

# Guide to Ofsted's house style

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Corporate member of  
Plain English Campaign  
Committed to clearer communication

**361**

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## Introduction

This is the Ofsted style guide. It is for all Ofsted staff to use. We publish it on [www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-ofsteds-house-style](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-ofsteds-house-style) for transparency.

As Ofsted staff, you must use this guide when writing inspection reports, official communications (for example letters and research emails), research reports and any other publications that will be published as PDF/Word attachments on GOV.UK.

If you're writing for social media, a GOV.UK HTML page or blog, you must follow the [GDS style guide](#). We are moving towards publishing more of our information as HTML webpages rather than documents, so for things like handbooks/frameworks, do check with the Digital Comms team ([digital@ofsted.freshdesk.com](mailto:digital@ofsted.freshdesk.com)).

We also have a glossary of the terms most commonly used in writing for Ofsted. This is published internally.

## Part A. House style

### 'A' or 'an'

1. Use 'an' for an abbreviation if it is intended to be read in the abbreviated form (an MP, an HMI, an SHMI).

### Abbreviations

2. Avoid using abbreviations, especially in documents for an external audience. If an abbreviation occurs only a few times, it is best to write it out in full each time. Exceptions are GCSE, A level, BTEC National Diploma, UK and MP, which never need to be written in full. The **glossary** includes phrases that you should never abbreviate, such as 'female genital mutilation' and 'child sexual exploitation'.
3. If you do use an abbreviation, spell out the words in full the first time you use the expression and put the abbreviation in brackets after it: for example 'the Department for Education (DfE)'. Only do this if the abbreviation is used afterwards. The **glossary** includes details of particular abbreviations.
4. Do not:
  - use abbreviations in headings or in titles of publications
  - use the abbreviations 'eg', 'ie' or 'etc' – always write these out in full: 'for example', 'that is', 'and so on'
  - use full stops in abbreviations (BTEC, not B.T.E.C.).

### Addresses and telephone numbers

5. Postal addresses should be left-aligned and should have no punctuation at the end of each line.
6. When writing out website addresses in reports, you do not have to include 'http://' if the address starts with 'www'. For example:

[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

but

<https://parentview.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

### Bullets and lists

7. Bullets are useful for breaking up text. If you use bullets, follow the style in the Ofsted **publication template** (available on the intranet).
8. If using sub-bullets, indicate each one with a dash. Refer to the template for the house formatting style.
9. Each bullet point may consist of one or more complete sentences, or the points together may make up one continuous sentence introduced by a stem. You

should not mix the two kinds in one sequence. For more on bullet points, we have a **Clearly Ofsted** article, available on the intranet.

10. Only use numbers for lists when you are describing steps in a process. Otherwise, use bullet points, which imply that there is no priority or other meaning in the order of appearance.
11. Do not use a comma before 'and' in a list unless the meaning would be unclear without it. For example: 'The learners studied catering, key skills, and information and communication technology' ('information and communication technology' is one item in the list).

## Capital letters

12. In general, capital initials should be used only for proper nouns: the names of individual people, places, organisations or languages. Do not use them for common nouns except where these begin a sentence or heading.
13. Use capital initials for:
  - names of organisations, ministries, departments and directorates
  - very specific people's job titles (Secretary of State for Education, Prime Minister, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Divisional Manager [of a particular division])
  - names of government schemes, policies and programmes (Graduate Teacher Programme)
  - acts of Parliament, bills and legal documents
  - specific select committees (Education Committee, Justice Committee)
  - religions (Buddhist, Catholic, Christian, Islam, Muslim, Protestant, Sikh)
  - names of school years (Reception Year, Year 1, Nursery when referring to 'Nursery Year' in a school)
  - proper names of places, areas and countries (North America, Western Australia, the West, Eastern Europe, Ofsted's North West region)
  - Her Majesty's Inspector and Ofsted Inspector.
14. Do not use capital initials for:
  - job titles (minister, director, regional schools commissioner, chair of the governing body, chief executive, manager, headteacher, principal, director of children's services), unless part of a specific person's job title following their name (Joe Bloggs, Chief Executive, Some Academy Trust)
  - types of settings (schools, nurseries, academies, university technical colleges, multi-academy trusts, children's services, independent learning providers)

- subjects and curriculum areas (except for languages) in early years provision, schools and colleges
  - 'level', when referring to post-16 qualifications.
  - government – not 'Government', even when referring to an elected administration (so not 'the UK Government'), unless part of a proper name, such as Local Government Association
  - department or ministry – never Department or Ministry, unless referring to a specific one, such as Ministry of Justice
  - departmental board, interim executive board, the board (but use capital initials for Local Safeguarding Children Board and for proper names, such as Youth Justice Board)
  - white paper, green paper and command paper – only use for House of Commons paper
  - general mention of select committees (but capitalise specific ones – see above)
  - the military
  - geographical regions that aren't proper names, for example southern England, the south of Wales, the south-western part of Kent, north-east Somerset
  - childcare inspector.
15. For guidance on capitalising specific words and phrases, see the glossary. If you can't find what you're after, contact [publishing@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:publishing@ofsted.gov.uk).
16. Use sentence case (only the first word and any proper nouns begin with a capital letter) for:
- headings
  - subject line of letters
  - titles of journals, government documents, reports, research papers.

The exception to using sentence case is for proper nouns and titles of plays, books, poems and TV and radio programmes ('The Tempest', 'The Gruffalo'). Or follow the publisher or channel's style ('Alice in Wonderland', 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'). This also applies to newspapers and magazines ('The Guardian', 'The Economist').

17. Do not use blocks of capital letters in headings, paragraphs or in the subject line of letters. CAPITALS SHOUT AT THE READER. They are also harder to read than lower case letters.

## Colons and semi-colons

18. Use a colon to separate a clause that introduces a long or complex list, a quotation or a summary. Never follow a colon with a dash.
19. Avoid using a colon when the second half of the sentence explains the first half, as if it were standing for the words 'in the following way'. For example, instead of:

'This publication aims to help all staff in Ofsted: it sets out guidance and provides advice on tricky areas of writing.'

write:

'This publication aims to help all staff in Ofsted. It sets out guidance and provides advice on tricky areas of writing.'

20. Semi-colons are used to connect clauses that could stand as sentences on their own, but are so closely related that they convey their sense better combined into one sentence. Use them sparingly – it is usually better to write separate sentences instead.
21. Use semi-colons to break up lists of complex items after a colon in a paragraph, especially if the individual items contain commas. This makes it clear where the items divide. For example:

'Three areas are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning: personal, social and emotional development; communication and language; and physical development.'

22. Do not use semi-colons or commas at the end of bullet points..

## Dashes

23. The 'dash' is also known as an 'en rule' (–). It is longer than a hyphen. On a keyboard with the numeric keypad, the keystrokes are Ctrl and the 'minus' key on the numeric keypad on the right-hand side of the keyboard. The easiest way to insert an en rule using a laptop is to type: word-space-hyphen-space-word-space. The hyphen will auto-format to an en rule. You can copy and paste that one for further insertions.

24. Use spaced en rules to mark off matter in parenthesis, for example:

The survey explored which aspects of the inspection – from start to finish – were most helpful to leaders in planning improvements.

25. Avoid using an en rule to indicate a range of numbers, for example '16–19 study programmes...' except if space requires, such as in a table or chart. Instead, use words, for example '16 to 19 study programmes'. An en rule should, however, be used to separate the two calendar years in one financial year, for example 'the financial year 2016–17'.

26. Use the en rule for a noun made up of two nouns of equal relation. For example: 'the north–south divide'; 'the pupil–teacher relationship'.

## Data

27. The word 'data' takes a singular verb ('the data is...', not 'the data are...').
28. It is important that your findings stand up to scrutiny on the basis of your data. Survey inspections are often based on a small sample of schools, other institutions or providers. A good rule of thumb is to think of 'small' as fewer than 100.
29. If your sample is small or known to be unrepresentative, you should express proportions carefully. It is better to give the number of institutions rather than a percentage, for example, by referring to 'five of the 20 children's homes' rather than 25%. For small samples, avoid:
- describing proportions as percentages, which can seem to suggest that what is said applies to all institutions, rather than just the particular sample that was inspected
  - using expressions of proportions in words: for example 'a large majority', 'a minority'.
30. Fractions may be used sparingly to express proportions, but keep them simple – denominators of two, three, four and 10 are acceptable.
31. For all sample sizes, it is essential to remind the reader when the findings cannot be generalised. At the start of the report, use phrases such as 'in the schools visited for this survey', 'in the settings in this survey', 'in the colleges in this sample' to make it clear that the findings refer to a specific group. Later in the report, it is enough to say, 'in the schools visited' or 'in five of the seven local authorities' to reinforce the evidence base. Readers should not be given the impression that the report is about all institutions or settings nationally unless that is really the case.
32. Consider whether the sample is representative (or not). For instance:
- if the whole of a particular group is small, for example if there are 20 children's homes in a local authority and all 20 were inspected, then the writing should reflect the fact that the findings refer to all of them
  - if the sample is very large, say from a survey of 15,000 pupils, but it has not been selected to be representative of all pupils, the writing should reflect this.
33. Avoid using the words 'significance' or 'significant' when discussing data, quantities or proportions (for example in expressions such as 'a significant majority'). These words can imply statistical significance, even when you do not mean this.

34. Be cautious about using 'some', as in 'some schools', 'some local authorities' and so on. Instead, use phrases such as: 'around half the colleges inspected'; 'only two of the 12 local authorities in the survey'; 'nearly all the partnerships'; 'the few exceptions were'; 'in the best examples'; and so on.
35. If you are drawing conclusions based on other Ofsted publications, make sure you:
  - identify and explain where data is not comparable
  - use footnotes to indicate sources.
36. Use charts and tables to present large amounts of data. For guidance on formatting charts and tables, use Data & Insight's charts guidance (available on request).

### **Writing about deprivation**

37. Be cautious not to confuse technical terms and descriptive terms when writing about deprivation (for example 'disadvantaged' is both a technical definition and a descriptive term). Deprivation is not measured directly but uses indicators of an individual's deprivation. These indicators have technical definitions that are not interchangeable but may be easily confused with each other. When using these indicators, use the correct technical language to make clear which indicator you are using, or provide clarification in footnotes.
38. Indicators of economic deprivation are:
  - free school meal (FSM) eligibility
  - free school meal eligibility at any point in last six years (FSM6)
  - disadvantaged (FSM6, children looked after or who left care through adoption or another formal route)
  - income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI).
39. Other indicators of deprivation are:
  - children in need
  - children looked after.
40. Guidance on the indicators of deprivation is available on the intranet. This describes each indicator in more detail alongside writing advice.

### **Days and dates**

41. Write dates in this order: Monday 8 September 2015. Do not use '-th', '-rd', '-st' or commas.

42. Do not abbreviate days and dates except in figures, tables and other graphical material where space is limited. If they are abbreviated, they should be shortened to three letters (Jan, Feb; Mon, Tue).
43. Use 'to' in date ranges, rather than a hyphen or dash: for example, 'January to September 2015'; '2012 to 2015'. The exceptions are:
  - financial years – use an en rule (see 'Dashes' section) to separate the two years within a single financial year, for example: 'in the financial year 2016–17')
  - academic years – use a forward slash to separate the two years within a single academic year, for example: 'in the academic year 2016/17'.

## Ellipsis

44. An ellipsis consists of three dots (...) and is used to mark an omission of one or more words from a sentence. It can also be used at the end of a sentence to indicate that one or more sentences have been missed out. An ellipsis should have no space before it and one space after it. Do not use a full stop with an ellipsis.

## Emphasis

45. Use bold type only for emphasis, but keep it to a minimum. Do not use all capitals, underlining or italics for this purpose.

## Footnotes

46. Use footnotes rather than endnotes. Footnote numbers should appear at the end of the sentence to which they refer unless this would be misleading. They should follow any punctuation. If a sentence contains more than one footnote, separate each number with a comma. For example:

'Over the last 12 months, we have looked in depth at the leadership of children's social care services.'<sup>1,2</sup>

47. For guidance on the correct way to cite publications in footnotes, see the examples in paragraphs 82 to 88.

## Full stops

48. Use one space after a full stop.
49. Do not use full stops in abbreviations (DfE, BIS), contractions (Mr, Dr, Ltd, St) or after initials in names.

## Hyphens

50. Use hyphens for:
  - compound adjectives before a noun, for example: 'long-standing agreement', 'part-time teacher', 'up-to-date records'

- adverbs preceding a noun, but not ending in '-ly', such as 'well', 'ill', 'better', 'worse', 'little', 'much', 'new' and 'old', for example: 'well-qualified teacher', 'little-used method'
- compound nouns that have been derived from phrasal verbs, for example: 'take-up', 'cut-off', 'catch-up'
- prefixes where a hyphen is needed to avoid confusion or mispronunciation, for example: 're-engage'; 'pre-existing'; 'non-negotiable', 're-form'; 're-creation', re-inspect/ion
- a prefix followed by a proper name, a numeral or a date, for example: 'pre-Ofsted'; 'mid-August'; 'post-16'
- children's ages, for example: 'four-year-old children' (this helps to avoid ambiguity, since 'four year old children' can mean either 'four year-old children' or 'four-year-old children')
- compass points, for example: 'south-west of Leeds'; 'south-westerly wind', but specific regions, for example 'the south east', do not need to be hyphenated.

51. Do not use hyphens for:

- adverbs that end '-ly', for example: 'newly qualified teacher'; 'appropriately trained staff'; 'easily accessible settings' (the '-ly' form itself signals that this is an adverb modifying the word following it)
- capitalised words, for example: 'Latin American studies'
- fractions unless used adjectivally, for example write 'two thirds of the sample', but 'a two-thirds majority'.

52. Compound phrases do not usually need a hyphen if the noun comes first, for example: 'the childminder works part time'; 'the records are up to date', 'the teacher is well qualified'. However, use the hyphen if it is needed to make clear the connection between the parts of the compound: for instance, not only 'a child-friendly policy' but 'a policy that is child-friendly'.

53. Floating hyphens take the following form:

- three- and four-year degrees
- three- and four-part lesson structures.

54. Guidance on the hyphenation of particular words is in the **glossary**. If the word you are looking for is not there, consult the 'Oxford English Dictionary'.

## Inclusive language

55. We have a duty to promote equal opportunities and social inclusion. Language and communication play an important role in supporting these objectives. Inclusive language helps to avoid inadvertent bias.

56. Use:

- 'men' and 'women' when writing about adults – use 'male' and 'female' only where the age range includes adults, young people and children
- 'disabled person' and 'disabled people' unless referring to a wider group – see paragraph 59 for more information on this
- 'minority ethnic' rather than 'Black and minority ethnic' as a collective term for ethnic groups that are minorities in Britain
- 'Black' and 'White' with capital initials when they form part of a specific census category, such as 'Black Caribbean' or 'Any other White background' (these categories may appear in questionnaires and survey results)
- 'Gypsy', 'Roma' and 'Traveller' with capital initials
- 'heterosexual', 'lesbian', 'gay' or 'bisexual' (do not use 'homosexual'); 'lesbian' can be used as a noun (for example, 'she is a lesbian'), but 'gay' and 'bisexual' should only be used as adjectives
- 'older people', not 'old people' or 'the elderly'
- 'young people' (not 'children') for those aged over 14.

57. Legislation introduced in September 2014 extended the use of the term 'special educational needs' to young people aged from birth to 25 in any context, including in colleges.<sup>1</sup> Previously, for colleges or providers in the further education and skills sector, we used the term 'learning difficulties and/or disabilities'. So, while 'special educational needs' is the broad term that should be used in all contexts, it is acceptable to use 'learning difficulty' or 'learning disability' when you require a more focused/precise meaning.

58. When referring **only** to disabled pupils/learners/young people/children, use 'disabled pupils' (or learners etc). When referring to a **wider group** (including those who have special educational needs), use: 'pupils/learners/children/young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)' at the first mention (delete as appropriate). For the remainder of the report or document, you can then use 'who have SEND'.

59. There is some flexibility with phrasing if you are writing about pupils/learners/people who have multiple and complex disabilities, for example in a report or letter about this topic, so please contact [publishing@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:publishing@ofsted.gov.uk) for advice.

60. When referring to a group or community of people who are not heterosexual, it is appropriate to use the collective term 'lesbian, gay and bisexual people'. This

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<sup>1</sup>Children and Families Act 2014, section 20; [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/section/20](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/section/20).

is often abbreviated to LGB people, but we prefer to avoid abbreviations where possible. 'Transgender' is sometimes added to 'lesbian, gay and bisexual' to produce 'lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people (LGBT)'. Do not add 'transgender', unless this is definitely what you are talking about because transgender is obviously not a sexual orientation and the others are. However, because transgender people often face a lot of the same/similar issues that LGB people face, their causes are often brought together. So if this is the case, it's fine to use. However, in equalities monitoring questionnaires, transgender should not appear in any monitoring category as transgender people are either men or women. An additional question, such as, 'do you present yourself in the same gender as you were born?' is preferred.

61. Please see the **glossary** for information on specific terms not mentioned above.

### **'-ise' v '-ize' spellings**

62. Use the '-ise' ending for words like 'realise' and 'organise'.

### **Italics**

63. Do not use italics. Use single quotation marks and roman text if referring to the name of a document or publication.

### **Letters**

64. You can find letter templates in the correct corporate identity on the **templates and branding section** of the intranet. Use the black-and-white version for routine correspondence.
65. Do not use punctuation after the greeting or the sign-off. (See also the section 'Addresses and telephone numbers'.)
66. The sign-off depends on whether the letter is addressed to a named person. For instance: 'Dear Parent or Carer... Yours faithfully' but 'Dear Ms Jones... Yours sincerely'.
67. Like other documents, letters should normally be typed in 12pt Tahoma and left aligned (or unjustified) with a ragged right-hand margin. Do not use double word spacing after a full stop. Separate paragraphs by a line space and do not indent the first line.

### **Money**

68. Use numerals for money, for example '£6' not 'six pounds'.
69. Use numerals and words combined to express very large round numbers, for example '£15 million'.
70. Do not:
  - use 'k' or 'K' for thousands

- mix units
- include empty decimal places, for example use £1, not £1.00
- use pound signs if the amount is less than £1, for example write 55p, not £0.55 – however, where sums of money above and below £1 appear together, treat them all in the same way (£7.70, £2.65 and £0.53).

## Numbers

71. Write numbers from one to nine in words and use numerals for 10 and above. Exceptions are:
- mathematical/statistical data, including percentages
  - money
  - key stage 1, key stage 2
  - Year 1, Year 2
  - sets 1, 2, 3
  - day 1, 2, 3 of an inspection
  - chapter headings/page numbers
  - abbreviations in footnotes (for example: '2nd edition'). Use a comma to separate thousands in numbers: 1,000; 10,000; 100,000.
72. Use the % symbol for percentages (50%, not 50 per cent).
73. Express fractions in words, for example: three quarters. Do not hyphenate fractions unless used adjectivally, for example: 'two thirds'; 'a two-thirds majority'.
74. Avoid mixing numbers, fractions, decimals and percentages in the same sentence or paragraph. Avoid using percentages when expressing numbers below 100 – use the exact numbers instead. For example: 'in 15 of the 79 providers that were inspected...'
75. Use first, second, third (not firstly, secondly, thirdly). Use 20th century, 21st century, avoiding superscripts as in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>.

## Plain English

76. Use plain English in all written communications. The [Plain English Campaign](#) defines this as text 'written with the reader in mind and with the right tone of voice, that is clear and concise'.
77. Plain English involves following a few simple principles to ensure that your writing is easier to read and understand:
- use short sentences
  - prefer the active rather than passive form of verbs

- avoid jargon – if you need to use technical or specialist language, make sure you explain the meaning
- do not use a long word if there is a shorter one that expresses the same meaning
- avoid nominalisations (for example use 'Ofsted inspected' rather than 'Ofsted carried out an inspection'; 'we discussed' rather than 'we had a discussion').

## **Pupils/learners/students/children**

78. In the education remits, the term 'pupils' should be used in primary and secondary school inspection reports, rather than 'students', up to the age of 16. You can also use the term 'children' for early years provision.
79. Use 'students' for school sixth forms. In further education and skills post-16 provision, the term 'learners' should be used. However, 'students' can be used if the author feels this reflects the provision type better.
80. If you are talking about more than two phases in a school (for example, in an independent school), use 'pupils'.

## **Quotations**

81. Use single quotation marks to mark the beginning and end of a quotation. Use double quotation marks when a quotation appears within a quotation.
82. If the quoted material is a complete sentence or question, punctuation should fall inside the closing quotation mark. For example:  
  
One headteacher said: 'I say to staff "It's my job to make sure you are the best you can be."'
83. If the quoted material is a single word or phrase, put the punctuation outside the closing quotation mark. For example:  
  
Too many post-16 learners felt they had made 'false starts'.
84. When quoted material is more than two lines, indent the text to display it more effectively.
85. If the quoted speech ends but the sentence continues, there should be a comma within the closing quotation mark to represent any punctuation that would have been included if the sentence hadn't run on. For example:

The comment of one parent that, 'Ms Jones is a wonderful headteacher. I love the fact that she is always visible,' was typical of the views of majority of parents who submitted free-text comments during the inspection.

86. When quoting direct speech, use a comma to introduce or follow a short sentence or phrase and a colon to introduce a longer quotation. For example:

'The improvement in the quality of care assessments is encouraging,' he said, 'but more work needs to be done.'

Ofsted's Director, Social Care said: 'Inspectors have seen examples of high-quality practice that puts the outcomes for children at the heart of decision-making.'

## References

87. Publication titles in the text and in the footnotes should be in single quote marks and in sentence case.
88. Titles of journal articles or chapters within books should be in roman type (not italicised), sentence case and in single quotation marks. However, capital initials are used in the titles of the Annual Report and Departmental Report. See the **glossary** for the correct way to refer to the Annual Report.

89. Do not cite full publication details in the main body of the text – put the reference in a footnote. In the footnote, insert all the publication details, including the title, date of publication, publisher and hyperlink (where available). Link directly to the page referred to rather than the home page of the website. For example:

'What is care for: alternative models of care for adolescents', Association of Directors of Children's Services, 2013;  
[www.adcs.org.uk/news/whatiscarefor.html](http://www.adcs.org.uk/news/whatiscarefor.html).

90. Use the following styles for citing references in footnotes and bibliographies. Note the information required for each type of publication and the order in which it should appear:

'Below the radar: low-level disruption in the country's classrooms' (140157), Ofsted, 2014; [www.gov.uk/government/publications/below-the-radar-low-level-disruption-in-the-countrys-classrooms](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/below-the-radar-low-level-disruption-in-the-countrys-classrooms).

'Working together to safeguard children', HM Government, 2015;  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children-2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children-2).

Richard Gardner, 'Boys catching up with girls in GCSE exam performance, new results show', in 'The Independent', 20 August 2015;  
[www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/boys-catching-up-with-girls-in-gcse-exam-performance-new-results-show-10464115.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/boys-catching-up-with-girls-in-gcse-exam-performance-new-results-show-10464115.html).

Children Act 1989, section 22;  
[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/22](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/22).

B Foster and P Norton, 'Educational Equality for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children and Young People in the UK', in 'Equal Rights Review', Volume 8, 2012, pp. 85–112.

J Seely, 'Oxford A–Z of grammar and punctuation', Oxford University Press, 2013.

91. You do not have to include 'http://' in web addresses that start with 'www'. Remove the underlining that appears automatically under hyperlinks, as underlining makes text harder to read.
92. Never just give a URL as a reference – include details of the website/publication you are linking to so that readers can still find it if the link breaks.
93. Avoid giving web addresses that link directly to files such as PDFs and Word documents – give the address of the page where there is a link to the file.

### **Singular or plural**

94. Consistently treat group (corporate) nouns (for example, 'Ofsted'; 'government'; 'team'; 'division', 'family', 'playgroup') as singular, for example: 'Ofsted is a non-ministerial government department'. 'Staff' is an exception, for example: 'The staff were pleased when the lead inspector gave positive feedback.' If a plural sense is desired, redraft the sentence, for example: 'members of the team were...'
95. Use a singular verb ('is', not 'are') for the following: 'none of them is...'; 'neither of them is...'
96. Use a plural verb for 'leadership and management' (for example: 'leadership and management are improving').
97. Avoid using a singular verb in sentences such as 'A majority of pupils are happy at school.' If the word 'pupils' is omitted and the sense of the sentence still suggests that the subject is plural, it is preferable to use a plural verb. The same applies to sentences where expressions of quantity such as 'a proportion', 'a percentage', 'a number', 'one in three', 'half' or 'one third' are used in a similar context. For instance: 'A small proportion of early years settings are inadequate.'

### **Split infinitives**

98. These are best avoided if you can do so without making the sentence sound awkward. One word to avoid using in a split infinitive is 'effectively', because it can easily be misunderstood to mean 'actually' (but not officially or explicitly).

### **Time**

99. The 12-hour system, with am and pm, is more easily understood than the 24-hour system. For example, normally use 9.30am and 3.20pm instead of 09.30 and 15.20. Say 'from 8am to midday' or '8pm to midnight' rather than 'from

08.00 to 12.00'. However, lengthy timetables presented as tables may look more precise in the 24-hour form.

## Part B. Formatting

### Body text

100. The body text in all documents should be 12pt Tahoma.
101. Text should be left-aligned, that is, with a ragged right-hand margin. This is because text is easier to read when the spaces between the words are regular.

### Charts and tables

102. Use charts and tables to present large amounts of data. We have specific guidelines for them on the intranet.
103. Charts and tables should be numbered (Figure 1, Table 1), with a title in 11pt bold Tahoma. This should appear above the chart or table. Give the date(s) of the information in the title (see example below).
104. Any notes to help the reader should be included below the chart or table. For example, where necessary add a line explaining that the figures have been rounded and may not add up to 100%. This wording should be used consistently within a publication. The source of the data may also be shown there.
105. Use colours that will look different from each other when the electronic document is printed out in black and white.
106. If a publication is to be designed, please supply charts and tables to the publications team separately in Excel format as well as in Word.

### Headings

107. Use the following heading levels:

**Heading 1** (16pt bold Tahoma): use for chapter headings.

**Heading 2** (14pt bold Tahoma): use for main section headings within chapters.

**Heading 3** (12pt bold Tahoma): use for sub-headings within main sections.

*Heading 4* (12pt italic Tahoma): use for further subdivision where necessary.

108. Do not underline headings.

## Templates

109. Use the Ofsted templates on the intranet for most documents. For reports, consultations, inspection guidance or leaflets for electronic-only publication, please use the appropriate Word template. These include pre-set styles for headings, text, bullets and case studies. You can get the correct template for your document on the **branding and templates section** of the intranet or from the publications team: email [publishing@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:publishing@ofsted.gov.uk).
110. If you need guidance on using the templates, please consult the publications team at [publishing@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:publishing@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Further information

Oxford University Press's free online guidance on grammar. This is also our preferred dictionary: [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)

David Crystal, 'Discover grammar', Longman, 1996. Practical help and guidance with grammar that is easy to understand. Includes practice activities.

John Seely, 'Oxford A–Z of grammar and punctuation', Oxford University Press, 2013. A handy brief guide.

R L Trask, Guide to punctuation, University of Sussex.  
[www.sussex.ac.uk/informatics/punctuation](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/informatics/punctuation). Clear explanations with many examples.

R L Trask, 'Mind the gaffe: the Penguin guide to common errors in English', Penguin, 2002. Advice on avoiding pitfalls and writing simply and effectively, presented in an entertaining way.

Plain English Campaign: [www.plainenglishcampaign.co.uk](http://www.plainenglishcampaign.co.uk).