

Corporate house style

Acronyms

Avoid using acronyms unless you are repeating the full name or term very frequently in your text. Only use one if it is going to help, rather than slow down or exclude, all of your possible readers. The first time you use the term, spell it out in full with the acronym in brackets after it. If you are writing a lengthy report, do the same the first time it appears in each chapter.

A few very familiar acronyms do not need to be spelled out, including: the NHS, GP, AIDS, MP, VAT, the EU, the BBC, Ofsted and DNA.

Other abbreviations

Do not use abbreviated Latin terms, such as eg (for example), ie (that is), etc (and so on), unless you are writing in notes or in tables.

Do not use a full stop after contractions such as Mr, Dr, Ms, or after an abbreviation unless it spells another word – for example, when no. is used instead of number.

When a unit of measurement follows a numeral, it should be abbreviated, with no space between the number and unit. The abbreviation remains the same for plural units – for example, 1cm and 5cm.

Appendices/annexes

Attachments at the end of documents are referred to as annexes. They should be named using letters, not numbers – for example, annex A. If there is only one annex, it is not named with a letter. In body text, the word “annex” does not start with a capital letter.

Bullet points and numbered lists

Bullet points are useful for organising short, related points. But when using them, you should avoid:

- Lists of more than six bullet points.
- Bullet points containing lengthy sentences or short paragraphs.

- Using bullet points to split a long sentence into phrases separated by semi-colons.
- Wide variation in the length of the bullet points in a list.
- Overusing bullet points, as this can become monotonous for the reader.

Start each bullet point with a capital letter and end it with a full stop, apart from when the items listed contain fewer than four words.

You should use numbered lists instead of bullet points if:

- People need to read the information in a set sequence – for example, if the list is a series of related steps.
- You refer to any of the points made in the list later on in the text.

Capital letters

Our corporate house style follows the trend over the last decade of using fewer capital letters, as seen in *The Guardian*, *Community Care*, *The Health Service Journal*, *The Economist*, and many academic style guides.

You should use capital letters when referring to:

A council or individual NHS trust by its full legal name: but you don't need to use a capital when subsequently referring to "the council" or "the trust", or when referring collectively to "NHS trusts" or "councils".

The name of an individual hospital within a trust: for example, Pinderfields General Hospital, Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital.

National organisations, public bodies and national committees: for example, the National Skills Academy for Social Care, the Royal College of Surgeons. But if referring to "royal colleges" in the generic sense, use lower case.

The Government: only if you mean the current government. Do not use a capital if using the word as an adjective, as in "government departments", or if referring to the government of another country.

Parliament: but not for the adjective "parliamentary".

Acts of Parliament: for example, the Race Relations Act. If "the" is part of the Act's official title, then it should also have a capital. Also use capitals when referring to "Acts of Parliament" in the generic sense. But parliamentary bills are lower case.

Regulations: but only if you are reproducing the official name exactly, for example The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Government agencies: For example, the Benefits Agency, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Major national initiatives: For example, Investors in People or Sure Start. Do not use italics. Department of Health programmes, such as the clinical negligence scheme for trusts, do not take capitals.

Titles of publications: these should be exactly as shown in the source document. But when using the words “section”, “page”, “annex”, etc in body copy, use lower case.

Compass points that are part of a county, a region or a town’s proper name: for example, West Midlands, North Yorkshire, East Riding of Yorkshire, Bath and North East Somerset. In other contexts compass points do not take capitals (for example north London), unless you are referring to CQC’s regions – for example, our South East region.

The names of nationalities: for example, French, English, African. Note: the term “minority ethnic” is not capitalised, but Black is.

Job titles: unless you are referring to the job title in a general sense. For example, “Many senior analysts supervise three or more people”.

Team or directorate names: for example, the Corporate Services directorate, the Press team.

Capitals are **not** used for:

- The seasons – spring, summer, autumn, winter.
- Organisations in the generic sense, such as social services department/s, NHS trust/s, councils, primary care trusts.
- When referring to a government “white paper” or “green paper”, although “Act of Parliament” is capitalised.
- The titles or headings of CQC publications, apart from for the first word and any proper nouns in the title or heading (for example, The state of health care and adult social care in England. But if you are referring to another organisation’s publication, follow its use of capitals in the title.

Date, years, seasons

Dates are shown as date/month/year, as in 12 July 2007 or Thursday 12 July 2007. Do not use abbreviations and superscripts, as in 12th July 2007 or July 12th 2007. But use a non-superscript abbreviation for centuries, as in 20th century, not twentieth century.

When referring to a range of years, show both years in full, as in 2005–2006, with a dash with no spaces in between. When referring to a financial year, use 2007/08 separated by a slash with no spaces in between.

The names of seasons are not capitalised. If referring to a season within a particular year, write “the autumn of 2006”, not “autumn 2006”.

Foreign words

“Data”, the plural of “datum”, has been naturalised into everyday English as singular, as in “a piece of data”.

Use anglicised plurals for agendas, focuses, forums, and syllabuses. But use “appendices” as the plural of “appendix”, and “analyses” as the plural of “analysis”. The singular of “criteria” is “criterion”.

Use italics for non-anglicised foreign terms – for example, *Clostridium difficile* and its abbreviation *C. difficile*.

Money

- £ and p, not pounds and pence.
- £1 not £1.00, 99p not £0.99.
- £2.5 million not £2,500,000. Use £2.5m in tables or financial documents.
- Put commas in thousands: £1,000.

Numbers

Zero to nine: Show as words.

From 10 onwards: Show as numerals.

A number that starts a sentence: Should be written as a word. Hyphenate numbers made up of two words – for example “sixty-eight” – but not if the number involves units of a hundred, thousand, or million. For example, “five hundred”, “sixteen million”, but “five hundred and sixty-eight”.

Numbers of 1,000 or more: Show a comma between the thousands.

The words “millions” and “billions”: Write out in full, apart from in tables and charts, where they can be abbreviated to “m” and “bn” (£200m, £3bn).

Ordinal/ranking numbers (first, second, 15th, etc): From first to ninth, the number should be spelled out. For 10th and over, use numbers with an abbreviation, but no superscript.

Fractions: Should be written as words and hyphenated, apart from in tables. For example, two-thirds, three-quarters. Use “a third” not “one third”, and “a quarter” not “one quarter”.

Numbers of chapter, section and pages: Shown as numerals – for example, “chapter 5”, “section 3”, “page 89”.

Percentages and other measurements

Percentages are written as a numeral and symbol (8%) – including numbers below 10. But when starting a sentence with a percentage, express it in words – for example, “Four per cent”.

Avoid mixing use of percentages (10%) with proportions (1 in 3) in the same sentence.

When a unit of measurement follows a numeral, it should be abbreviated, with no space between the number and unit. The abbreviation remains the same for plural units – for example, 1cm and 5cm. If a unit of measurement is shown without a number, it should be written in full.

Phone numbers

Leave a space between the area code and the number – as in 0191 222 6000. The London code is 020, followed by a space before the number, which usually has either 7 or 8 as its first digit – for example, 020 7448 9200, not 0207 448 9200.

References and footnotes

If citing other publications (including white papers, green papers, bills and Acts of Parliament), make sure their reference numbers in the text reflect the order in which they appear. The full reference should not be shown at the foot of the page, but in a references list at the end of the publication, in its correct numerical position.

Format for references:

1. Author (this may be a person/s, organisation or government department).
2. Title (*italics* for books and journal titles; double quotation marks for journal articles).
3. Publisher (if different from the author).
4. Place of publication (if not the UK).
5. Date of publication.
6. Page number (where relevant for books, and for all journal articles).

Examples:

Department of Health, *A short guide to NHS foundation trusts*, November 2005.

American Allergy Association, *Allergies in Children*. New York: Random, 1998.

Murray C, Lopez A, "Alternative projections of mortality and disability by cause 1990–2020: global burden of disease study," *Lancet* 1997;349:1498-504.

Show the exact original title, including its use of capitals, and double-check every other detail, including any weblink.

Footnotes are not the same as references. A footnote is used to show that there is a note at the foot of the page explaining a piece of information in the main text. Avoid using footnotes unless it is impossible to incorporate the information into the body of the text.

Ratings

When referring to ranked ratings such as "excellent", "good", "fair", "weak"), use double quotation marks the first time you refer to them, or in each major section of longer documents.

Quotations marks (speech marks)

Use double quotation marks for direct speech or when quoting from documents or books. Do not use italics. If quoted text contains a quotation, the inner quotation should be in single quotation marks.

Quotes that are longer than four lines of text should be indented, with no quotation marks.

Single speech marks are sometimes to acknowledge use of a colloquial, slang or seemingly inappropriate word. It is not good practice in terms of clarity and accessibility, so try to avoid using terms that need qualifying in this way.

Tense – use of

CQC's publications will often refer to assessments that we have carried out. Our findings should be presented in the past tense, because they reflect the situation at a particular point in time. Consultation documents are mainly written in the future tense, because they refer to what we intend to do.

Time

Use the 12-hour (7.30pm) clock rather than the 24-hour clock (19:30 hours). Leave out full stops, spaces or unnecessary zeros – for example, "9am", not "9.00 a.m.".

Be specific about time periods rather than using general phrases like "last year", "recent" and "this summer".

Titles

Of publications

When referring to the title of a document or publication, use italics. Do not use quotation marks or underlining.

Use lower case for the titles or headings of CQC publications, apart from for the first word and any proper nouns in the title or heading. But if referring to another organisation's publication, follow its use of capitals in the title and subtitle.

Of people

If you need to show a woman's title and don't know her preferred choice, use "Ms".

If you need to show someone's job title, check their correct title with the organisation or the person if possible. If you don't know the sex of the person concerned or how they prefer their title to be worded, use an inclusive term.

Here are some ways to rephrase job titles so that they are gender inclusive:

- Using the simplest form of the word – for example, “chair” instead of “chairman”.
- Replacing -man with -person.
- Choosing a different word – for example, “representative” instead of “spokesman”.

Underlining

Do not underline titles or headings, or use underlining to emphasise words in body text.

Web addresses (URLs)

Do not include “<http://>” at the beginning of a web address if it is followed by “www”. For example, our full website address, <http://www.cqc.org.uk>, is shown as www.cqc.org.uk

If you have a document to be published on a website, make sure that you format any web addresses in the text using the “hyperlink” style in Word.