



## Highways England

### **Normal not formal**

A guide to our corporate narrative, tone of voice and writing style







# Contents

1	Why this guide matters and how it will help you
2	Corporate narrative
3	Tone of voice
4	Style guide
5	Putting our tone of voice, essentials of writing and style together

1

Why this guide matters  
and how it will help you

## 1

# Why this guide matters and how it will help you

We write for a purpose – to communicate our ideas or information to others in the clearest way possible, and to influence our chosen audience to think, feel, say or do something as a result.

Of course, we need to use the correct spelling, punctuation and grammar. If we get the basics wrong, we quickly risk being misunderstood or frustrating our audience.

But there's much more to good writing than that. We all need to communicate clearly, consistently, with personality and in a way that helps our audience understand who we are, what we do and why it matters to them.

This practical guide is designed for everyone at Highways England. Communication is not just about saying something; it's about engaging and being heard. You need to use a style and words that the other person will understand - which may not be the same as the language you use in your own world at work.

**This guide is for the times when you have an important message to get across, and you're wondering how best to present it. It's split into three sections:**

- Our **corporate narrative**. Highways England's story about who we are, why we exist, what we do and how we do it, and where we're going.
- A guide to our **tone of voice**. To help you write in a way that reflects our personality and values.
- Our **style guide**. Explains in more detail how to communicate in a clear and consistent way, how to present things like numbers, lower and upper case, contractions, the second and third person, and how to choose words that really work.

Together they will help us all write more effectively, whether for external or internal reports, documents, letters, emails, presentations or digital communications.

No guide can cover every eventuality. You may occasionally have to adapt your writing for legal documents, formal papers for meetings or other occasions that require a particular style. But this will be the exception; the general rule is think normal not formal.

“

We write for a **purpose** – to **communicate** our ideas or information to others in the **clearest way possible**, and to **influence** our chosen audience to think, say or do something as a result.

”



**Peter Allen**

Executive Director of Corporate Affairs and Communications

2

Corporate narrative

## 2

# Corporate narrative

Our corporate narrative is quite simply a story that our audiences can relate to, about who we are, what we do, the positive difference that we make to our customers' lives, and the journey we are on together with our customers.

## Who we are

We are a publicly funded, government owned company that plans, designs, builds, operates and maintains England's motorways and major A-roads. As well as managing one of the most advanced road networks in the world, we provide information and assistance for the millions of people who use our roads.

We know we play a vital part in everyone's life every day, whether they use our network or not: we enable work journeys and home deliveries, visits to friends and family, holidays, and the movement of the goods and services that we all depend on.

“

We make a positive difference to people's lives.

”

## Why we are here

Our mission is to connect the country. We believe that connecting people and communities creates job and social opportunities and helps business and the economy thrive. We make a positive difference to people's lives. We care about each and every person's journey. We aim to keep people moving today and moving better tomorrow. We want everyone on our network to get home safe and well.

When we write or speak to colleagues, customers, suppliers and stakeholders, we should embody this sense of purpose. It's why we exist.

“

When we communicate, we should express confidence that our imperatives are at the heart of what we do.

”

## What we do

Our job is to manage and improve the road network to make journeys safer, smoother and more reliable. We work in partnership with our suppliers to develop and deliver efficient and innovative solutions, and we listen closely to our customers and stakeholders who help shape our work. We care about minimising the environmental impact of our projects and schemes, and creating benefits for local communities. We aim to deliver on time and on budget, getting the best possible value for public money.

In doing so, we focus on our three imperatives: safety, customer service and delivery. We want everyone who uses or works on our roads to get home safe and well. We aim to meet our customers' needs, and deliver the services and improvements that enable them to connect with people and places. These are our core priorities and are what matter most to us.



## 2.1

## Corporate narrative

## How we work

Our imperatives are underpinned by our five values – of safety, ownership, passion, integrity and teamwork. These describe how we do business, how we behave towards each other, behaviours that we expect of ourselves, our colleagues and our leaders. There are many ways to express and bring our values to life and influence how people perceive us as an organisation.

When we speak, we should show our passion for how we do things.

## Where we're going

While we are busy maintaining, improving and enlarging the network of today to meet our customers' current needs, we are also thinking about the future and the next generation of road users.

We believe there will be a 'roads revolution' with three key areas of radical change:

- an increase in the number of people who will use our roads
- technical innovation in designing, maintaining and operating our infrastructure
- increasingly connected and electrified vehicles

These are factors that will radically change how we manage our network, how our customers use it and how it develops in the decades to come.

We are on a journey together with our customers. While we provide an increasingly digitally-driven, strategic road network, they are the ones who give it meaning by using it and benefitting from it. They want us to understand their needs. We must show that we do, and that they can trust us to deliver it.

So our communication should reflect and encourage a sense of partnership between us as trusted experts and our customers as the people we serve.



## Our values

**Safety**

**Keep ourselves and others safe above all else.**

**Ownership**

**Take accountability, learn from failures and celebrate success, stretch goals and deliver them, maintain focus on our imperatives.**

**Passion**

**Deliver with energy and pace, care about what we do, continuously improve and innovate, provide great service in everything we do.**

**Integrity**

**Be open, honest and professional, respect and value the contribution others make, do what we say, always do the right thing.**

**Teamwork**

**Work together effectively to achieve our goals, work efficiently and flexibly, listen to others and communicate clearly.**

3

Tone of voice



## 3

# Tone of voice

The way we talk about who we are, what we do, why our work matters and how we work is crucial in influencing how we see each other and how the world sees us. It is the perceptions of others (and not our perceptions of ourselves) that form our reputation and give us our 'licence to operate'. These perceptions are based just as much on what we say as what we do.

By using a human, customer-focused and quietly confident voice, people will trust us. If we are formal and distant, they won't engage. We should write in the everyday, modern English that people understand. We are honest, transparent and relevant to our customers' lives and experiences on our network.

We provide easily digestible facts and insight into how our work improves their lives. We translate technical terms and avoid jargon. What matters most to our customers are the outcomes that result from our work and benefit them, rather than simply the outputs themselves.

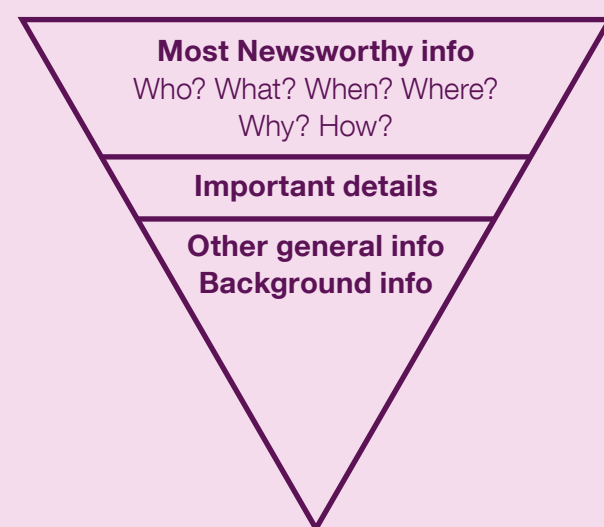
It isn't always easy to modernise our writing from the 'civil servant speak' of the past. But it's essential if we are to present a modern, dynamic, confident organisation. By consistently using the tone of voice outlined in this document, you will convey our personality through everything you write.

**More people are reading content online than ever before which means reading habits are changing.**

**On the average Web page, users have time to read at most 28% of the words during an average visit; 20% is more likely.**

**So cater for the skim reader in your writing.**

**The inverted pyramid technique has been used in journalism for over 100 years but is a really easy way to ensure that critical information is not overlooked.**



## Essentials of good writing

### We all think of companies as people.

So humanise Highways England by using 'we' and 'us' and 'our' as much as possible. When you need to name the organisation, use phrases such as 'At Highways England, we...', to keep the first person going. Avoid abbreviating to 'HE'.

Use the phrase 'our people' rather than 'staff' – it conveys a much more human tone.

### Audiences like to be talked to personally,

so use 'you' to address the reader wherever you can. Internally we often talk about 'customer' because it helps us focus our work on their needs. But externally, when we are communicating directly with the people who use our network or the media, we should use 'road users', 'drivers' or 'motorists' because this is the term that they understand.

**Choose lively, active verbs** that are all about doing and present us as engaged and accountable. Passive verbs make us seem more distant and less responsible.

For example, put 'We are resurfacing the road' rather than 'The road is being resurfaced' or 'Work to resurface the road is currently underway'.

### Use words your audience will understand.

Find alternatives to technical terms, business jargon and abbreviations. If it sounds complicated to you, it certainly will to them.

- Choose simple, everyday language that you'd be happy to speak.
- Use words such as 'before', 'next to' and 'start', rather than 'prior to', 'adjacent to' and 'commence'.
- And avoid old-fashioned words like 'thus', 'hence' and 'whom'.

### Bring our story, imperatives and values to life

by using words that communicate warmth and express our passion, enthusiasm and personality.

- Use words like 'benefit', 'expertise', 'partner', 'proud', 'determined', 'deliver', 'work with', 'collaborate' and 'help'.
- Borrow words or phrases from our corporate narrative: 'We use experience, expertise and care. We connect the country. We care about each and every journey. We make a positive impact on people, the economy and the country. We're proud of the work we do and people who do it'.

### Write in short sentences of 10 to 20 words.

They are easier to understand. But you can sometimes vary the length for effect. Like this.

## 3.1

## Tone of voice

**You can challenge grammar conventions.**

It's fine to sometimes start sentences with 'and', 'but' or 'because', end sentences on a preposition such as 'of', 'to' or 'with', and split an infinitive (as at the beginning of this sentence) if it sounds better.

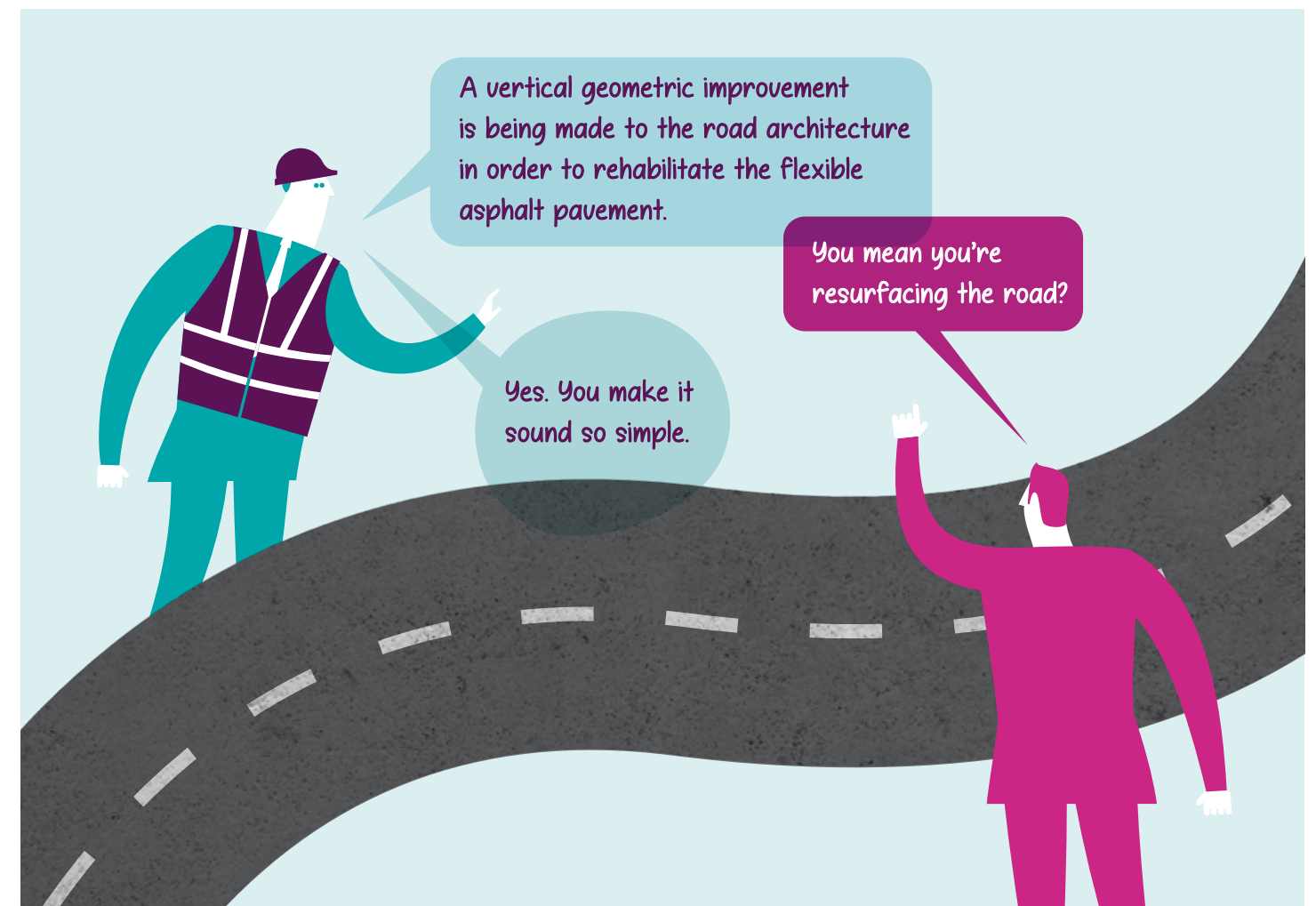
**Write the way you talk**, rather than in old-fashioned 'civil servant speak'.

**Punctuate lightly.** Contemporary punctuation is 'open' or light. It keeps things moving, while classic punctuation can interrupt the flow and look pedantic. Its main purpose is to make your meaning clear and make reading easier.

**Use widely recognised phrases.** Avoid overly informal colloquial language, slang and regional words that others might not understand.

**Avoid repetition and redundant words.** It slows the pace. Write 'we are planning a programme of work' (and not 'we are currently planning a continuing programme of ongoing work').

By working to these essentials we will engage our audiences better and enhance their understanding and perceptions of who we are, what we do and the benefits we create.



4

# Style guide

# Style guide

## DfT

### Abbreviations and acronyms

The golden rule, generally, is to avoid using them. Unless they are very well known ('BBC', 'UK', 'MOT'), the chances are you will exclude or confuse your audience. If you need to refer to something several times, use a shorter form of the phrase after the first full use. For instance, 'Department for Transport' can be 'department' rather than 'DfT'.

If your document is long, repeat the full version and its acronym in each section to help your audience. But never use an abbreviation or acronym if you are only referring to something once.

If you are going to use abbreviations or acronyms, you need to be really sure all of your audience will better understand than writing it out in full. In such cases, spell out the name in full on first use with the abbreviation or acronym in brackets after.

If you are developing a new Highways England project, system or initiative, break the bad habit of giving it an abbreviation or acronym. All you will do is confuse other people. We do not maintain a guide to abbreviations. Instead, give it a simple, descriptive name, chosen to help people to understand what it is. For instance, the Customer Insight Survey, confusingly abbreviated to and pronounced 'kiss', has been renamed Hiview – because it gives a high-level view of what customers think.



...never use an abbreviation or acronym if you are only referring to something once.



### Ampersands

We always use 'and' rather than '&' in general text. You can occasionally use '&' if it is part of a company name ('Legal & General') or a commonly used abbreviation ('R&D').



### Apostrophes

Take care when using apostrophes. Acronyms should be avoided where possible. But if you do use one make sure you only use an apostrophe to show ownership. So avoid KSI's, RIP's and TO's.

See page 17 for the use of apostrophes with plurals and possessives.



### Bulleted lists

Bullets are a useful way of breaking up your writing and clearly showing a list. They are much easier to read than a list incorporated into general text. There are three main styles of bulleted lists:

- Short items
- Lists that follow on from the introductory text (but not full sentences)
- Complete sentences

When writing bullet points, use a colon after the introductory text. Start each bullet point with a capital letter, unless it is a list that carries on from the introductory text. Only use full stops at the end of complete sentences, and try to have a consistent grammatical construction throughout the list. Don't use commas or semicolons after each item, and never use 'and' or 'or' after the penultimate item.

## Examples of bulleted lists

### Example 1. Short items

The whole life cost of a lighting scheme includes several elements:

- Installation
- Operation
- Maintenance

### Example 2. Lists that follow on from the introductory text

Before driving in winter, you should:

- check the anti-freeze in your radiator
- make sure your lights are clean and working properly
- ensure your windscreen is clean

For this type of bulleted list, make sure each bullet makes sense when read straight after the introductory text. Note that each line starts with a lower case letter and there are no full stops.

### Example 3. Complete sentences

The Roads Investment Strategy highlights several challenges:

- The strategic road network is struggling to cope in the face of increasing demand and the volume of high speed traffic.
- Delays to journeys deter investment and constrain the ability of business to compete.
- Stop-start funding available for roads investment has made it difficult to plan for the long term.



# Style guide

ABC

## Capital letters

Modern English uses lower case as much as possible and upper case generally only at the beginning of sentences and for:

- a proper noun – for example a person, place, month, company or publication
- the name of a place, but not a compass direction – see below
- names of days and months, but not seasons
- the title of a Highways England programme, directorate, business unit or team (like ‘Commercial and Procurement, Asset Delivery’); but not just using the descriptive word ‘directorate’ generally
- describing someone by their title (for example ‘Executive Director John Smith’); but when referring to a job description, use ‘executive’ or ‘director’

Other than the above, default to lower case. For instance, a descriptor such as ‘smart motorways’ or ‘strategic road network’ remains lower case. As do document titles, for example *Annual assessment of Highways England’s performance: April 2019 to March 2020*.

Points of the compass can be tricky. We use upper case where a compass point is part of a proper name or has administrative significance or is the title of a Highways England regional team, and lower case where it is simply a geographical location. For example:

- West Midlands, West Sussex, North Yorkshire, East Midlands, Yorkshire and North-East operations team
- the north-west, the south coast, west Kent, north London, eastern England

Compass points such as ‘south-east’, whether adjective or noun, should be hyphenated.

The word project does not need to begin with a capital letter. For example use *A303 Stonehenge project* rather than *A303 Stonehenge Project*.

Upper case	Lower case
Highways England	the company
M1, A1(M), M62	motorway, junction 6
Major Projects Directorate or Major Projects	the directorate
Area Manager Joe Simms	area manager
Department for Transport	the department
Freight Transport Association	the association
Transport Secretary or Roads Minister Jo Smart	the minister, the government
London, Cumbria	south-east London, the north
Monday, September	spring, summer

## 4.1

## Style guide



## Commas

The Oxford Comma, or serial comma, is generally to be avoided. In the US, it is often used before the last item in a list of three or more items - for instance, 'bacon, eggs, and hash browns'. But here, we follow the British convention without a comma before the last item - 'bacon, eggs and tomatoes'.

However you can make an exception and insert a comma to aid clarity and avoid confusion. For instance, 'Our products are available in black and white, and red and yellow', or 'The Bakerloo line runs between Harrow and Wealdstone, and Elephant and Castle'.



## Contractions

You can use contractions in moderation to sound more conversational.

For example, you can put 'it's' or 'we've' or 'don't' or 'can't'.



## Clichés

Clichés start as phrases or words that were striking or useful but through over-use have become annoying, meaningless and now make your writing look stale.

There are far too many to list, but a few examples include:

- due to the fact that...
- point in time
- just a matter of time
- the reason why is because...
- step change, sea change or quantum leap
- going forwards, ongoing
- literally, figuratively
- basically, totally, essentially
- best ever
- as you know (there will always be someone who doesn't know)
- in regards to, in relation to



First and foremost, clichés are old hat. At the end of the day, we should avoid them like the plague.



## Double spaces

You may once have been taught to insert two spaces after a full stop when typing. No more. This isn't necessary using modern fonts and word processors, and can affect the word spacing in a document. If you can't break the habit, you can use the find and replace function in Microsoft Word.



## eg, etc, ie and nb

Avoid using these abbreviations of Latin phrases if possible as they are not always understood. Use these alternatives:

- eg – 'for example' or 'such as'
- etc – 'and more'
- ie – 'that is' or 'specifically'
- nb – 'note' or 'important'

If you are sure your audience will understand these abbreviations, then avoid full stops in between or after the letters.

## 4.2

## Style guide



## Dates and times

### For dates, the general rules are:

- Write dates in this order: day (in full), date, month (in full), year (in full) – and don't separate with commas.
- Avoid 'st', 'nd', 'rd' or 'th'.
- Don't use a leading zero for single-digit dates.
- You can omit the year if it is clear from the context.
- Use either 'between' and 'and' or 'from' and 'to' – but don't interchange or mix them.
- Use hyphens, not slashes, for financial years ('2015-16').

### Here are some examples:

- '26 January 2016' or 'Wednesday 26 January 2016'
- 'Between 26 and 30 January'
- 'Between 2015 and 2016' or 'From 2015 to 2016'
- 'Between 26 January and 4 February 2016'
- 'The 2015-16 financial year'

### For times, the general rules are:

- Use either the 24-hour or 12-hour clock consistently – don't interchange them.
- The 24-hour clock is best for operational situations, while the 12-hour clock is best for general writing.
- When using the 24-hour clock, use a leading zero, separate hours and minutes with a full stop or colon, and don't use the word 'hours' or 'hrs' after the time.
- When using the 12-hour clock, don't use a leading zero, separate hours and minutes with a full stop or colon and write either 'am' or 'pm' (lower case and no punctuation) without leaving a space.
- When using the 12-hour clock, there are no such times as 12:00am or 12:00pm – use 'midday' and 'midnight'.

### Here are some examples:

- 'Traffic officers arrived at the scene at 08:32'.
- 'I will be there at 8.45am and have to leave at 10.00am'.
- 'The meeting will run from midday to 3pm'.



## Ellipses

Use ellipses (...) to show that words have been left out.

They can also be effective to show that something is happening in the future (eg 'Look out for more information next month...'), but use this sparingly.



## Exclamation mark

An exclamation mark expresses surprise or excitement. But it's very rarely used in formal writing so leave it out, unless you're certain it will help understanding.

## 4.3

## Style guide



## Emails

We use a standard email signature template at Highways England, and there are slightly different versions for first aiders and mental health first aiders. You can download these from the intranet or follow this [link](#).

Using a standard template shows our customers that we are a professional organisation.

It is understandable that people sometimes want to add the logo of the charity they are supporting, or the employee network they are part of. However, these can sometimes get stretched or are low quality so these must not be added.

Please speak to the internal communications team about alternative ways to promote your charity or network.



## Font

Our corporate font is Arial 12 point. It is a standard font size adopted by most organisations and is in line with [RNIB guidelines](#).

We use the Helvetica font on our website, intranet and some design documents, but unless you are in the Communications team, you will not need to use this font,



## Headings

Use sentence case for all headings in documents – this means an initial capital for the first word and the remainder in lower case, apart from proper nouns.

- ✓ Highways England's vision, values and behaviours
- ✗ Highways England's Vision, Values and Behaviours

If the heading is in two parts, use a colon to separate them. Don't use an initial capital letter for the word after the colon, unless it would normally have one (for example 'Learning and development: a guide for line managers').



## -ise and -isation

We use the '-ise' and '-isation' spelling for words like 'maximise', 'realise' and 'organisation'. Microsoft Word may disagree and suggest the American '-ize' or '-ization', so be careful when you spell check.



## Italics

Use italics rather than quotation marks for the titles of publications:

'We drew many of our ideas from the white paper, *A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone*.'



## Numbers and units

Although we are a metric country, we use miles on road signs. Always use the full word 'mile' and never abbreviate it. Other rules are that we:

- write out all single-digit numbers between zero and nine in full. We changed this in 2018 to replace our previous style of using numbers for zero to nine, which contradicted widely used common practice
- write all numbers from 10 onwards in numerals. However, at the start of a sentence we use words ('Twelve miles of roadworks...')
- always use the words 'million' and 'billion' in full
- use commas to separate thousands ('1,000' or '15,000,000')
- insert hyphens in fractions and when writing numbers greater than 20 as words ('two-thirds', 'twenty-two')
- abbreviate miles-per-hour to 'mph', while kilometres-per-hour becomes 'km/h'
- don't leave a space between the digit and a unit of measurement, unless we are writing the unit in full ('12kg' or '12 kilogrammes')
- use the '%' symbol for percentages



## 4.4

## Style guide



## Phone numbers

At Highways England, we use these formats:

**For six digits after the area code:**

- 07700 123 456 for mobile numbers
- 01234 123 456 for standard landline numbers

**For seven digits after the area or other code:**

- 01x1 123 4567 for numbers in major cities, such as Birmingham or Manchester
- 0300 123 4567 for non-geographic numbers
- 08xx 123 4567 for all numbers beginning 08

**For eight digits after the area code:**

- 020 7123 4567 or 020 8123 4567 or 020 3123 4567 for London numbers

You may see many other formats in daily life, but they are wrong and not recognised or used by telecoms companies.



## Plurals and possessives

Plurals and possessives have separate sets of rules and it's important to understand and apply them correctly, particularly in the cases of numbers and abbreviations. Getting them wrong makes your writing look unprofessional.

**Plural numbers and abbreviations**

We use modern English and simply add an 's' (the 1990s, CEOs). It's old fashioned to add an apostrophe (the 1960's and CEO's), though you will still see it occasionally elsewhere.

Use the same format for some common expressions (no ifs or buts, dos and don'ts).

**Singular possessives**

To make a noun possessive, simply add an apostrophe and 's' to the end (the team's weekly meeting). The apostrophe shows ownership. The meeting belongs to the team.

For singular nouns that end in '-s', the same applies: add an apostrophe and 's' to the end (the boss's office). And also for proper names (John's car, Francis's bicycle).

**Plural possessives**

In this case, first pluralise and then show possessiveness. So a meeting for more than one shareholder becomes 'the shareholders' meeting'. Do the same for proper names ('the Smiths' house'). For plurals ending in '-s' or '-es', simply add an apostrophe ('the roads' age range' or 'the bridges' standard design').

**Possessive pronouns**

Mine, yours, his, hers and theirs shouldn't cause any problems. But its and it's can do. 'Its' is a possessive pronoun, showing ownership (the company published its results.), whereas 'it's' is a contraction, which stands for 'it is' or 'it has' (it's the day we publish our results). If you're unsure, try this test: if you cannot substitute 'it is' or 'it has' for 'it's' then the apostrophe shouldn't be there and you need the possessive pronoun 'its'.

**Personal names that end in -s**

With personal names that end in -s: add an apostrophe plus s when you would **naturally** pronounce an extra s if you said the word out loud:

- He joined Charles's army in 1642.
- **Dickens's** novels provide a wonderful **insight** into **Victorian** England.
- Thomas's brother was injured in the accident.

Note that there are some **exceptions** to this rule, especially in names of places or organisations, for example: St Thomas' Hospital.

## 4.5

## Style guide



## Quotation marks

We use double quotation marks when directly quoting someone's words and single quotation marks when using a word in a special context, such as giving an example.

Use single speech marks sparingly, though, as it can be 'jarring' and make your writing seem 'stilted', just like someone doing 'curly quotes' with their fingers as they talk to you.

Note that when the sentence ends with a quote, the punctuation is within the speech marks.

**For direct quotations, here are examples of the three main methods:**

- Bob Smith said he was "very happy" with the results of the survey.
- Mrs Smith said "Thank you to the two traffic officers who helped me last week." Note that the full stop is inside the quote mark, because it is a complete sentence.
- Project sponsor Jane Jones said: "I'm delighted that we have completed this scheme to time and budget. Thank you to everyone who was involved.  
"Our customers can now expect safer and more reliable journeys on this section of road."

Note that, in the third example, we omit the double quotation marks from the end of each paragraph other than the last one. This indicates to the reader that the quote is continuing.



## Slashes

Avoid the slash mark (/) in general writing, as it gives your work a feel of being written in note form. Usually you can replace the phrase 'and/or' with either 'and' or 'or'.

There are a few exceptions. You may use the slash mark in:

- the phrase '24/7'
- web addresses
- some units of measurement (such as 'km/h')
- fractions where the lower number is 10 or greater (such as 8/11ths)

Remember, use hyphens, not slashes, for financial years ('2019-20').



## Titles of books, publications and reports

Use italics rather than quotation marks. Give the full title in the first instance and follow this with any recognised shorter version. Capitalise the title as in the original, rather than following our own style. For example:

First reference: 'We drew many of our ideas from the white paper, *A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone*.'

Subsequent reference: 'As in the previous case, you can find much of the information in *A New Deal for Transport*.'

Alternative subsequent reference: 'For the final report, we used section 4 of the white paper'.



## Web addresses

The format varies according to the document you are writing:

- For documents that will only be viewed online, you should use hyperlinks, where the actual web address is hidden behind clickable text.
- For documents that will be viewed both online and in print, you should use the full web address with a hyperlink: [www.highwaysengland.co.uk](http://www.highwaysengland.co.uk)
- For documents that will only be viewed in print, you should use the full web address without a hyperlink: [www.highwaysengland.co.uk](http://www.highwaysengland.co.uk)

When giving the full web address in print documents, you should replace long addresses with clear instructions:

- 'For advice on how to plan your journey, go to [www.highwaysengland.co.uk](http://www.highwaysengland.co.uk) and click on traffic information then Planning your journey.'

If the navigation to the page is too complicated to explain in a concise manner, always replace with a shortened URL (contact [digital.communications@highwaysengland.co.uk](mailto:digital.communications@highwaysengland.co.uk) to request this).

You should always place hyperlinks behind relevant text rather than using 'click here' or similar:

- ✓ 'For more information, visit our website.'
- ✗ 'Click here for more information'.

Always make sure that any web addresses and hyperlinks are accurate and work properly before publishing or sending your document.

# 5

Putting our tone of voice,  
essentials of writing and  
style together

# Putting our tone of voice, essentials of writing and style together

Good writing and speaking takes practice. But if you know who you're talking to, what you want to achieve and how you want people to think, then it's easier to choose your story, tone of voice and the language you want to use.

These top tips will help you with emails, letters, documents and reports, whether for internal or external audiences.





5.1

# Putting our tone of voice, essentials of writing and style together

## What people say – and what they mean

Interestingly, bad writing often requires a good vocabulary while it obscures and avoids accountability:	Good writing informs clearly and actively, often in half the words:
Gridlock occurred due to the failure of an electronically-adjusted, colour-coded vehicular flow system.	A traffic light failure caused gridlock.
A fourth quarter equity gain was experienced by the organisation.	The company made money in the fourth quarter.
Twenty employees have been undergoing a career alternative enhancement programme.	We have laid off 20 people.
Some passengers are temporarily deseated this afternoon because this train is heavily commuterised.	Some passengers heading for London will have to stand until local commuters get off at the next stop.
The company's working requirements have been upscaled pending the onboarding of further human resources.	Staff will have to work longer hours until we employ more people.
We have upcoming amendments for the adjacent non-motorised user scenarios in our scheme.	We will be changing the design of the pedestrian crossings and walkways that are part of our scheme.

## 5.2

# Putting our tone of voice, essentials of writing and style together

## Consider your audience

Is there unconscious bias in your writing, for example gender bias? Or do you need to appeal to a particular type of audience? Check out any gender bias in your writing by using the **Gender Decoder**.

## How good is your writing?

Jump into your audience's shoes, imagine what they want to hear, review your work, and consider how they would score it using this **Write-ometer**.

## Time to test yourself

How clear and simple is your writing? There are lots of ways you can check:

- Read what you've written out loud. Does it sound like you? If not, rewrite it so it is less formal
- Get a colleague to review what you've written
- Use your spell and grammar checkers
- Use the Gunning Fog Index at <http://gunning-fog-index.com>, which weights the average of the number of words per sentence, and the number of long words per word.

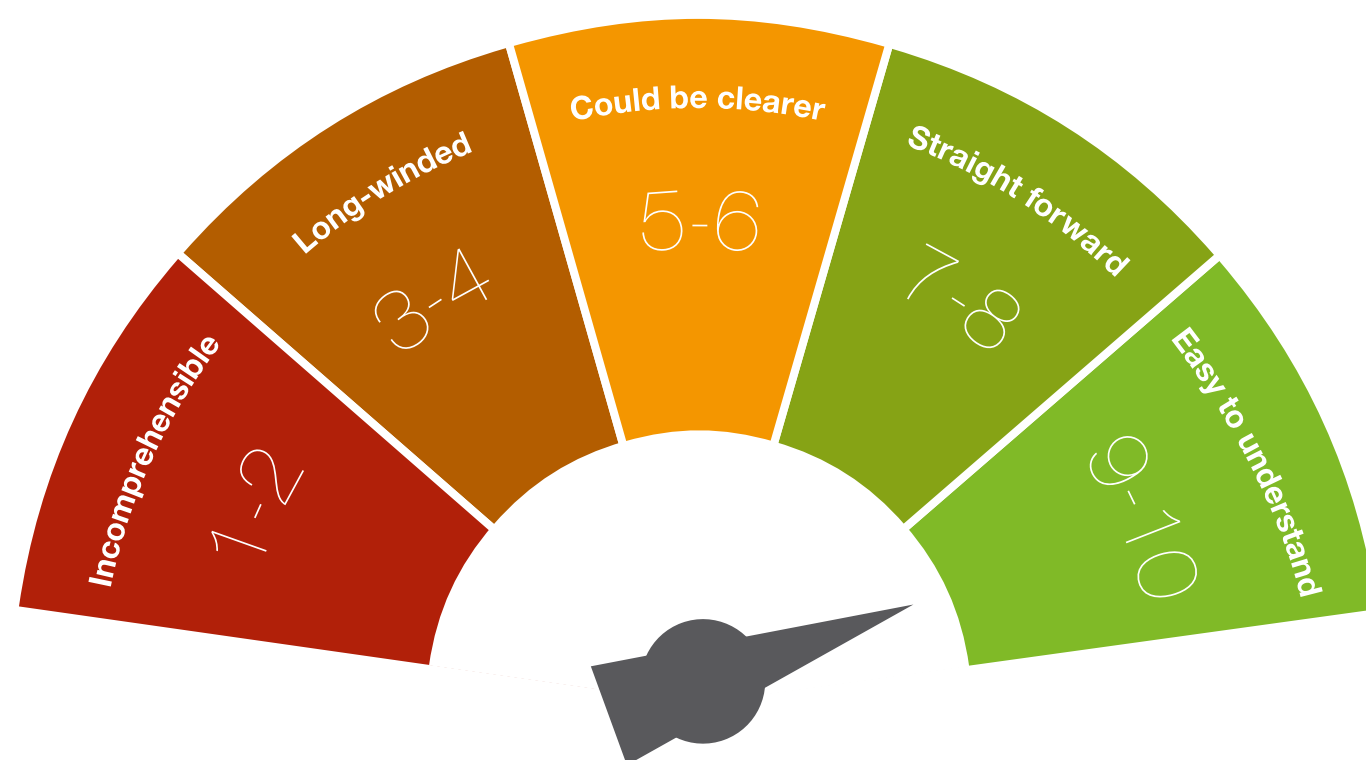
The index estimates how many years of formal education you need to understand a text on first reading. For instance, a fog index of 12 requires the reading level of an 18-year old doing A-levels. So texts for a well-educated audience generally need a score of 12 or less. Texts that need understanding by almost everyone need a score of less than eight. If your text is above these limits, simplify it. This paragraph has a score of nearly 11.

## Want to know more?

The Communications team is always on hand to help with any writing challenges you may be facing. Visit the team's intranet pages to find out the best person to speak to in the team. You'll also find examples of good and bad written communications on the intranet pages.

The Plain English Campaign website has lots of great resources for those wanting to finesse their writing.

*Eats Shoots & Leaves* by Lynn Truss – an excellent and amusing read on writing and grammar.



**What can you do to move up the scale?**

6

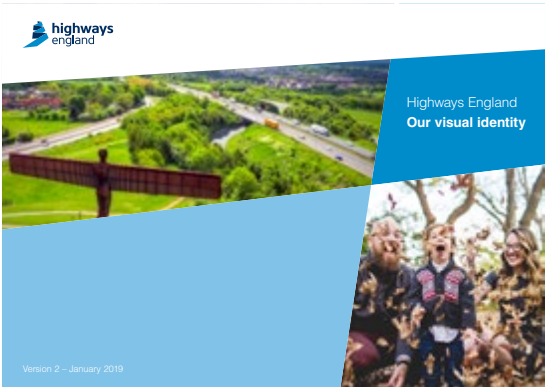
# Brand documents

6

# Brand documents

This is part of a suite of documents that form the brand guidelines of Highways England. They are separated into specific areas of branding and focus on that subject, offering guidance and information for you to ensure our brand is protected across multiple platforms and usages.

For the rest of these documents visit our page on the **intranet**.



## Visual identity

Comprehensive details on the visual identity.

**Main sections covered are:**

- Logo
- Design system and its applications
- Photography and video

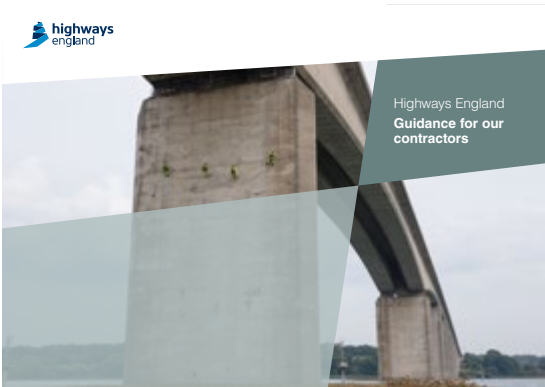


## Our social media

Focused information on how our visual identity is applied on digital formats.

**Main sections covered are:**

- Social media
- Design system and its applications
- Usage and commissioning process



## Guidance for contractors

This is our document for our supply chain, communicating our visual identity and the specific applications for them.

**Main sections covered are:**

- Logo
- Design system and its applications
- Site signage
- Additional information for our supply chain

Search from the intranet homepage...

tools and resources

▼ 🔍



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For an accessible version of this publication please call **0300 123 5000** and we will help you.

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