Brand Essentials
Making us all look good

Chapter 6:
Editorial Style Guide
Contents

The University’s editorial style guide 03
Glossary of common terms 13
Guide to proof reading 14
Guide to copy editing 15
The University’s editorial style guide

About this style guide
This style guide has been produced by the University’s publications team within Communications and Marketing (CAM). It is a reference tool for University staff, external suppliers and freelance copy-editors/writers. It outlines the English standard for all University of Edinburgh publications, including brochures and booklets, student prospectuses, reports and media releases. It also lists commonly misspelled words as well as listings of University of Edinburgh-specific terms and information.

Grammar rules are applied differently worldwide – most publishing houses and higher educational institutions have their own ‘house style’. Please adhere to this editorial guide to maintain consistency. If you have any questions about this style guide, or suggestions for additions and amendments, please email Barbara.Laing@ed.ac.uk.

Additional guidance specific to publishing for print
- For spelling, consult the *Oxford Dictionary of English*.
- Reputable grammar reference books: *Butcher’s Copy-editing and Hart’s Rules*.
- For basic guidelines on copy-editing and proofreading, visit www.ed.ac.uk/communications-marketing/resources/publishing.

Additional guidance specific to publishing for the web
- Guidelines on writing for the web can be found at www.ed.ac.uk/communications-marketing/resources/publishing.
A

@ Unless in an email address, the @ symbol should never be used to represent the word ‘at’

a, an

Use ‘a’ before all words beginning with a vowel or diphthong with the sound of ‘u’, but use ‘an’ before words beginning with an unaspirated (silent) ‘h’:

- a eulogy, a European
- an heir, an honest person, an honour

Preference: an historic occasion

abbreviations (see acronyms, contractions)

An abbreviation is a shortened form of a word or phrase, used to represent the whole: EU for Economic Union, kg for kilogram

On the first mention, spell out the whole word or phrase and follow with the abbreviation in parentheses. After this the abbreviation can be used alone

Don’t use full stops between abbreviated initials:

- Economic Union (EU)

Abbreviate words such as company, corporation, incorporated and limited only when they follow the name of a company or corporate entity

Plurals of abbreviations should have no apostrophe: URLs, GPs

Don’t abbreviate Professor to Prof

accents, foreign words and expressions (see italics)

Don’t use accents on foreign words if they have been anglicised or are widely used, but keep the accent if it makes a difference to pronunciation or understanding:

- café, hotel, régime but façade, fiancée, pâté

Italise lesser-known phrases: fin de siècle, mise en scène

adjectives and adverbs (see hyphens)

An adjective describes a noun: red, difficult, hot

An adverb modifies the meaning of an adjective, verb or other adverb: gently, very, well

When qualifying adjectives, a joining hyphen is rarely needed: heavily pregnant, classically carved, colourfully decorated

When used before a noun, write the compound with a hyphen: a well-founded rumour. If in doubt, use the hyphen in these phrases as little as possible, or when the phrase could be ambiguous:

- The island is well regulated
- but
- It is a well-regulated island

admit, except

accept means to agree or to receive: I accepted all the proposals except means not including: I tried all solutions, except the first offered

accompany, accommodation

acknowledgement

not acknowledgment

acronyms (see abbreviations)

An acronym is a word formed from the initial letters or groups of letters of words or a set phrase: AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)

Well-known acronyms don’t need to be written out in full: UCAS, UNESCO

Write out lesser-known acronyms in the first instance, then follow with the acronym in parentheses. After this the acronym can be used alone

Don’t put full stops between letters

- Communications and Marketing (CAM)

AD, BC (see Common Era)

AD comes before the date, BC comes after it: AD35, 350BC

Both AD and BC are used after ‘century’: third century BC/AD

addresses

Be consistent and use as little punctuation as possible: Mrs L R Smith, 114 Myrtle Road, Aberdeen AB12 9TT not Mrs. L. R. Smith, 114 Myrtle Rd., Aberdeen AB12 9TT

Spell out locations: Road, Street, Avenue not Rd., St., Ave.

adviser

not advisor

affect, effect

affect (verb): to have an influence on

effect (verb): to cause, bring about, accomplish or achieve

effect (noun): a result

all right

not alright

Americanisms (see -ise endings)

Use British English and spellings (if in doubt consult the Oxford Dictionary of English): organisation not organization, centre not center (unless in official names e.g. World Health Organization, World Trade Center), holiday not vacation, shop not store

amid

not amidst

among

not amongst

ampersand [&]

Generally use the word ‘and’ in preference to an ampersand, although ampersands may be used in University College or School names such as ‘the College of Science & Engineering’

apostrophes

with plurals/time periods

Don’t use in plurals: the 1960s not the 1960’s, CDs not CD’s, three As and a B not three A’s, I had dinner with the Joneses not the Jones’s

Do use to indicate the plural of single letters: p’s and q’s, dotting the i’s

Don’t use if a period of time modifies an adjective: six months pregnant, 10 years old

Do use with time periods where the time period modifies a noun: two days’ time, 12 years’ experience
benefited, benefiting

biannual, biennial
biannual: twice a year
biennial: once every two years (or lasting two years)
billion, million (see numbers)
Spell out the words billion and million where possible: £10 billion, six million people etc
Abbreviate to ‘bn’ and ‘mn’ in tables to save space: £6bn

bullet points and lists

Example 1
This is the most common type of bulleted list, where each point is a sentence fragment that will form a complete sentence if read together with the introductory line. Don’t punctuate points made up of single words or very short phrases until the final full stop and note the lower-case letters at the start of each line
Desirable attributes include:
• creativity
• a level head under pressure
• tenacity
• a common-sense approach.

Example 2
If list items comprise long clauses or phrases, the first word of each point should be lower case, and points should be punctuated with semicolons and a final full stop
In terms of staff development:
• two-thirds of staff members felt no changes were necessary;
• two-thirds felt a strong sense of loyalty to the University;
• three-quarters felt they had benefited from cross-school collaborations;
• two-thirds were satisfied they had received adequate training.

Example 3
If an item in the bulleted list is a complete sentence, no introductory colon is required, the first word of each point should be capped and there should be a full stop at the end of each sentence

Key findings
• The most popular reason for choosing Edinburgh is its international reputation.
• Nearly 85 per cent of respondents are satisfied with their programme choice.
• More than 80 per cent of respondents are satisfied with the accommodation and facilities offered.

Numbered lists

A numbered list should be introduced by a main clause, followed by a colon. The first word of each item should be lower case, and each item should have appropriate ending punctuation
Applying to the University of Edinburgh is simple:
1. order a prospectus
2. fill in the application form
3. email or post the form to the above address
4. call the number below for further information.

apostrophes

with possessives
Where an object or objects belong to one person or thing, the apostrophe goes before the ‘s’: The University’s halls of residence
Where an object or objects belong to more than one person or thing, the apostrophe goes after the ‘s’: Students’ Union, Freshers’ Week; the graduates’ certificates; the classes’ timetables

When using plural nouns that don’t end in ‘s’ (children, women, sheep etc), the apostrophe goes before the ‘s’:

The women’s minibus runs until 11pm

The exception to this rule is its, yours, ours, theirs, hers etc:

The book was old and its cover was in tatters

 Singular proper names/nouns ending in ‘s’ follow the rule of writing whatever is voiced: Keats’s poetry

Note: it is acceptable to omit the additional ‘s’ provided you are consistent: Dickens’ Great Expectations, Welles’ Citizen Kane. If the ‘s’ is soft, omit the ‘s’ at the end: Rabelais’ writings. The ‘s’ is usually omitted when the last syllable of the name is pronounced iz: Moses’ and in the names of the ancients like Socrates’, Dionysus’, Achilles’ heel.

Exception: Jesus’s

archaeology
not archeology

artefact
not artifact
capital letters (see headings, titles)
As a main principle, use initial capitals (each word begins with a capital letter) for:

- proper nouns (people’s names, towns and cities, countries, organisations);
- nationalities, languages and religions;
- days of the week and months of the year;
- job titles, course titles, names of institutions (the Principal, the College of Science & Engineering, the School of Engineering etc).

collective nouns
These stand for a single entity: the total number is …, the Scottish Parliament has …

The plural is more suitable when the emphasis is on the individual members of a group, and the singular when it is on the body as a whole:

- A committee was appointed to consider the subject
- The committee were unable to agree

colons and semicolons
A colon typically links a general or introductory statement to an example, a cause to an effect, or an idea to a conclusion:

- This formula is confusing: do I look confused?
- Informatics has some of the UK’s best facilities: its laboratories are state of the art

Colons are also used to introduce a list:

- Research topics include: gender and politics in France, French cinema and French literature

A semicolon is used to separate clauses or items in a list, or to indicate a pause longer than that of a comma and shorter than that of a full stop. Usually the two parts of the sentence divided by the semicolon balance each other, rather than lead from one to the other (in which case a colon is preferable):

- The reporters raised their hands; the Prime Minister answered one last question

contractions (see abbreviations)
A contraction results from letters being missed out (an abbreviation is a shortened version): Mr is a contraction of M-iste-r

Don’t use full stops in contractions or abbreviations: Dr not Dr.

Contracted words are acceptable in informal speech: you’ll for ‘you will’ and we’ll for ‘we will’ etc.

coordinate, coordination

© copyright (see ® registered trademark)
In Microsoft Word documents, © can be found under ‘Symbol’ under the ‘Insert’ dropdown menu. Alternatively, type the characters (c) and the symbol will appear automatically
D

dashes (see en rules, hyphens)

dates (see AD, BC, Common Era)

Follow this style:

5 June
21 July, 2010

5–7 July 2010 (use en rule not hyphen)
1990s not 1990’s; the 90s not the Nineties or the ‘90s
the 4th century BC/BCE; the 19th century
(use en rule not hyphen)

days of the week

Capitalise the first letter
Don’t abbreviate unless in a table (keep to three letters each Mon, Tue, Wed etc)

dependant, dependent

dependant is a noun: In the event of his death, the man’s dependants
gave permission to remove his organs
dependent is an adjective: The patient was dependent on the medics
saving his life

different
different from, not different to or different than

disinterested, uninterested

disinterested means impartial; uninterested means having no interest in

e-

Lower case and hyphenated in most phrases: e-science, e-learning, e-newsletter

e.g.

Try rephrasing to avoid, using ‘for example’ instead

ellipsis […]

Use … not .. (three full stops, not two, and use a space afterwards)

Instead of typing three dots in a row, hold down the ALT and semicolon

email

not e-mail or Email

enquiry, inquiry

enquiry: the act or instance of asking or seeking information
inquiry: an investigation, especially an official one

en rules (see hyphens)

An en rule is two dashes (–)

An em rule (to be used sparingly, if at all) is three dashes (—)

En rules are used:
• in preference to hyphens for emphasis:
  
  The three colleges that make up the University – Health & Social Science, Science & Engineering and Medicine & Veterinary Medicine – have a long tradition of excellence
  
  mother–daughter relationship
  Labour–Liberal alliance
  London–Edinburgh train
  Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm

• when the first part of a compound doesn’t modify the meaning of the second part.

The en rule can be thought of as standing for ‘and’ or ‘to’:

Note: The en rule shouldn’t replace ‘and’ if the word ‘between’ is used:

The period between 1950 and 1960
The period between 1950–60

The em rule should rarely be used. It can be used to indicate the omission of a word or part of a word:

It was agreed that Dr S— would stand down after three months

enrol, enrolling, enrolment

e etc, etcetera

no full stop in abbreviation

exclamation mark (!)

Use sparingly. It is unlikely this will be needed, even in direct speech

F

Fairtrade, fair trade

Fairtrade (one word, initial capital): refers to the mark sanctioned by the Fairtrade Foundation on goods
fair trade (lower case, two words): refers to the general concept of fair prices being paid to producers in developing countries

fewer than, less than

Fewer refers to number; less refers to quantity

fewer than 12 speeches; fewer than seven doctors
I had less than £10; less than half the population
gender
Avoid the use of gender-specific suffixes such as -ess or -rix:
actor not actress; manager not manageress; chair not chairman.

government
Lower case unless referring to a specific government: the Scottish Government.

headings (see capital letters, titles)
Use sentence case in headings and subheadings. Avoid using all capital letters or full stops.
The use of sentence case should follow normal grammatical rules – capital letters should only be used for the first letter of the first word and for names, proper nouns (people and place names) and abbreviations/acronyms:
How to get a place at university
not
How To Get A Place At University
or
HOW TO GET A PLACE AT UNIVERSITY

helpdesk
one word
hi-res, hi-tech
not high-

hyphens (see adjectives and adverbs, en rules, multi-)
Inventions, ideas and new concepts often begin life as two words and then become hyphenated, before finally becoming accepted as one word. For example, ‘wire-less’ and ‘down-stairs’ were once hyphenated.
Keep usage to a minimum and introduce only to avoid ambiguity:
‘four year-old children’ has a different meaning to ‘four-year-old children’.
Do use hyphens:
• to form compound adjectives: three-year deal, top-ranking institution, first-degree programme;
• in compound nouns containing prepositions: brother-in-law;
• between some prefixes and root words: co-author, non-controversial.
Don’t use hyphens:
• after adverbs ending in -ly or the adverb ‘very’:
  a badly prepared speech
  genetically modified vegetables
  a very exciting speech
• in the following words:
  cooperative, coordinate, email, groundbreaking, interpersonal;
  multidisciplinary, nationwide, ongoing, online, postgraduate;
  teamwork, undergraduate, website, wellbeing, worldwide

i.e.
Try rephrasing to avoid, using ‘that is’ instead

incur, incurring

international
lower case i, unless sentence structure requires it

internet
lower case

inverted commas (see quotation marks)

-ise endings (see Americanisms)
-ise endings should be used in preference to -ize endings: recognise, economise, organise.

italics (see accents, foreign words and expressions, titles)
Use italics for:
• titles of publications (books, newspapers, magazines, journals, brochures), campaigns, television and radio programmes and advertisements, plays, films, conferences, CDs, works of art, exhibitions and vehicles (ships, aircraft, spacecraft and locomotives).
Also use italics for foreign words that aren’t anglicised (enfant terrible). If a foreign word is italicised, ensure it has the correct accents: protégé.
• Essay, article, song and short poem titles should be roman and in single quotes:
  The article ‘Chicken Genomics’ appears in the journal Nature.

Note: unless in a bibliography, the definite article in a sentence referring to a newspaper should be lower-case roman except for The Times and The Economist. If the definite article doesn’t refer to the newspaper, (e.g. the Scotsman correspondent) it should also be lower-case roman.
J
judgement

K
Latin plurals
Some are common: alumni, data, criteria
Many plural forms look pedantic and put the reader off: forums not fora, syllabuses not syllabi

licence, license
licence: noun
license: verb

lists (see bullet points and lists)

L
miles, kilometres, metres
Use miles in preference to kilometres. If kilometres are mentioned, use decimals:

- Haddington is 2.7 kilometres away
- North Berwick is four and a half miles away

Use metres not meters or yards
Contractions can be used in tables: 10m

million, billion (see billion, numbers)

money
£5, 75p, €10 not £5.00 or £0.75
Unless in a table, write out in full the name of foreign currencies: francs, yen (no initial capitals)
If dollars are not US dollars, say twenty-five New Zealand dollars or $NZ25 if in a table
To get the euro symbol in Microsoft Word, hold down the ALT and number 2 keys

multi- (see adjectives and adverbs, hyphens)
Adjectives beginning with the combining form ‘multi’ are not usually hyphenated: multicultural
If followed by a vowel, add a hyphen for ease: multi-ethnic, multi-user

M
medieval

nationwide

NB
Try to avoid by spelling out as ‘please note’, however if you must use it don’t add full stops

no one
numbers
one to nine: write out in full
10 and above: use digits
above 999, use comma: 1,000, 3,500, 23,000
If a number is at the start of a sentence, always spell it out in full, or rewrite the sentence if possible to avoid the problem
For neatness/consistency, spell out numbers if, in a range of two or more related numbers, at least one is higher than 10:

- The class can have between seven and thirteen students
occur, occurred, occurring

online, offline

on to
The preposition ‘onto’ is still not yet accepted as part of standard English (unlike into). It is likely, however, to be accepted as British English before long.
It is important to distinguish between the preposition ‘onto’ (or ‘on to’) and the use of the adverb ‘on’ followed by the preposition ‘to’:

She climbed on to the deck (or the preposition ‘onto’)

but

Let’s move on to the next point (not onto)

out of date
Hyphenate when used as an adjective:

The equipment used in the laboratory is out of date

but

The out-of-date equipment should be replaced as soon as possible

outwith
Scottish preposition meaning ‘beyond’ or ‘outside’. Use sparingly

paragraphs
Use one return in between paragraphs, not two

Don’t indent paragraphs

parentheses () and brackets [ ]
If a sentence is logically and grammatically complete without the information contained within the parentheses, the punctuation stays outside. When a complete sentence is within parentheses, the full stop stays within them:

Use gloves when conducting chemistry experiments.
(Gloves are stored in the top cupboard.)
Use gloves when conducting experiments (unless no chemicals are involved).

Square brackets [] are used in direct speech to add an interpolation – a note from the writer, not the speaker – or to enclose extra information provided, often by someone other than the writer/speaker of the surrounding text:

Professor Elaine Watson said: “We are honoured and delighted that HRH The Princess Royal [the Vet School’s patron] could be with us today.”

Avoid complicated build-ups of brackets and parentheses. If the copy can’t be simplified, follow ( [ ) sequence

per cent
The % symbol can be used in tables, with no space between the numeral and symbol: 15%

phone numbers
Use the international format: +44 (0)131 650 1000

possessives (see apostrophes)

prerequisite

proactive

quotation marks
Direct speech should be contained within double quotation marks; quotes within quotes should be within single marks:

“The new library facilities are excellent,” said the Edinburgh student.
“I said to her, ‘Those figures don’t tally’ and he replied with…”

When multiple paragraphs of direct speech are quoted, the opening quotation marks should be used at the start of each paragraph and closing marks only at the end of the final paragraph

Punctuating sentences containing quotation marks can be confusing – try to punctuate according to sense.

Example 1
When a long sentence is quoted, introduced by a short phrase, or more than one sentence is quoted, attach the closing full stop to the long/last sentence and keep it within the closing quotation marks:

The Director of Studies said, “Under no circumstances are students allowed to take mobile phones into the examination hall. That is against University regulations.”

Example 2
When a quotation forms part of a longer sentence, the quotation mark usually precedes all punctuation except an exclamation mark or question mark belonging to the quotation:

Physicists are searching for the Higgs boson or so-called ‘God Particle’.

Example 3
When the quoted words form a complete sentence that ends at the same point as the main sentence, add the full stop before the final quotation mark:

He said simply, “It cannot be done.”
ranges (numerical)
(see en rules)
- students aged 18–21 (en rule not hyphen)
  or
- students aged from 18 to 21
  not
- students aged from 18-21

regard, regards
regard (noun): She saved him without regard for herself
regards, or best wishes (noun): Give her my regards
as regards (concerning): As regards content, the research paper will cover important topics
with/in/having regard to (as concerns): He made enquiries in regard to the teaching post
not in regards to
® registered trademark symbol
(see © copyright symbol)
In Microsoft Word documents, ® can be found under 'Symbol' under the 'Insert' dropdown menu. Alternatively, type the characters (r) and the symbol will appear automatically

semicolons (see colons and semicolons)
spaces
In a paragraph of text, use a single space at the end of a sentence not a double space
spin-out
adjective and noun
stationary, stationery
stationary (adjective): immobile
stationery (noun): paper, envelopes, notepads etc
supersede

tautology
A tautology essentially says the same thing twice. Resist the temptation to over-emphasise a point: significant landmark, added bonus
that, which
There is much confusion over when to use ‘that’ and when to use ‘which’

Example 1
As a general rule, in restrictive relative clauses, where the relative clause serves to define or restrict the reference to the particular person or thing being described, ‘that’ (preferable) or ‘which’ can be used:

- Any research paper that/which gets young scientists thinking outside the square is worth publishing.

In non-restrictive relative clauses, which serve only to give additional information, ‘that’ cannot be used:

- The research paper, which outlines the latest developments in stem cell research, took two years to write.

Example 2
Another general rule worth following is to use ‘that’ for defining clauses and ‘which’ for non-defining clauses
Defining clauses have no punctuation:

After inspecting the line of robots on the table, the professor picked up the second one that was built by an MSc student

Non-defining clauses must be between commas:

After inspecting the line of robots on the table, the professor picked up the second one, which was built by an MSc student

times
am and pm should have no full stops and there should be no space between the numeral and letters am or pm:

- 4am, 8pm, 5.15pm

Write out fractions of hours in full:

- (nouns): half an hour; one and a half hours; one and three-quarter hours
- (adjectival sense): a half-hour wait, a one-and-a-half-hour wait

24 hours a day

titles (see capital letters, headings, italics)
Italise titles of publications (including books, newspapers, magazines and journals), campaigns, television and radio programmes and advertisements, plays, films, conferences and CDs
Titles of essays, articles, songs and short poems should be roman and in single quotation marks

- The article ‘Chicken Genomics’ appears in the journal Nature

Job titles should have initial capitals: Head of Marketing
U

UK, US (see abbreviations)
no full stops between letters

under way
not underway

up to date, up-to-date

The message was up to date
but
We received an up-to-date message

URLs (see web addresses)

V

vice versa
no hyphen or italics

voicemail

W

web addresses
Web addresses that start with http://www should be published with
www only:

www.google.com

Web addresses that start with something other than http:// (e.g. https://) or do not include the usual ‘www’ should be published in full:

http://maps.google.com
https://www.myed.ac.uk

If possible, list websites in bold. If a website occurs at the end of a sentence, add a roman full stop:

For more information, visit www.ed.ac.uk.

website
wellbeing

which (see that, which)
while

not whilst

who, whom
Who forms the subjective case and so should be used as the subject in a sentence:

Who taught second-year physics?

Whom forms the objective case and so should be used as the object in a sentence:

Whom did she marry?
To whom do you wish to speak?

Note: There is continuing debate about whether to use ‘who’ or ‘whom’. The use of ‘whom’ has steadily declined and is rarely used unless in formal contexts: To whom it may concern
Accepted practice in modern English is to use ‘who’ instead of ‘whom’ and, where applicable, to put the preposition at the end of the sentence: Who do you wish to speak to?

workplace
worldwide
Glossary of common terms

Below is a list of common terms specific to higher education and the University of Edinburgh

A level
noun: A level
adjectival sense: A-level results

alumni
alumna: female graduate
alumnus: male graduate
alumni: plural of either

charitable strapline
The University of Edinburgh is a charitable body registered in Scotland, with registration number SC005336.

college
Capitalise when referring to a specific University of Edinburgh College:
The College of Science & Engineering is having an open day on 3 March
but
Universities and colleges around the country are currently holding open days

contact details
List contact information in this order:
Name
Title
Section
Telephone or tel (not phone)
Fax
Email
Website

degrees, degree classifications
no full stops: MA (Hons)
Use colons to separate 2:1, 2:2

departments
There are no academic departments at the University of Edinburgh. Try to refer to the School name where possible. If referring to a subject area within a School, use initial caps, but only in this instance:
- English Literature, Psychology, Nursing etc
- The oldest/largest/highest ranked centre for the study of chemistry in the UK
- not
- The oldest/largest/highest ranked Chemistry Department in the UK

EUSA
Edinburgh University Students’ Association

Freshers’ Week
not Fresher’s

full time, part time
Hyphenate as an adjective:
The tutor has a part-time job

Two words as an adverb (preference):
The tutor works full time

Two words as a noun:
The referee called full time on the game

graduand, graduate
A graduand is to be awarded a degree; a graduate holds a degree

honours
lower case
He graduated with first-class honours
She completed an honours degree in philosophy

HHR
The Chancellor, (and Patron of the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Medicine), HRH The Princess Royal

masters, MSc
Use lower case ‘masters’ if generally talking about a degree, but ‘Masters’ if it refers to a specific course:
- He graduated with a Theoretical Physics MSc/with a Masters in Theoretical Physics

postgraduate, undergraduate
no hyphen

Principal
The Principal, Professor Sir Timothy O’Shea
For ease, refer to ‘the Principal’ in the second instance

school
Capitalise when referring to a specific University of Edinburgh School:
The School of Chemistry has some of the UK’s finest facilities

staff
Can be singular or plural (preference)

university (see ‘capitals’ in main style guide)

Always use initial capitals when specifically referring to Edinburgh, but not if speaking generally:
- Student numbers are growing at the University
- but
- She took it for granted that she would go on to study at university

Vice-Chancellor, Vice-President, Vice-Principal
Guide to proofreading

Proofreading a document gives you a final chance to check the copy for any inaccuracies and to ensure nothing has been overlooked or misunderstood in the design process. It can be challenging to proofread your own copy and it’s advisable to ask someone else to do this, preferably a professional proofreader. You can contact the Publications team in CAM for further advice on this.

The following offers you a brief guide.

Always print out the document – it is easier to catch mistakes on paper than it is on screen.

Read the document at least twice – firstly to check for sense and that all the relevant information is on the page; and secondly to focus purely on the words, checking for spelling, punctuation, grammar and typos.

Once you have read the document, scan it from start to finish to ensure the page furniture such as headings, folios, tables etc is consistent throughout.

Use this quick checklist as a general guide:

**Folios and page numbers**
Do all pages have folios? Are the pages numbered correctly? Are all fonts consistent?
If there is a Contents page, check that the chapter or section page numbers match up with those throughout the document.

**Headings and colours**
Are the fonts, heading sizes and colours consistent?

**Full stops**
Check that full stops on captions, standfirsts (introductions) and pull quotes are consistent.

**Spacing**
Is spacing under headings, photos, in tables, after bullet points, and at the bottom of text columns, consistent throughout?

**Advertising and logos**
Are advertising elements in the correct position? Check that logos, or requested information such as photo credits, writer’s bylines, charity straplines, copyright symbols, is included.

**Ragged or justified copy**
If ragged (ranged left/right) copy is used, is it consistent throughout?
If copy is justified, check hyphenation is consistent throughout.

**Widows and orphans**
In body copy, try to avoid single words at the top of a text column (widow) and, less importantly, the first line of a paragraph starting at the very bottom of a text column (orphan).

**Tables**
Are all columns lining up? Is the use of bold or italicised type within the table consistent?

A few common things to watch out for:

**Double spaces after full stops**
Always use one space between sentences.

**Americanisms and foreign words**
Avoid American spellings such as realize, organization, color etc; if in doubt refer to *The Oxford English Dictionary*. If foreign words have been anglicised – such as café – don’t italicise them or give them an accent.

**Hyphenation**
Check our editorial style guide if in any doubt about how to use hyphens or en-rules.

**And vs ampersand (&)**
Spelling out the word ‘and’ is preferable, unless in a College or School name.

If in any doubts, contact CAM:
Barbara Laing
Publications Manager
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T 50 9848
Guide to copy-editing

The aim of copy-editing is to ensure that copy is clear, concise and easy to follow, consistent in editorial house style throughout, and without any ambiguity, wasted words or repetition. You can find the University’s editorial house style at: www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/communications-marketing/resources/publishing.

It can be challenging to copy-edit your own work, and it is advisable to ask someone else to do this, preferably a professional copy-editor. You can contact the Publications team in CAM for further advice on this.

The following offers you a brief guide.

Try to keep the original writer’s voice as much as possible. Avoid changing the meaning of a sentence, statement or phrase unless you are confident the original is erroneous. If you think the piece needs a complete rewrite or it has gone way over the agreed word count, ask your manager whether it should be sent back to the writer with clear instructions, or whether you are permitted to rewrite/cut it yourself. Address this before the copy is designed to save time.

Never assume the reader knows as much as you do about the subject. Would someone who is unfamiliar with this subject understand it? Don’t ‘dumb it down’ but make sure it is easy to understand and nothing is ambiguous. Writers can often be too close to their subject, so examine the copy as if you are a reader coming to the information for the first time.

Cut out any superfluous material. Can something be said in a more concise way? The copy should always be clear and easy to read.

Avoid flamboyant language and use adjectives carefully. Consider if there are too many and may be standing in the way of clarity.

Avoid repetition. Repetition of phrases or words is easy to overlook. Consider if there is an alternative way of saying something if the same phrase keeps popping up.

Check for consistency. Are quote marks single or double? Do tenses jump around? Are people called by their first names or surnames throughout? Are their correct titles – Professor, Mr, Ms, etc – applied consistently and correctly? Do proper nouns have initial capitals or lower case throughout?

Does the copy flow in an ordered, sensible fashion, or do topics jump around?

Marking up raw copy

Once you have finished copyediting, you need to explain things clearly to a designer. For example, where to place photographs and logos, if copy needs to be in bold or italics, if certain copy needs to be placed on a certain page etc.

If you want to bring the designer’s attention to something, write any instructions in square brackets [ ] or chevrons < > preferably in a different colour to make it stand out, for example:

[Designer: Please make text bold with a grey screen behind it and a reversed out head]

<Designer: Please insert logo below this text>

To understand and use copyediting marks and symbols correctly, refer to The Cambridge Handbook for Editors, Copy-editors and Proofreaders.

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