# Our House Style Guide

This is our House Style Guide. In this guide, you will find our preferred writing style with guidance around writing as the University of Birmingham.

## Abbreviations and acronyms

Write abbreviations and acronyms in full at first mention, followed immediately by their abbreviation in brackets e.g., Centre for Human Brain Health (CHBH).

## A-level

A-level is written as above with a hyphen.

## American usage

English (UK) rather than English (US) conventions of usage and spelling should be used e.g., ‘-ise’ rather than ‘–ize’.

## Ampersand (&)

Use the word ‘and’ in publication titles, headings, – normal text. Colleges, Departments and course names. Only use the ampersand if: a) it is part of a company’s name, a University building e.g., Sport & Fitness and service e.g., Park & Ride-; b) when writing references, as in a bibliography or when sourcing a quote, in which case use the ampersand if it appears in the original work.

## Bold text

Bold text can be difficult to read for some people. Only apply bold to two or three words at a time and only consider this for emphasis in heading text.

## Bullet points

Where bullet points are complete sentences, begin each with a capital and end with a full stop. If the bullet points are part of a list, they do not need initial capitals and should end with a semi-colon.

## Dates

Write as: Tuesday 1 April 2023 or 1 April 2023 or 1 April. When abbreviating use 1.4.23, and when using periods of years express them as 2022–23 using an en rule – not a hyphen -.

## Times of day

Use either the 12- or 24-hour clock – not both in the same text. Written as figures, the 12-hour clock uses a full stop between the hours and minutes (9.00am, 3.45pm) and no space between the time and am or pm (9.00am, 3.45pm). The 24-hour clock uses a colon and omits am/pm (13:30) and should be used for international audiences.

## Degree details

Degree details after someone’s name should appear as follows: eg Bob Smith (BSc Biology, 2018; MSc Biology, 2022).

## Email addresses

Use lower case letters. We express email as one word (no hyphen), only capitalising the initial letter if at the beginning of a sentence.

## Headings

Headings should always be in sentence case and without a full stop. This is an initial capital followed by all lower case (unless a proper noun appears in the heading). This includes left-hand navigation bars on the web. Use sentence case for events. Do not use initial capitals for emphasis anywhere.

## Image captions

Use a full stop on image captions if they are a full sentence, but not if just a person’s name.

## Internet

We follow modern common practice and use lower case ‘i’ in all references to the internet unless it is at the beginning of a sentence. Likewise, use lower case for ‘website unless the word starts a sentence and takes an initial capital.

## Italics

Use italics only sparingly as most screen readers will not announce the text inside the bold or italics. Italicise the titles of publications e.g. *The Guardian.*

## Measurements

When writing in prose, please use full versions for distances and measurements, abbreviated versions are suitable for tables and captions.

For weights and measurements, use metric units. There is no need to use a space between number and unit e.g., 25m pool.

## Numerals

Use words for numbers from one to ten (inclusive) and figures for all numbers over ten. Figures are also used for decimal fractions and per cent. Do not start a sentence with a figure; write the number in words instead. We spell out million and billion in words, preceded by the amount in digits, e.g., five million people, three million donations, £10 million.

## Paragraphs

Denote with a single line break and do not indent the initial word.

## Percentages

Our standard editorial practice is to use 'per cent', as this is more widely understood.   
The exception to this is when writing for a table, graph or chart in prospectuses.

e.g., four per cent, 16 per cent etc.

## Quotation marks

There are two types of quotation marks, or inverted commas: single (‘ ‘) and double (“ “). We follow standard British practice, enclosing quoted matter between single quotation marks. When a whole sentence is a quotation, all punctuation is placed inside the quotation marks; if the quoted matter forms only part of the sentence, it comes outside the quotation marks

e.g., The report praised the ‘tireless efforts of the dedicated and hard-working staff’.

## Quotations within quotations

Use double quotation marks within single quotations e.g., ‘When I say “immediately”, I mean some time before April,’ said the tutor.

## Single spacing

Please use a single space only following a full stop.

## Subscript and superscript

Please use these as accurately as possible, especially if your text contains formulae. Not using them can change the meaning of the text.

## University of Birmingham

When referring to the University, you should use upper case ‘U’ if you mean this university, and lower case if referring to university/universities in general and are not specifically referring to the University of Birmingham.

As a guide, try putting ‘of Birmingham’ after the word ‘university’ in your text. If it makes sense, it’s upper case, if not, use the lower case. Also note that ‘the’ is not part of our name, so should also be lower case unless beginning a sentence. e.g., The University is a great place to study and live.

To avoid confusion, remember that we are the University of Birmingham and not Birmingham University.

## UOB

In all external communication (verbal and written) the use of the acronym UOB should not be used. There are other universities which refer to themselves as UOB and this creates confusion. Internally to colleagues it is acceptable to abbreviate to UOB.

## Web addresses

These should be written in the following way: www.birmingham.ac.uk with no full stop or other punctuation marks immediately afterwards. Try not to include too many website addresses within the main body of text. Put them at the end of the copy if possible.

## Accessibility guidance

At the University of Birmingham, we want to ensure that as many people as possible can use our website, and we are working to improve our digital services.

There’s a lot of guidance around making digital content accessible, please refer to this when developing any content.

<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/resources/digital/web-resources/editor-resources/guidelines/accessibility.aspx>

## Sex and Gender Terminology Guidelines

### Use inclusive group terms

Opt for terms like 'everyone,' 'team,' or 'colleagues' instead of 'guys' or 'ladies.'

Choose neutral language

Use 'humankind' in place of 'mankind,' and consider 'workforce' or 'personnel' rather than 'manpower.'

### Avoid patronising language

Favour 'women' over 'girls,' 'ladies,' or 'gals' to ensure respectful communication.

### Eliminate gender stereotypes

Steer clear of expressions that reinforce stereotypes, such as 'man up,' 'take it like a man,' 'boys will be boys,' and 'stop acting like a girl.'

### Respect preferred titles

When using gendered titles e.g., Ms, Mr, Mrs, Miss, ensure they are necessary and inquire about the person's preferred title. Some individuals may prefer the gender-neutral title 'Mx' (pronounced 'mix' or 'mux').

### Professional titles in academic settings

Within a university context, use a person's academic or professional title (e.g., Professor, Doctor).

### Use inclusive pronoun terminology

Refer to 'pronouns' and 'gender' without the term 'preferred.' this ensures that a person's gender identity is not portrayed as a choice.

### Noun and adjective distinction

Employ 'woman' or 'man' as nouns and 'female' or 'male' as adjectives to accurately and respectfully describe individuals.

By adopting these guidelines, you can promote inclusive and respectful communication around sex and gender terminology.

### Capitalise the names of all religions and religious groups

Capitalise religious figures, deities, holy texts, holidays, and titles.

Be mindful of how you refer to religious individuals. For instance, consider using "a person who practises”.

Sikhism" instead of "a sikh." if possible, inquire about an individual's preference.

Use "Muslims" or "people who practice Islam" instead of "Islamic people".

When discussing countries or regions with a predominant religion, use phrases like "Muslim-majority country" rather than "Muslim country" or "Islamic country".

Avoid adopting a Christian-centric perspective.

Recognise that not everyone observes Christian holidays and that they may celebrate other religious holidays.

Use "given name" instead of "Christian name".

When communicating with general student or staff groups, keep in mind that many members of the University community abstain from alcohol consumption for a variety of reasons, including religious beliefs.