b>	occurring twice a year
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<b>biennial</b>	occurring every two years or lasting for two years
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<b>born</b>	brought into being by birth, destined to do something
<b>borne</b>	past participle of the verb 'to bear'
<b>canvas</b>	durable cloth used for sails and tents
<b>canvass</b>	to solicit votes, orders and advertising
<b>complement</b>	a person or thing that completes or matches something
<b>compliment</b>	an expression of admiration or praise
<b>continuous</b>	prolonged without interruption
<b>continual</b>	recurring often; repeated
<b>council</b>	an assembly of people meeting for discussion or consultation
<b>counsel</b>	advice or guidance on conduct or behaviour; advocate(s) in a legal case; to advise
<b>dependent</b>	depending upon (adjective)
<b>dependant</b>	a person who depends on another person (noun)
<b>discreet</b>	tactful; trustworthy; preserving secrecy
<b>discrete</b>	distinct; separate
<b>disinterested</b>	free from bias or partiality
<b>uninterested</b>	showing or feeling lack of interest
<b>disorganised</b>	lacking organisation or system, not properly planned and controlled
<b>unorganised</b>	not organised, not having or belonging to a structured whole

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<b>ensure</b>	make certain
<b>insure</b>	against risk
<b>assure</b>	speak confidently to remove doubt
<b>fewer</b>	for individual items, eg fewer people
<b>less</b>	for bulk, eg less money
<b>imply</b>	to express or indicate by a hint
<b>infer</b>	to deduce, ie to conclude by reasoning from evidence
<b>index</b>	an alphabetical list of people, places or subjects, printed in a piece of text – usually at the back
<b>contents</b>	a list showing the order in which information is presented, printed at the front of a document
<b>judgement</b>	the function of the mind by which it arrives at a notion of a thing; the critical faculty; discernment; a decision
<b>judgment</b>	the form of spelling used in the legal world for a judicial decision or order in court (as distinct from the more common form of spelling above used in a more general sense)
<b>libel</b>	defamation in which false information is published about someone's name or reputation in a permanent form, eg in writing
<b>slander</b>	spoken defamation involving false statements about someone's name or reputation (though defamation on radio or TV is classed as libel)

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<b>licence</b>	a permit (noun)
<b>license</b>	to issue a permit (verb)
<b>loose</b>	not tight
<b>lose</b>	to mislay
<b>maybe</b>	perhaps
<b>may be</b>	eg They may be young but they're experienced. (verb)
<b>moral</b>	concerned with or relating to standards of behaviour (adjective)
<b>morale</b>	the degree of confidence of a person or group (noun)
<b>practice</b>	eg I have to take my son to football practice. (noun)
<b>practise</b>	eg The best way to become a good musician is to practise daily. (verb)
<b>precede</b>	to come before (in time), eg Monday precedes Tuesday.
<b>proceed</b>	to go forward; to continue
<b>prescribe</b>	to set down as a rule or guide
<b>proscribe</b>	to prohibit; to condemn
<b>principle</b>	general truth; standard; rule of personal conduct
<b>principal</b>	the most important (adjective); head of a school or college (noun)

<b>relative</b>	having meaning or significance only in relation to something else
<b>relevant</b>	having direct bearing on the matter in hand
<b>review</b>	look back
<b>revue</b>	show or entertainment
<b>site</b>	the place where something was or is intended to be located
<b>sight</b>	perception by the eyes; vision
<b>cite</b>	to quote or refer to a passage, book or author
<b>stationery</b>	paper or writing materials
<b>stationary</b>	not moving
<b>their</b>	eg Have the customers received their goods? (belonging to them)
<b>there</b>	eg Were you there when they called? (in that place)
<b>they're</b>	eg They're going to the seaside. (they are)
<b>waver</b>	to hesitate between possibilities (verb)
<b>waiver</b>	the voluntary surrender of some claim or right (noun)
<b>wear</b>	eg I like the clothes you wear.
<b>were</b>	eg Were you at the party last night?
<b>where</b>	eg Where is the nearest chemist?
<b>your</b>	eg Is this your car? (belonging to you)
<b>you're</b>	eg You're the first person to arrive. (you are)

### 7 Spelling traps

Most of us are occasionally tripped up by the difficulties of English spelling. Take care with the following words, which are often misspelt:

- accommodation
- address
- any more (two words)
- argument
- cemetery
- commit, committed
- committee
- compatible
- definite
- definitely
- discernible
- dissatisfied
- extension
- gauge
- guarantee
- immediately
- inconvenient
- instalment
- liaison
- manufacture
- millennium
- necessary, necessity
- occasion
- pursue
- receive
- recommend
- restaurant
- sceptical
- separate
- several
- skilful
- thank you (two words)
- tomorrow
- under way (two words)
- unforeseen
- unnecessary
- up to (two words)
- warehouse
- wilful

## Further information

For anything that does not appear in the ICO Style Guide, please refer to the following publications.

- Guardian Style edited by David Marsh
- Collins English Dictionary (30th anniversary edition, 2010)
- Oxford Guide to Plain English by Martin Cutts

Useful websites include:

- **Plain Language Commission**
- **Online Collins Dictionary**



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The style guide is maintained by the Corporate Affairs Directorate. As language and conventions change, parts of this guide will also need to change, so we will be updating it accordingly. We want the guide to be as useful for staff as possible, so please contact Corporate Affairs if you have any suggestions for changes.

Corporate Affairs

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version three