Natural England writing and style guidelines

December 2016

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Introduction

Welcome to Natural England's writing and style guidelines

* The main reference source for Natural England's house style is *The Chambers Dictionary* (the most recent edition is the twelfth). Further advice on grammar can be found in Sir Ernest Gowers' *The Complete Plain Words*.

Every document we produce – whether internally or externally focussed – becomes the 'voice' of Natural England. The message, and how effectively it is communicated will determine our success in encouraging people to understand, enjoy and get involved in protecting their natural environment.

We must produce text that is engaging, consistent and accurate, and ensure that the advice we give is practical and accessible to those who need it.

This guide will help us achieve this. It outlines Natural England's house style* on specific points of punctuation, grammar and typographic formats, as well as guidance on layout and referencing, the use of plain English and writing for the web.

Almost all organisations have a particular house style, and each will do things slightly differently. The information contained within this guide is the preferred style which Natural England has adopted as its house style, and as such should be applied to all written documents to achieve consistency and accuracy in the messages we communicate.

Incorporated in these guidelines are updated versions of the *Top Ten Tips for writing well*, and the *'Write it Right'* guide, originally published in 2008.

Follow these techniques to make your text concise, lively and – above all – clear.

Please email any queries to:
brandqueries@defra.gov.uk

Use of plain English

Using plain English is not a matter of 'dumbing down' language. Plain English delivers its messages as clearly and simply as possible, which is why you must always keep your reader in mind when you write. Ask yourself why you are writing, what are you trying to say and to whom are you saying it.

The advice offered below is a 'potted guide' to plain English. For more detailed advice, contact the Communications Support Team or refer to Sir Ernest Gowers' *The Complete Plain Words*, a guide to good English originally published for the benefit of staff in the civil service.

Avoid long sentences

You should consider rewriting a sentence if it is over 20 words long.

The following 85-word sentence is an example taken from *The Complete Plain Words:*

'Forms are only sent to applicants whose requirements exceed one ton, and in future, as from tomorrow, forms will only be sent to firms whose requirements exceed five tons, and as you have not indicated what your requirements are, I am not sending you forms at the moment because it is just possible that your requirements may well be within these quantities quoted, in which case you may apply direct to the usual suppliers, of which there are several, with a view to obtaining your requirements.'

In the following, the above has been trimmed to 44 words and broken down into three sentences:

'Only firms whose requirements exceed five tons now need to apply to us for forms. Others can apply direct to the suppliers. As you do not say what your requirements are, I will not send you a form unless I hear you need one.'

Use an 'active' voice

Using the active voice more is the single biggest thing that will give your writing a bit of life. It also makes writing more confident and more authoritative, as it makes clear who is responsible for doing what.

The following is written in a 'passive' voice:
'A mistake was made in preparing the report.'

To write the above in an 'active' voice, we name the agent. For example:
'We made a mistake in preparing the report.'

In the above example, the agent is 'we'.

Other examples are:
Passive 'The order request sent to us last month has been declined.'

Active 'We have declined the order request you sent to us last month.'

Use of plain English

Passive 'If advice is sought from a doctor, it should be determined that they have the necessary qualifications.'

Active 'If you seek advice from a doctor, you should determine that they have the necessary qualifications.'

Because passive sentences avoid naming agents they are usually vague and confusing, they also sound evasive and bureaucratic. In contrast, active sentences are more likely to deliver information in a direct and lively way.

Use 'everyday' English

Long and/or unusual words might make your writing sound impressive but they rarely help to deliver a clear message.

For example, the sentence:

'If you seek advice from a doctor, you should determine that they have the necessary qualifications.' would be much clearer written as:

'If you ask a doctor for advice, make sure they have the right qualifications.'

Many words and phrases can be replaced by a shorter, plainer alternatives. For example, it might be possible to replace:

'In excess of' with 'more than'
'In the event of' with 'if'
'Discontinue' with 'stop'
'In respect of' with 'about'
'Accordingly' with 'so'
'Adequate' with 'enough'
'Disclose' with 'show'
'Disburse' with 'pay'
'Livelihood' with 'living' etc.

Avoid jargon

Jargon refers to technical terms and abbreviations that are commonly used in a particular area of work. It also includes the use of 'ordinary' words in unfamiliar ways. For example:

'The physical progressing of building cases should be confined to...'

The above is an example found in *The Complete Plain Words*, and was taken from a government circular. It actually refers to inspectors visiting government sponsored building projects to see how much work has been done since the last inspection.

Jargon should only be used if you are absolutely sure your reader will understand it. Even then, the use of everyday words might make the message clearer and more accessible.

Use of plain English

Avoid 'nominalisations'

Nominalisations are verbs that are turned into nouns. For example:

'The lawyer made an objection to the line of questioning.'

In the above, nominalisation has turned the action 'objected', into a thing, an 'objection'.

It would be better to write:

'The lawyer objected to the line of questioning.'

Many nominalisations are very useful.

'Explanation', 'walk' and 'placing' are all harmless nominalisation, but used in the wrong way they can sound clumsy. For example:

'They did not give an explanation for the event.'
(Better written as 'They did not explain the event.')

'We undertook a walk to the river.'
('We walked to the river.')

'The placing of the signs was incorrect.'
('The signs were placed incorrectly.')

Avoid Acronyms

Abbreviations should be avoided unless they are commonly used and widely recognised ie Nato, RSPB and IBM. Natural England should always be written out in full and not abbreviated to NE. (See also **Abbreviations and acronyms**.)

Layout

Captions and credits

Captions should be placed below pictures. Try to ensure that captions are self-explanatory – the reader should not have to consult the main text to fully understand the image.

Captions for images on the front cover of a document should be placed on the back cover.

Captions including the common name of an organism should, where appropriate, be followed by its Latin name in italics. The Latin name should not be separated from the common name by a comma and should not be in brackets. (See also **Names**.)

When crediting a picture, the photographer's name should appear together with the name of the organisation they belong to, or the name of the image library where the picture was obtained.

Numbered captions for figures (maps, diagrams etc) should be placed below the figure, but numbered captions for tables should be placed above the table. In both cases the figure/table number should be in bold. There is no punctuation after the number, only two spaces between it and the title. For example: Table 4 Distribution of invertebrate species

Please note that captions do not end in a full stop.

Quotes and extracts

Speech should be contained in double quotation marks. Formal spoken quotes should be introduced by a colon. For example:

Commenting on the new policy, Mr Parry said: "I am confident this will not affect our operations in any significant way."

Shorter, informal quotes do not need to be introduced by a colon. For example:

Mr Parry said he had been "disturbed, but not downhearted" by the new policy.

Material quoted from other publications (that is, quotes that are not examples of direct speech) should be contained in single quotation marks. For example:

The report stated that 'the meadow contained a large number of wildflower species that were locally rare.'

Sometimes quotes occur within quotes. In these cases the quotation marks containing the smaller quote will always be different to those containing the larger one, so if quoted material occurs within a larger non-speech quote it is contained within double quotes. For example:

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According to the report, 'The counsellor suggested that "disaffected residents" were more likely than others to report incidents.'

Conversely, within quoted speech, single quotation marks should be used to highlight the 'special use' of words. For example:

Mr Smith said: "Mr Parry has been caught 'on the hop', so to speak."

Indent quotes of more than 50 words. Do not use italics in this case, as it makes them hard to read. (See also **Highlighting text**.)

Fonts

If material is aimed at an external audience please use the font Megano. If Megano is not available, or if material is primarily for internal consumption then Arial can be used.

For body text, the minimum font size is 11pt. However, captions can be set in 9pt.

For more information on fonts and font sizes consult the *Natural England brand guidelines* or contact the Communications Support Team.

Headings and subheadings

Headings should be separated from the text below them by a space. Subheadings do not need to be separated. Headings and subheadings should start with a capital letter then continue in lower-case. Try to limit headings to three grades: headings, subheadings and sub-subheadings. Do not underline headings.

Highlighting text

Use single quotes to highlight the 'special' use of words. Highlight the names of publications (books, journals etc) by putting them in italics. For example:

'Writing in *The Times* today, he made clear...'

To emphasise individual words use bold type or italics rather than underlining them. For example:

'He was told repeatedly that it was **not** the way to do it.'
'But how *can* this be a solution?'

Use italics for Latin names and foreign phrases not assimilated into English, but use the English alternative wherever possible. (See also **Quotes and extracts**.)

Layout

References and bibliographies
Within text a reference should consist of the author's surname and relevant year (or years), both within brackets – a convention known as the Harvard System. For example:

(Smith 1984)
(Rogers 1987, 1992)

Where the author's name is mentioned as part of the text only the date of the reference is in brackets. For example:

'Smith (1984), in his first study, reported that...'

Where two authors are responsible for a reference their names should be linked with an ampersand. For example:

(Smith & Harris 2003)

If three authors are responsible for a reference, link the last two names with an ampersand. For example:

(Clifton, Boon & Jones 1998)

Where more than three authors are responsible for a reference, remove all but the first name and add 'and others'. For example:

(Burgess and others 1934) rather than (Burgess, White, Brown & Morris 1934)

Where an author is responsible for two or more references in the same year, distinguish them with letters. For example:

(Kendal 2001a, b)
(Jones & White 1987a, b, c)

Where more than one reference is cited at the same time, separate them with a semi-colon. For example:

(Reeves 1987; Johnson & White 1988)

In Natural England, bibliographies are compiled in accordance with British Standard (BS) 5605:1990 Citing and referencing published material, BS 1629:1998 References to published materials and BS 6371:1983 Citation of unpublished documents.

References quoted in a text should be listed at the end of the document.

References should be listed in alphabetical order according to the surname of the author, or first author when there is more than one.

In the case of **journals**, put the author's name in capital letters, the title of the paper in normal text, and the name of the journal in which it appears in italics. The year of publication should be included after the author's

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name, and the relevant volume, issue and page numbers after the name of the journal. Where there are **two authors** their names can be joined by an ampersand (&). Where there are **three authors**, the last two names can be joined by an ampersand. For example:

DAY, J.W. 1999. Soil accretionary dynamics. *Estuarine and Coastal Shelf Science*, 49(5), 607–628.

Note that an author's initials are punctuated with full stops but with no spaces between them. In all other cases full stops are followed by two spaces. Also note that the abbreviation 'pp' (meaning 'pages') is not used.

Where there are **more than three authors**, either name all the authors, or name the first author followed by 'and others' (rather than 'et al').

For example:
BROWN, P. and others. 2001. Annelids of the Suffolk Coast. *Annals of the Marine Biology Society*, 43, 87–95.

If the reference is a **book**, add the place of publication and the name of the publisher in normal text after the book's title (written in italics). For example:

TORRENS, P. 2005. *Jurassic Stratigraphy*. Vol. I. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In the above, note the colon inserted after the place of publication.

If a reference is a **chapter within a book** or **conference report** it should be written as follows:

KERSTEN, M., & SMITH, C.J. 1992. The Atlantic coast of Morocco. *In:* P.R. EVANS & W.G. HALE, eds. *Coastal waders and* wildfowl in winter, 276–292. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Note that the initials of the author/editor of the main publication are placed in front of the surname, not after. Also note that 'In:' is in italics.

In cases where information has been accessed via the **Internet** include the website's address (URL) and an access date. For example:

KORB, K.B. 1995. Persons and things: book review of Bringsjord on Robot-Consciousness. Psycoloquy [online], 6 (15) URL: www.wachau.ai.univie.ac.at.70/00/archives/Psycoloquy/95/V6/0162 [Accessed 17 June 2000].

Text alignment

This should be justified left. Do not use 'full text' justification where words are aligned to create straight lines down each side of a column of text. Using full text creates 'rivers' of white through a document and this – together with the uneven word-spacing – makes text hard to read.

Separate paragraphs with a space. Do not indent a line to start a new paragraph. (See also **Fonts**.)

Capitalisation

Avoid unnecessary capitals, but stick to these rules:

Compass points and regions

There are two kinds of compass point: the cardinals (north, south, east, and west) and the intercardinals (for example: south-east, north-northwest). Write compass points in lower case unless they form part of a proper name. For example: East Midlands, West Country.

Unless they form part of a proper name intercardinal compass points should be hyphenated. For example: north-west, south-east, southsouth-east, east-south-east.

Unless they form part of a proper name, the cardinal compass points are hyphenated when they appear as adjectives. For example: north-countryman, south-seeking.

Be aware that it is easy to make mistakes with regional names. If you write south-east England you are referring to the south-east quadrant of the country; if you write South East England you are referring to a Government Office Region (GOR) that covers a specific area. There are nine GORs in England: South West, South East, London, East of England, West Midlands, East Midlands, North West, Yorkshire and The Humber, and North East.

Names

Common names of organisms are written in lower-case. For example: dog rose, green woodpecker, robin. Capitals are used only when a common name includes a proper name. For example: the Duke of Burgundy fritillary, Desmoulin's whorl snail.

Common names are often spelt in different ways. For example: globe flower, globe-flower, globeflower. For advice on spelling common names, consult the most recent edition of *The Chambers Dictionary*, or the Natural History Museum's 'Nature Navigator' website **www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/biodiversity/nature-navigator/.** (See also **Proper names**.)

Use the term 'Latin name' rather than 'scientific name'. Although many of these names are actually Greek, or part Greek (and may contain words from other languages) they are constructed according to the rules of Latin grammar.

Latin names consist of a genus name followed by a species name. For example: *Galanthus nivalis*. Note that the genus name is spelt with a capital letter and the species name is in lower-case. Both names are in italics. Include Latin names where appropriate; do not automatically assume that a general reader will not be interested in knowing what they are.

If the common name and Latin name are used together there is no need to put a comma between them, and the Latin name is not placed in brackets. For example: 'The common snowdrop *Galanthus nivalis* is often seen in woodlands.' Where a Latin name is repeated, or more than one species of the same genus is mentioned, the genus name can be abbreviated.

Capitalisation

For example: 'Three snowdrops are seen here: common snowdrop *Galanthus nivalis*, greater snowdrop G. *elwesii* and the green snowdrop G. *ikariae*.'

In cases where an organism's genus name is also its common name, it is written in normal text without a capital. For example: rhododendron, dahlia, tradescantia.

In cases where an organism does not have a common name, identify its type then write its Latin name. For example: 'They have rediscovered the lichen *Bryoria smithii* in Dartmoor.' (See also **Highlighting text**.)

For historical reasons some place-name spellings do not follow the usual conventions. For example: Bury St Edmunds and Earls Court are spelt without apostrophes. In addition, some place names have common variants. For example: Berwick-on-Tweed/Berwick-Upon-Tweed, Newcastle upon Tyne/Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

For advice on the correct spelling and hyphenation of place names consult the gazetteer on the Ordnance Survey website **www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/.**

Proper names must be capitalised. Examples include: Middle Ages, Jurassic Period, The Chalk (a proper name and refers specifically to chalk of the Upper Cretaceous Period (Maastrichtian to Cenomanian), Neolithic, Bronze Age, Internet, Iron Age, Stone Age.

Write national in lower-case unless it is part of a proper name, for example: National Service, National Nature Reserve.

Some proper names have become common names (and lost their capital) though regular use. For example: wellington boots (named after the Duke of Wellington), diesel (named after Rudolf Diesel) and suede (from Suède, the French for Sweden).

Some proper names are treated as common names when they are used as adjectives. For example: write Stone Age, but stone-age artefacts.

Please note that some proper names include the definite article 'the'. For example: *The Times*, *The Economist*, *The Mammal Society*.

Titles

Use lower case unless it is a formal title:

The managers are busy.
Poul Christensen, Chair of Natural England, has arrived.
UK Prime Minister David Cameron
A number of prime ministers attended.

Likewise, governments are lower case unless you are referring to a particular administration. In general, refer to the (current British) Government and Parliament in the singular, but you can use the plural to emphasise the fact that they are made up of individuals.

Numbers

Use lower case when using as an adjective:

The Government is reluctant to increase tax.
He thought Parliament was in recess.
The Government have debated the point at length.
The government minister announced the move.

Never start a sentence with a figure, rephrase the sentence or write the number in words.

In most circumstances the numbers one to ten and the ordinals first to tenth should be written as words. For example: 'There were ten errors in the document but he only spotted the third.'

Numbers 11 upwards are written as figures unless they are used conversationally. For example: 'I must have told him a hundred times!'

Numbers ten and below can be written as figures if combined with a unit of measurement. For example: 10 km, 3 years, 2 per cent, 7 °C. (Note the space between the number and unit).

Numbers ten and below are also written as figures where they occur with larger numbers. For example: 'The three studies produced different averages: 17, 11 and 8.' Not '17, 11 and eight.'

Number can be abbreviated to no.

Date, time and range

Dates are written day–month–year, for example:
2 June 1967, 12 September 2005.

Where a day of the week is specified, omit the year. For example:
Tuesday 3 May.

Please note that abbreviations such as 2nd, 12th and 3rd are not used except when a day is referred to conversationally. For example:

'The date of the meeting has been moved from the 23rd to the 24th.'

References to **centuries** are written as follows:

17th century
ninth century
third century ad (See below)

Note that 'century' is not capitalised and there are no hyphens in the above examples. However, hyphens are used when a century is used as an adjective. For example: 'The 13th-century castle on this site...'

Try to avoid hyphenating **date ranges**. Write 1939 to 1945 in preference to 1939–1945 or 1939–45.

Numbers

Years that comprise parts of two calendar years (such as financial years) should be written with a backslash. For example: 1961/2, 1989/90, 1999/2000.

When referring to a decade, do not use an apostrophe. For example: write 1990s not 1990's.

When writing early dates, confusion can be avoided by inserting ad or bc as necessary. Remember that bc goes after the year and after the century, while ad goes after the century but before the year. For example:

400 bc
fourth century bc
ad 600

Both ad and bc should be written in small caps.

When expressing time, where possible, use figures instead of words. Only use the 24-hour clock if absolutely necessary. In the examples below, please note that numbers are not hyphenated and the abbreviations 'am' and 'pm' are not punctuated.

8.00 am
12.00 noon
eight o'clock in the morning
half past twelve
eleven thirty
11.00 am to 12.30 pm

In Geological time the abbreviation Ma stands for one million years. For example: 300 Ma = 300 million years.

The words Era and Period are capitalised when referring to specific geological time units. For example: Cainozoic Era, Devonian Period.

The words supergroup, group, formation, member and bed are capitalised when referring to specific lithostratigraphical units (that is, named rock layers). For example: Northern Drift Group, Reading Beds, Newney Green Member.

Please note that some periods are formally divided into Upper, Middle and Lower, while some (for example, Cretaceous, Permian, Carboniferous) are divided into Lower and Upper only. Geological time units – those based on the actual age of rocks. Where these are formally divided into **epochs** such as Early, Mid- and Late, these words are capitalised. Where there is no formal division the words are in lower case. For example:

Mid-Triassic
late Neogene
early Late Jurassic
mid-Cretaceous

Numbers

Please note that epoch divisions normally equate with series divisions. For example: Lower Cambrian equates with Early Cambrian. Do not mix series and epochs. For example: write 'early Early Cretaceous' or 'lower Lower Cretaceous' not 'lower Early Cretaceous' or 'early Lower Cretaceous'.

Where a range is estimated write 'between 50 and 60' rather than 'between 50–60', and 'from 300 to 400' or '300–400', but not 'from 300–400'.

Numbers in a table should be aligned by their decimal point and use the table font version of Megano if available. For example:

927.4
3.95
10.1
654.09

927.4
3.95
10.1
654.09

Measurements and conversions

In general, metric measurements should be used instead of Imperial ones.

Use hectares (ha), not acres (ha = acres x 0.405)
Use metres (m), not feet or yards (m = feet x 0.305); (m = yards x 0.92)
Use kilometres (km), not miles (km = miles x 1.61)
Use Centigrade, not Fahrenheit (C = (F-32) / 1.8).

For all measurements, use the abbreviation rather than the whole word except in conversational usage, eg 'a couple of kilometres away'. Leave a space between the number and the unit, eg 10 km, 45 C.

For all conversions, multiply or divide, then round up or down to the nearest whole number or convenient decimal fraction.

However, there are exceptions. In the UK, miles, yards or feet must be used on road traffic signs, and nautical miles and knots used on signs relating to air and sea transport. Acres remain the official unit of measurement on land registration documents. There might be occasions where the use of metric measurements sounds awkward, eg when describing the height of an individual it is more common to use feet and inches rather than metres and centimetres.

Acres

Convert to hectares. Multiply by 0.405 and round up or down to the nearest whole number or convenient decimal fraction.

Feet

Convert to metres. Multiply by 0.305 and round up or down to the nearest whole number or convenient decimal fraction.

Fractions

When written as words, fractions should be hyphenated. For example: three-quarters, one-half. When writing decimal fractions, there is no need to add noughts to balance numbers after the decimal point. For example: write 17.5 and 12.452 rather than 17.500 and 12.452.

Numbers

If precision is not paramount, fractions can be rounded up or down to the nearest whole number or convenient decimal fraction. The convention is that, numbers five and above are rounded up and, four and below rounded down. For example, 2.467 could be rounded up to 3, 2.5 or 2.47.

In cases where it is necessary to use imperial measurements do not confuse decimal and imperial fractions. For example:
7.5 km not 7½ km
2¼ miles not 2.25 miles

Hectares

Use the abbreviation 'ha' in preference to the whole word, but where hectares are mentioned conversationally the word can be written in full. For example: 'There are 100 hectares in one square kilometre.'

Kilometres

Use the abbreviation 'km' in preference to the whole word, but where kilometres are mentioned conversationally the word can be written in full. For example: 'He told me the reserve's entrance was a couple of kilometres farther on.'

Metres

Use the abbreviation 'm' in preference to the whole word, but where metres are mentioned conversationally (or where there's a danger of confusion with miles) the word can be written in full.

Miles

Convert to kilometres. Multiply by 1.61 and round up or down to the nearest whole number or convenient decimal fraction.

Money

Amounts should be written consistently. For example: £13.00, £2.25 and £0.50, not £13, £2.25 and 50p.

Per cent / percentage

Try to avoid using the character '%' and write 'per cent' instead. However, the character can be used in tables, and in text that frequently refers to percentages – in this case the frequent repetition of 'per cent' is ungainly.

If percentage figures are being rounded up or down for clarity, make sure that – where appropriate – the figures add up to a total that is not less than 99 per cent and not more than 101 per cent.

There is a difference between 'per cent' and 'percentage points' as statistical terms. For example: 'In 1950, 80 per cent of children walked to school, and in 2003, 20 per cent of children did; a drop of 60 percentage points.' In this example we can only compare the two percentage figures. We have no idea of the actual numbers of children involved, so it would be wrong to say 'a drop of 60 per cent', instead we refer to the difference in 'percentage points'.

Numbers

Temperature

Use Centigrade rather than Fahrenheit. Convert Fahrenheit to Centigrade using the formula C = (F-32) ÷ 1.8.

To create a degree symbol ° on a PC activate the numeric keypad (press Num Lock) then press Alt while typing the code 248.

When writing temperatures, the degree symbol is attached to the unit, not the number. For example: write 45 °C, not 45° C or 45°C. Please note the space between the unit and the number.

Thousands and millions

Use a comma to highlight thousands. For example: 606,000. Write thousands as 60,000, not 60K. Use a comma for four digits or more (but not in dates): 5,000; 50,000; 5000 bc.

File sizes should always be written as abbreviations, eg 45 Kb, or 1.8 Mb.

When using millions write 1.6 million rather than 1,600,000 or 1.6 m.

We use a billion to mean a thousand million (1,000,000,000), not a million million. Write 6 billion, not 6,000,000,000 or 6 bn.

We use a trillion to mean a thousand billion (1,000,000,000,000), not a million cubed. Write 5.3 trillion, not 5,300,000,000,000 or 5.3 trn.

Yards

Convert to metres. Multiply by 0.92 and round up or down to the nearest whole number or convenient decimal fraction.

Punctuation

The correct use of punctuation is essential in showing your readers where sentences start and finish and, if used properly, will make your writing easy to understand.

Abbreviations and acronyms

These must be explained unless they are commonly used. Widely recognised abbreviations include Nato, RSPB and IBM. Note that abbreviations are not punctuated (for example, not R.S.P.B.) and that many acronyms (abbreviations that are spoken as a word) are treated as 'proper' names and given a capital letter. For example: Defra.

Natural England should always be written out in full, not abbreviated to NE.

Some acronyms are so common they have lost their proper name status and capital letter. For example: scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus), radar (radio detecting and ranging) and laser (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation).

Some abbreviations commonly used within Natural England – such as 'BAP' – will not be familiar to an external audience and should be explained.

Avoid unfamiliar abbreviations, but if a document includes frequent repetitions of a phrase such as 'Government Office Region' it might be preferable to include the abbreviation 'GOR' in brackets after its first use, and after that use the abbreviation on its own. However, in a long document the reader should occasionally be reminded what an abbreviation stands for. Abbreviations of Latin phrases such as ie, eg and etc are not punctuated. See also **Contractions**.

Plurals – abbreviations and acronyms may be pluralised and made possessive in the same way as any other noun.

Check the function of the abbreviation or acronym. Is it being used as a plural noun, as a singular possessive noun, or as a plural possessive noun?

Use s, 's, or s' depending on how the form is being used. For example:

'SSSIs are now more accessible.' SSSIs is the plural form of SSSI.

'A Destination NNR's signage must be in the correct design style.'

NNR's is the singular possessive form of NNR.

In the following example, the abbreviation is being used as a plural possessive, so s' needs to be added.

'Most NNRs' visitors are well behaved.'

Remember: Punctuate an abbreviation or acronym according to its function: s for plural, 's for singular possessive, and s' for plural possessive.

Punctuation

Accents

There is no need to use accents on most Anglicised French words. For example: cafe (not café), role (not rôle), naive (not naïve). However some words, such as cliché, may be more recognisable with an accent.

In MS-Word, accented letters such as é, ï and ń can be created by using Symbol in the Insert menu. Alternatively, accented letters can be created using the numeric keypad on a PC. For example: to type ü activate the numeric keypad (press Num Lock) then press Alt while typing the code 129. Other examples are: é (130), è (138), ë (137), á (160), à (133), ò (149), ó (162), ô (147), ø (0248), ú (163), ù (151), û (150), í (161), ì (141), î (140), ï (139), ñ (164) and ß (225). (See also **Appendix 1: Special Alt Characters**.)

Ampersands (&)

An ampersand '&' is most often used to link names that have joined to create a single entity. For example: Marks & Spencer. More rarely, it is used as an abbreviation of 'and' but should not be used as a general substitute for 'and'. (See also **References and bibliographies**.)

Apostrophes

Where a name ends in an 's' there is usually no need to add another 's' after a possessive apostrophe. For example: Bridges' (not Bridges's) Smiths' (not Smiths's). Exceptions are made where the final 's' is accented. For example: James's, Thomas's, Jones's. If in doubt, be guided by pronunciation.

Apostrophes are used where a **time period** modifies a noun. For example: two weeks' holiday, six years' imprisonment, twelve months' ban.

Apostrophes are not used where a time period is modifying an adjective. For example: three weeks old (not three weeks' old), six months pregnant (not six months' pregnant). See also **Date, time and range**.

Brackets

Use round brackets to:

- Explain a term or introduce an abbreviation, eg many people use upper case (capital letters) for writing headings; send me the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).
- Include optional information, eg almost half (48 per cent).
- Cross-refer, eg be careful with square brackets (see below); look up the dictionary (page 43).

Use square brackets to:

- Include an editorial comment or direction, eg all staff will receive a huge bonus [Poul, please confirm].
- Include a clarification that is not part of quoted text, eg 'The position [as stated in the environmental education policy] is far from clear.'

Punctuation

The full stop should lie inside the closing bracket if the whole sentence is bracketed, and outside if the bracketed section forms only part of the whole sentence. For example:

If you'd like more help, get in touch (or look at the website).

Bullet points

When creating a list decide whether it should be bullet-pointed or numbered. The latter will be more useful if the reader is asked to refer to information in the list. (See also **Numbered lists**).

Information in a bullet-pointed list should be introduced with a colon. If the list comprises single words or short phrases there is no need to start each line with a capital letter or end it with a full stop; only the last line must end with a full stop. For example:

Please bring with you:

- pens
- writing paper
- waterproof clothing.

If the elements of a list are being presented as parts of a single sentence, then each line starts with a lower-case letter and ends with a semi-colon – except the last line which ends with a full-stop. The word 'and' should also be added after the semi-colon on the penultimate line.

For example:

When you leave the building please ensure you:

- close all the windows;
- shut down electrical equipment;
- set the alarm system; and
- turn off the lights.

If the list comprises a series of longer phrases or complete sentences then each line starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop. For example:

The contractor should provide:

- Clear instructions on what the survey is intending to achieve.
- Maps for use in surveying and subsequent reporting.
- Any previous records from the site and other relevant sites.

Lists can also contain sub-lists. For example:

When booking a conference room, do the following:

- Confirm that the room has not already been booked on the day you require it.
- Request one of the following seating plans:
  - theatre-style
  - rows.
- Organise suitable refreshments.

Punctuation

In the above, the lines of the sub-list were tabbed and Word automatically changed the style of the bullet-points.

Bullets that are whole sentences should begin with a capital letter and each should end with a full stop.

Colons and semi-colons

Colons have a number of uses, but are often used to formally introduce information and quoted material. When presenting information as a list within text, ensure that the colon does not separate the object from the verb. For example: do not write, 'The three NNRs in the East Midlands Region are: Biggin Dale, Calke Park and Derbyshire Dales.' Either replace the colon with a comma or rephrase it as, 'There are three NNRs in the East Midlands Region: Biggin Dale, Calke Park and Derbyshire Dales.'

Do not combine a colon with a hyphen or dash :- :–

Think of semi-colons as 'super commas'. Use them to:

- Separate long phrases in a list when at least one of the phrases contains a comma, eg You will need the following items: climbing boots (or strong walking shoes); two pairs of lightweight trousers; and – most importantly – a waterproof jacket, which must have zipped internal pockets.
- Link two related clauses that could otherwise be joined with 'and' or 'but', eg Some people do their best work in the morning; others are at their best in the afternoon.

See also **Bullet points** and **Quotes and extracts**.

Commas

Use commas to:

- Help the reader understand the sense of something, eg However, you might feel the new law will make a difference. However you might feel, the new law will make a difference.
- Denote a natural pause, often after a secondary clause at the beginning of a sentence, eg Unfortunately, this is not true; Although it was raining, we decided to go for a picnic.
- Show that information is extra to the main idea, eg The photocopier, which is on the second floor, needs repairing.
- Separate items in a list, eg She wanted, eggs, ham and bacon.
- Denote how items are split in lists, eg The sandwiches they stocked were ham, chicken, ham and tomato, and chicken and cucumber.

Punctuation

Contractions

These are abbreviations of single words or word pairs (such as Prof. for 'Professor' and can't for 'can not'). Single word contractions do not need to be punctuated when the contraction ends in the same letter as the whole word, so write 'Dr' rather than 'Dr.' as a contraction of 'Doctor'. An exception to this rule is the abbreviation 'no.' for number, a contraction of 'numero'. (See also **Abbreviations and acronyms**.)

Dashes and hyphens

There are three types of dash:

- hyphen dash -
- short dash –
- long dash —

Long dashes are often referred to as 'em dashes' because they are traditionally the same width as an 'm'. Short dashes are called 'en dashes' because they are traditionally the same width as an 'n'. Em dashes are most commonly used in American English.

Hyphen dashes should be reserved for hyphenating words; all other dashes should be en dashes. For example:

'He crossed the road – to the wrong side!'
There are seven orchid species – including three rare ones – at the site.
£100–£200.

Please note that dashes have spaces on either side when used as punctuation, and no spaces when used to indicate a range.

To create an en dash using Word on a PC, press Ctrl and minus on the numeric keypad. Alternatively, activate the numeric keypad (press NumLock), then press Alt while typing code 0150. To create an en dash on a Macintosh, press Alt and minus on the main keypad.

When using hyphens there are few rules as to which words should be hyphenated and which not, and the rules that exist usually have exceptions. As a general rule you should hyphenate words to separate similar vowels.

Words used as adjectives are often hyphenated. For example:

high-level talks, 13th-century castle, fine-grained sandstone. Composite adjectives are also hyphenated. For example: fifty-year-old man and three-metre-high wall. Hyphens are not used in composite adverbs.

For example: 'The wall was three metres high,' and 'He was fifty years old.' (In these examples, 'high' and 'old' are acting as verbs.)

As a rule, include a hyphen only when it will be helpful in some way, for example:

'The 20-odd members of the Cabinet,' as opposed to, 'The 20 odd members of the Cabinet."

Punctuation

Some hyphenations are not helpful. For example: unwanted hair-remover, anti-trade unionist, fried fish-merchant.

One word	Hyphenated	Separate words
Brownfield	Decision-maker	(to) break down
Email	Fifty-year-old man	Flood plain
Geodiversity	Last-minute	Global waming
Mudflat	Long-term	Green belt
Offshore	Lower-case	Ice Age
Overgrazing	Part-owner	Per cent
Recreate	Re-creation	Salt marsh
Reedbed	Self-explanatory	Sea level
Website	Up-to-date	(to survey) under water

If in doubt consult the most recent edition of *The Chambers Dictionary*.

Ellipses

This character consists of three full-stops ... and is used to indicate omitted text. To create an ellipsis on a PC, activate the numeric keypad (press Num Lock), then press Alt while typing the code 0133. If an ellipsis occurs at the end of a sentence there is no need to add a full stop.

Exclamation marks

Use exclamation marks sparingly and singly to express surprise, shock or despair, eg I don't believe it! Do not use them to add excitement to dull writing. It doesn't work.

Full stops

Use plenty to create short punchy sentences. Put a single space after a full stop.

Numbered lists

When creating a numbered list do not use a full stop after the number, just include two spaces, for example:

1 Close all the windows.
2 Shut down electrical equipment.
3 Set the alarm system.
4 Turn off the lights.

Make sure all your numbered points are consistent, ie full sentences or fragments.

Punctuation

Question marks

Use question marks for direct questions, eg What are we going to do? Do not use for sentences such as: I wonder if you could let me know.

Quotation marks

Double quotes are used to signify speech, single quotes are used to highlight 'special' words and quoted material that is not speech (for example, a quote from a report). Make sure that double and single quotation marks are 'curly'; also known as 'smart'. These marks are called curly because they curl into the adjacent letter. They're also known as smart because they can recognise the start and end of a word or sentence and position themselves accordingly.

For example:
'These curly single quotes are smart.'
"These curly double quotes are smart too."

Plain double and single quote marks that don't curl are called 'straight quotes' and consist of characters known as 'tick marks' or 'primes'. For example:

'These are single tick marks.'
''These are double tick marks.''

Tick marks should be used only to indicate feet and inches, or minutes and seconds. Text that is copied and pasted from the Internet or sent via email often has its curly quotes replaced with tick marks. To change tick marks to curly quotes in Word, re-type them or carry out a find and replace. (See also **Quotes and extracts**.)

Slashes

Avoid the use of / except in web addresses as it can mean different things to different people. For example, 1/2 could mean a half, one or two, one of two, January 2 (in the US) or 1 February (in the UK).

Spelling

The Chambers Dictionary is the standard reference for advice on spelling and hyphenation – consult the most recent edition (twelth).

Grammar

This section deals with words that are commonly mis-used, mis-spelt or otherwise abused. In most cases the use of the wrong homophone – words that sound alike but are spelt differently – will be an error that a spellchecker will not pick up.

accessary, accessory
Accessary means complicity. Accessory means additional.

acquire
To avoid confusion it is preferable to substitute the word 'get', 'buy' or 'win' depending on the intended meaning.

add value to
Overused. Use 'improve'.

adverse, averse
Adverse means hostile. Averse means reluctant.

adviser
Not advisor.

affect, effect
Affect means to influence or assume the manner of. Effect means to bring about or accomplish.

agenda
The plural of 'agendum', though agenda is commonly used as the singular.

aggravate
Means to make a bad situation worse. It does not mean to irritate or annoy.

among, amongst
Use 'among'.

androgenous, androgynous
Androgenous means producing male offspring. Androgynous means having male and female characteristics.

antenna
In the biological sense the plural is 'antennae'. The plural 'antennas' refers to radio equipment.

anticipate, expect
These words are not interchangeable. To expect means to foresee something. To anticipate something means to foresee something and act accordingly.

anyone, any one
One word when referring to a person, otherwise two words.

appraise, apprise
Appraise means evaluate. Apprise means inform.

Grammar

apt, liable
Apt is used to indicate a positive; liable, a negative. For example: 'Smith was apt to be cheerful, but Jones was liable to be bad-tempered.'

axle, axel
An axle is a rod between two wheels. An axel is an ice-skating jump.

bacteria
The plural of bacterium.

best practice
Overused. Use 'good examples of'.

biannual, biennial
Biannual means twice in one year. Biennial means lasting two years, or appearing every two years.

bottom line
Use 'most important thing' or 'main point'.

caddis
Not caddice.

Cainozoic
Not Cenozoic.

calendar, calender
A calendar is a record of a year. A calender is a type of press, or a member of a mendicant order of wandering Persian dervishes.

collectable, collectible
Alternative spellings of the same word, but collectable is preferred.

compare to, with
Use 'compare to' to draw attention to similarities, and 'compare with' to draw attention to differences. For example:

'In terms of rainfall, Northern Ireland can be compared to Wales.'
'East Anglia is very dry compared with Northern Ireland.'

compliment, complement
Compliment means to praise. Complement means to make complete.

compose, comprise
These words are not interchangeable. Compose is synonymous with consist; while comprise means to contain. For example: 'The organisation comprises three departments,' not 'The organisation comprises of three departments,' or 'Three departments comprise the organisation.'

However, you can write, 'The organisation is composed of three departments.'

Grammar

continent
The word is capitalised when it forms part of a proper name. For example: European Continent. However, continental is written in lower-case.

continual, continuous
Continual refers to things that happen repeatedly. Continuous means uninterrupted.

criteria
The plural of criterion, but it is commonly used as the singular.

data
This word is a plural (the singular is datum) but it is commonly used as the singular.

deliverables
Say what they are. Are they results? Reports?

deny, refute
These words are not interchangeable. If you deny an allegation you are saying it's untrue. If you refute an allegation you have proved it to be wrong.

dependant, dependent
Dependant should be used to refer to a person; dependent to a situation.

depository, depositary
A depository is a place. A depositary is a person or body of people given something for safe-keeping.

dike, dyke
Alternative spellings of the same word. Dike is preferred in most cases, except when describing the geological feature. Note that dike can refer to a trench, or to a raised bank formed from the spoil of a trench, or both.

dilemma
A dilemma is not simply a difficult choice, it is a choice between two unpleasant alternatives.

discreet, discrete
Discreet means circumspect. Discrete means separate parts.

disinterested, uninterested
These words are not interchangeable. Disinterested means unbiased. Uninterested means not interested.

divergent
Does not simply mean 'different'. If two things are divergent they are separate and growing further apart.

Domesday Book
Not Doomsday Book.

Grammar

dos and don'ts
Not do's and don'ts.

due to, owing to
The choice of words can affect the meaning of a sentence. For example:

'It was difficult to assess the changes due to outside factors.'

Has a different meaning from:

'It was difficult to assess the changes owing to outside factors.'

The first sentence suggests that changes resulting from outside factors were difficult to assess. The second suggests that outside factors made the changes difficult to assess.

To avoid misunderstandings it might be better to rephrase these sentences. For example:

'It was difficult to assess the changes that were the result of outside factors.'
'It was difficult to assess the changes because of outside factors.'

Earth
Capitalise when referring to Earth as a planet; otherwise 'earth' should equate with 'soil'.

effectively, in effect
Effectively means that actions have resulted in a positive, satisfactory result, while 'in effect' usually indicates an unplanned outcome. For example:

'Removing dry scrub effectively reduced the risk of fire.'
'Increasing the amount of grazing in effect led to a decrease in diversity.'

either, neither
The rule is that 'either' is followed by 'or', and 'neither' by 'nor'. For example:

'You can go to either Bognor or Rhyl.'
'I shall go to neither Bognor nor Rhyl.'

enormity
Means monstrous, wicked or outrageous; it is not a variation of enormous.

enquiry, inquiry
Alternative spellings of the same word, but inquiry is usually used to describe a formal investigation. For example: The police inquiry.

ensure, insure
Ensure means to make certain. Insure means to undertake insurance.

everyday, every day
The compound word 'everyday' is used only as an adjective. For example: 'He wore everyday clothes.'

Grammar

expect, anticipate
These words are not interchangeable. To expect means to foresee something. To anticipate something means to foresee something and act accordingly.

extinct
Used properly this word is an absolute: something is extinct, or it's not. In the same way that something is either dead, or alive. The IUCN classification 'Extinct in the wild' should be used with caution when addressing a non-scientific audience as, properly speaking, it is a contradiction.

farther, further
Both words mean the same thing, but farther is preferred when describing real distances, and further when describing figurative distances. For example:

'The next stop is 3 km farther on.'
'He could take the idea no further.'

fewer, less
Use fewer for plural nouns and less for singular nouns. For example:

'There were 5,000 fewer visitors [plural] to the centre last year.'
'The number [singular] of visitors to the centre was 5,000 less than last year.'

florescent, fluorescent
Florescent means flowering. Fluorescent means to emit light.

forbear, forebear
Forbear means to refrain. Forebear means ancestor.

forego, forgo
Forego means to precede. Forgo means to do without.

former, latter
These words should be used only when referring to two things. For example:

'This species is usually found only in Cornwall and Devon; frequently in the former, less so in the latter.' If more than two things are being referred to, former should not be used and latter should be replaced by last or last-mentioned.

Friesian, Frisian
Friesian is a breed of cattle. Frisian is a language.

frontbench, front bench
The compound word 'frontbench' is used only as an adjective. For example: 'He sat on the front bench as a frontbench spokesman.'

Grammar

genera
The plural of genus.

going forward
This is redundant. Rarely does life go backward.

Government, government
As a general rule, refer to the Government in the singular not the plural: the Government 'is', not the Government 'are'. The plural form can be used when the use of the word emphasises the fact that a government is made up of individuals.

Capitalise the word when referring to a specific government. For example: 'The current Government is reluctant to increase tax.' In other cases do not capitalise. For example: 'The Romans established a new system of government.' Government is also written in lower-case when the word is used as an adjective. For example: 'The government minister.'

Great Britain
Comprises England, Scotland and Wales. The **United Kingdom** comprises Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The **British Isles** comprise the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

'h' at the beginning of a word
Use 'an' before a word beginning with a silent 'h', eg 'an hour' but 'a hostage'.

happen, transpire
Happen means 'to occur'. Transpire means 'to become known'.

historical, historic
Historical means something belonging to history. Historic refers to something important. For example:

'For historical reasons some place name spellings do not follow the usual conventions...'
'The Prime Minister's historic speech...'

homogeneous, homogenous
Homogeneous means 'of the same kind', while homogenous is most commonly used to describe organisms with a common ancestry.

however
Punctuation around 'however' depends on how you use it. Where it is an aside, put commas around it. However, if it starts a new point (as it does here), it must follow a full stop or semi-colon and not a comma. Consider these examples:

- These things, however, are bound to happen.
- These things are bound to happen; however, we must find a solution.
- However, these things are bound to happen.
- However these things happen, we must find a solution.

Grammar

I, me
'Will it be convenient for my colleague and I to call on Friday?' To see if the use of 'I' is correct in the previous sentence, rephrase it in the singular: 'Will it be convenient for I to call on Friday?' This is obviously incorrect and the original should be rephrased as, 'Will it be convenient for my colleague and me to call on Friday?' Doing the same with, 'The Conservation Officer and I went to the meeting' shows that 'I' is used correctly in this case.

imply, infer
Imply means 'to suggest'. Infer means 'to deduce'. If you see a man looking at a map, you can infer that he's lost; if you ask him if he needs directions, you imply that he's lost.

in close proximity to
Use 'near'.

in effect
See **effectively**.

insure, ensure
Insure means to undertake insurance. Ensure means to make certain.

-ise/-ize
Use the standard British convention of '-ise' where there is a choice, eg realise, organise, apologise.

latter
See **former**.

lead, led
The regular past and past participate of 'to lead' is 'led', not 'lead'. 'Lead' (as a noun) is what you find in a pencil or a balloon.

less
See **fewer**.

liable, apt
Apt is used to indicate a positive; liable, a negative. For example: 'Smith was apt to be cheerful, but Jones was liable to be bad-tempered.'

licence, license
Licence is a noun. License is a verb. For example: 'If you have a liquor licence you are licensed to sell spirits.'

like, such as
'Like' excludes; 'such as' includes. For example, the phrase, 'Trails like the Cumbria Way are relatively demanding' could be taken to mean that trails similar to the Cumbria Way are demanding – but not the Cumbria Way itself. Replacing 'like' with 'such as' makes the meaning clearer.

luxuriant, luxurious
Luxuriant refers to rich vigorous growth. Luxurious refers to luxury.

Grammar

may, might
These words are not always interchangeable. For example, 'John was knocked over by a bike. He might have been killed,' means John was knocked over and could have been killed, but wasn't. On the other hand, 'John was knocked over by a bike. He may have been killed,' means John was knocked over by a bike and we don't know if he survived.

The use of 'may' can also imply that permission is being given. For example: 'John may go to the cinema,' could suggest that John is being allowed to go to the cinema.

media
The plural of medium.

might
See **may**.

neither
See **either**.

only
The word should be attached to the phrase or word it is modifying. For example:

'Jack died only last week,' not 'Jack only died last week.' The latter suggests that all Jack did that week was die – which might not be true.

'The number seven bus ran only on Wednesdays,' not 'The number seven bus only ran on Wednesdays.' The latter suggests that the bus might do something other than run – fly perhaps – on other days of the week.

ordinance, ordnance
An ordinance is a decree, while ordnance refers to military stores. The Ordnance Survey used to be part of the Army Board of Ordnance.

overlie, overlay
Overlie refers to the position of something. Overlay implies action – to put something on top. See also **underlie**.

owing to
See **due to**.

Palaeozoic
Not Paleozoic.

practical, practicable
A practical idea is a useful one. A practicable idea is one that can be carried out – but is not necessarily useful. For example: to increase a building's security it would be practicable, but not practical, to build a thirty-foot-high wall around it.

Grammar

practice, practise
Practice is a noun. Practise is a verb. For example: 'You can practise medicine from a medical practice.'

principal, principle
These words are not interchangeable. Principal means head or most important. Principle means rule or doctrine.

refute, deny
These words are not interchangeable. If you refute an allegation, you have proved it to be wrong; if you deny an allegation you are saying it's untrue.

regretfully, regrettably
Regretfully means with regret. Regrettably means unfortunately.

sewage, sewerage
Sewage is waste matter. Sewerage is pipework built to carry sewage.

scenario
Avoid. Try 'scheme', 'plan' or 'programme'.

slither/sliver
Slither means 'to slide'. Sliver means 'to tear', or slice thinly.

species
Please note that the word 'specie' means 'coined money' and is not the singular of species, which is itself the singular and the plural. See also **genera**.

such as
See **like**.

Superfluous words and tautologies
If a phrase is tautological it is saying the same thing twice. For example: 'razed to the ground' is a tautology as 'razed' itself means 'burnt to the ground'. Other examples of superfluous words in common phrases are:

new innovation innovation
exactly the same the same
close proximity close
different species species
located in in
situated in in
future plans plans
in order to to
present time now
whether or not whether
revert back back
longer in length length
exact replica replica
report back report
red in colour red

Grammar

suffice
Use 'be enough' or 'do'.

supersede
Spelt with an 's' not a 'c'.

terrane, terrain
Terrane refers to a rock formation (or, more specifically, a faultbounded tectonic unit of regional extent that is unlike adjacent terranes). Terrain refers to a tract of land with uniform character.

that
Where possible, delete this word where its removal will not change the meaning or readability of text. For example: 'I think that the paper that he wants is in that drawer' could be re-written as, 'I think the paper he wants is in that drawer.' Be aware that removing too many 'superfluous' words can reduce text to a form of shorthand that is hard to read.

that, which
Information that defines a subject should be introduced with 'that'. If information is only additional, it should be introduced by 'which' and placed within parentheses. Maintaining this distinction is useful as it can prevent misunderstandings. For example, 'London trains that leave from platform five are never late' has a different meaning from, 'London trains, which leave from platform five, are never late.'

tortuous, torturous
Tortuous means winding or twisting. Torturous involves pain and suffering.

transpire, happen
Transpire means 'to become known'. Happen means 'to occur'.

underlie, underlay
Underlie refers to the position of something. Underlay implies an action – to put something underneath. See also **overlie**.

underwater, under water
Underwater is one word when used as an adjective. For example: in the phrase 'underwater exploration'. In other cases it is two words. For example: 'They carried out the survey under water.'

United Kingdom
See **Great Britain**.

uninterested, disinterested
These words are not interchangeable. Uninterested means not interested. Disinterested means unbiased.

unique
This word is an absolute: something is either unique, or it's not. For example: it is incorrect to say that something is, 'Unique in this area.' If it's unique, it's unique everywhere.

Grammar

utilise
Use 'use'.

which, that
See **that**.

while, whilst
Use 'while'.

who, whom
'Who' is subjective and 'whom' is objective; so 'who' should be used to refer to a specific individual, and 'whom' used in other cases. For example:

'Mr Jones, the man who came last week...'
'When I go to the office, whom should I ask for?'

If in doubt use 'who'. For more information see Sir Ernest Gowers' *The Complete Plain Words*.

Writing for the web

We behave differently online: we want specific information, and we want it now. Most people will give a website less than ten seconds to prove its worth. We are also more likely to scan the text for key words, rather than read a page from beginning to end.

As a web writer, your challenge is to make it easy for readers to complete their particular tasks quickly and painlessly. Here's how:

First things first

There's a lot of information out there already. Do you have to write this page? Is the material already there on another page on the site? Can you link to it to avoid duplicating effort?

Page length

Stick to one topic per page. But don't try to fit too much in. If your page extends way beyond a screen's worth, think again. You can probably break it down into more digestible chunks.

Make sure each page is self-contained. It should make sense as an 'island' of information: your reader can access it from anywhere.

Know your audience

Imagine who visits our site – what they like, what their attitudes are and what they're looking for. Keep these typical visitors in mind as you write for the web. Remember that people don't care why we've decided to do something; they just want to know how it affects them.

Get to the point

Make sure you get your main message across in the first couple of lines:

- Don't mess around with background and waffly welcomes.
- Give answers before explanations, summaries before details, and conclusions before discussions.
- Include detail if you need to, but organise your material so that this comes further down the page.

Word count

Use fewer words and shorter paragraphs than you would if writing something for printing. We read words 25 per cent slower on screen. Use the Ten top tips on page 39 to produce concise, unambiguous text.
Pay special attention to sentence length: if in doubt, put that full stop in.

Key words, subheadings and bullets

Use regular, clear subheadings to break up the text and make it easy for your reader to scan the page:

- Make subheadings explicit and include key words if possible. So 'What is spatial planning?' is better than 'Delivery mechanisms and policies'. Combined, your subheadings should tell the story.

Writing for the web

- You can use bold to highlight key words in the body text.
- Don't use italics for emphasis as they are difficult to read on screen. However, do use italics for names of species.
- Use bullets to break up the text to make it easier to scan.

Hyperlinks

Use meaningful link text for hyperlinks, so readers know where the link will take them. Don't use 'click here'.

Keep up to date

Review your pages regularly, making sure any dates are current. Out-of date information will undermine the content of the whole site.

Web writing that works

The following extract shows first-draft sample text for a web page describing spatial planning.

The content hasn't been written with the reader in mind. It's too wordy, repetitive and includes off-putting terms such as 'delivery mechanism' and 'utilisation'. Without subheadings, it is also difficult to scan quickly.

The language is not as direct and active as it could be. And the sentences and paragraphs are too long.

Policy and delivery integration management
The spatial planning system consolidates and integrates policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of places and how they function, providing significant opportunities and challenges for the natural environment and an important delivery mechanism for much of Natural England's work. The spatial planning system conserves and enhances the natural environment and delivers high quality, environmentally sustainable development.

It is hoped that spatial planning policies and decisions conserve and enhance the natural environment through the wise utilisation of natural resources. They are also expected to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change; provide the highest levels of protection for England's protected landscapes, habitats, sites and species; be based on robust environmental evidence and a thorough understanding of environmental capacity and the cumulative impacts of development; and deliver substantial benefits for the natural environment and people together. This should include enhancement of biodiversity and landscape, opportunities to access and enjoy the natural environment and the provision of multi-functional green infrastructure.

Writing for the web

Opposite is a rewritten version that gets to the point and signposts the information clearly. It uses short paragraphs and bullets to make the points easy to scan. The sentences are shorter and the language itself is tighter: more active and direct, and with less padding.

What is spatial planning?
Spatial planning looks at how to integrate policies for developing and using land with other programmes that influence the nature of places and how they function.

Why is Natural England involved in spatial planning?
The spatial planning system is central to our work. Our aim is to ensure that it conserves and enhances the natural environment, while allowing for high quality, environmentally sustainable development.

We want spatial planning policies and decisions to:

- ensure wise use of natural resources;
- mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change;
- provide maximum protection for England's landscapes, habitats, sites and species;
- be based on sound environmental evidence;
- show a thorough understanding of environmental capacity and the cumulative impacts of development;
- enhance biodiversity and landscapes;
- increase opportunities to access and enjoy the natural environment; and
- ensure a multi-functional green infrastructure.

Contact us For more information contact us on 08457 654321

Ten top tips for writing well

Here are ten specific ways in which you can hone your writing style to highlight what you are saying rather than how you say it.

1 Know your reader

Keep your reader in mind as you write. Ask yourself why you are writing, what you are trying to say and to whom you are saying it.

Do you want to inform, engage or influence? Accordingly, decide whether your content should be factual, inspiring or persuasive.

Be clear about the action you want your reader to take. Then you'll tell them what they need to know, not simply what you've found out.

2 Know what you want to say

Put important messages at the start. Test them out aloud before you commit them to paper: if you can't make sense of them, how will your reader?

Sort out your thinking at the planning, not the writing, stage. Order your material to be logical and transparent to your reader.

3 Use subheadings that summarise the content

Use meaningful subheadings to show readers at a glance how your themes develop. So instead of 'Section 4', write 'What is Natural England's role?'

4 Be direct

Write to people, not about them. Use 'you' and 'we' or 'I' to make your writing more confident, more transparent and more personal.

Write, too, about what concerns your readers rather than Natural England processes.

Before

Members of the public are asked to send the Natural England head office examples of wildlife activities they would like to see in their local area.

After

Please send us your ideas for new wildlife activities in your area.

Ask yourself:
1 Why am I writing this?
2 Who is it for?
3 What am I trying to say?

"The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do." Thomas Jefferson"

Ten top tips for writing well

5 Keep it short and simple (KISS)

- Use plain English – language you use when talking – when possible.
- Only use jargon when you are certain your readers will understand it, and never for external or non-expert readers.
- Use abbreviations and acronyms sparingly. Explain them at first mention.
- Cut out redundant words.
- Use concrete terms rather than abstract (or meaningless) generalities:

  'Help with giving up smoking' rather than 'Strategies for smoking cessation'.

- Use verbs rather than nouns: it's the verbs that make language dynamic.
- Avoid too many heavy nouns ending in -tion or -sion, eg recommendation. This nominalisation (creating a noun from the verb) makes writing clunky and boring to read.

	Verb		Nominalisation
Use:	implement/do	not	undertake the implementation of
Use:	consider/think about	not	give consideration to
Use:	complete	not	achieve completion of
Use:	decide	not	reach a decision
Use:	recommend	not	make a recommendation to

Before
The aim of this document is to provide an outline of systemic operations to facilitate the implementation of methodology that will assist the team in the avoidance of inconsistency in the wording used in our publications.

After
This document outlines how we can be consistent with the wording we use in our publications.

Ten top tips for writing well

6 Use the active voice

Using the active voice more is the single biggest thing that will give your writing a bit of life. It also makes writing more confident and more authoritative, as it makes clear who is responsible for doing what. The active voice always puts the agent (the 'doer') first.

Before	After		
Reference was made to the document (by Jane).	Jane made reference to the document.	or	Jane referred to the document.

7 Stick to one sentence, one idea

Keep your sentences short. Aim for an average of 17 words per sentence.

Vary your rhythm: try inserting the odd two- or three-word sentence for impact. It's easy. And it may well just keep your reader awake.

Before

Whilst the organisation currently relies on sponsorship from small enterprises and individuals, the co-operation of large corporate bodies, without whose funding we will not be able to campaign successfully for legislative changes, is now essential if we are to improve the quality of life of many sectors of the population.

After

We need funding to lobby for changes in the law to improve people's quality of life. At the moment, we rely on sponsorship from small enterprises and individuals. But this is not enough. Financial support from large corporate and public bodies is now essential if we are to campaign successfully for change.

8 Keep paragraphs short

Stick to one main point per paragraph. If you can't sum up that point in a few words, you have probably tried to cram in too much.

9 Edit, then edit again

Be rigorous in your editing. Are you using the best word for the job? What do you mean? Is there a simpler way to say it? When you think you've finished, try cutting by a third.

10 Proof it!

Proofreading isn't an optional extra: make time for it.

- Print the document out and come back to it when you're fresh – ideally the next day.
- Try to proofread away from your desk: this will help you read it as a reader, not as the writer.
- Use a ruler to guide you and a pencil to point to each word individually. This will stop your brain reading what it expects to see rather than what's actually there.

Appendix: Special Alt Characters

[backspace†]	Alt 8	‘	Alt 39	5	Alt 53	C	Alt 67
[tab†]	Alt 9	(	Alt 40	6	Alt 54	D	Alt 68
[line break†]	Alt 10	)	Alt 41	7	Alt 55	E	Alt 69
€	Alt 15	*	Alt 42	8	Alt 56	F	Alt 70
¶	Alt 20	+	Alt 43	9	Alt 57	G	Alt 71
§	Alt 21	,	Alt 44	:	Alt 58	H	Alt 72
[paste†]	Alt 22	-	Alt 45	;	Alt 59	I	Alt 73
[space†]	Alt 32	.	Alt 46	<	Alt 60	J	Alt 74
!	Alt 33	/	Alt 47	=	Alt 61	K	Alt 75
“	Alt 34	0	Alt 48	>	Alt 62	L	Alt 76
#	Alt 35	1	Alt 49	?	Alt 63	M	Alt 77
$	Alt 36	2	Alt 50	@	Alt 64	N	Alt 78
%	Alt 37	3	Alt 51	A	Alt 65	O	Alt 79
&	Alt 38	4	Alt 52	B	Alt 66	P	Alt 80

Appendix: Special Alt Characters

Q	Alt 81	_	Alt 95	m	Alt 109	{	Alt 123
R	Alt 82	`	Alt 96	n	Alt 110	|	Alt 124
S	Alt 83	a	Alt 97	o	Alt 111	}	Alt 125
T	Alt 84	b	Alt 98	p	Alt 112	~	Alt 126
U	Alt 85	c	Alt 99	q	Alt 113	□	Alt 127
V	Alt 86	d	Alt 100	r	Alt 114	Ç	Alt 128
W	Alt 87	e	Alt 101	s	Alt 115	ü	Alt 129
X	Alt 88	f	Alt 102	t	Alt 116	é	Alt 130
Y	Alt 89	g	Alt 103	u	Alt 117	â	Alt 131
Z	Alt 90	h	Alt 104	v	Alt 118	ä	Alt 132
[	Alt 91	i	Alt 105	w	Alt 119	à	Alt 133
\	Alt 92	j	Alt 106	x	Alt 120	å	Alt 134
]	Alt 93	k	Alt 107	y	Alt 121	ç	Alt 135
^	Alt 94	l	Alt 108	z	Alt 122	ê	Alt 136

Appendix: Special Alt Characters

ë	Alt 137	£	Alt 156	½	Alt 171	…	Alt 0133
è	Alt 138	¥	Alt 157	¼	Alt 172	†	Alt 0134
ï	Alt 139	P	Alt 158	¡	Alt 173	‡	Alt 0135
î	Alt 140	ƒ	Alt 159	«	Alt 174	ˆ	Alt 0136
ì	Alt 141	á	Alt 160	»	Alt 175	‰	Alt 0137
æ	Alt 145	í	Alt 161	|	Alt 179	Š	Alt 0138
Æ	Alt 146	ó	Alt 162	ß	Alt 225	‹	Alt 0139
ô	Alt 147	ú	Alt 163	µ	Alt 230	Œ	Alt 0140
ö	Alt 148	ñ	Alt 164	±	Alt 241	‘	Alt 0145
ò	Alt 149	Ñ	Alt 165	°	Alt 248	’	Alt 0146
û	Alt 150	a	Alt 166	•	Alt 249	“	Alt 0147
ù	Alt 151	o	Alt 167	·	Alt 250	”	Alt 0148
ÿ	Alt 152	¿	Alt 168	€	Alt 0128	–	Alt 0150
¢	Alt 155	¬	Alt 170	„	Alt 0132	—	Alt 0151

Appendix: Special Alt Characters

˜	Alt 0152	½	Alt 0185	Î	Alt 0206	Ý	Alt 0221
™	Alt 0153	¾	Alt 0190	Ï	Alt 0207	Þ	Alt 0222
š	Alt 0154	À	Alt 0192	Ð	Alt 0208	ã	Alt 0227
›	Alt 0155	Á	Alt 0193	Ò	Alt 0210	ð	Alt 0240
œ	Alt 0156	Â	Alt 0194	Ó	Alt 0211	õ	Alt 0245
Ÿ	Alt 0159	Ã	Alt 0195	Ô	Alt 0212	÷	Alt 0247
¨	Alt 0168	Ä	Alt 0196	Õ	Alt 0213	ø	Alt 0248
þ	Alt 0254	Å	Alt 0197	Ö	Alt 0214	ü	Alt 0252
®	Alt 0174	È	Alt 0200	×	Alt 0215	ý	Alt 0253
¯	Alt 0175	É	Alt 0201	Ø	Alt 0216	©	Alt 0169
¼	Alt 0178	Ê	Alt 0202	Ù	Alt 0217		
¾	Alt 0179	Ë	Alt 0203	Ú	Alt 0218		
´	Alt 0180	Ì	Alt 0204	Û	Alt 0219		
¸	Alt 0184	Í	Alt 0205	Ü	Alt 0220		

†Some word processing programs will not recognize these Alt functions. Font used for this set of Alt functions is Arial.