RSSB Style Guide 2014
Spelling and word use

If in doubt...

If the RSSB style guide does not cover a specific subject consult:
1. An RSSB communications specialist
3. The Economist Style Guide
5. Fowler's Modern English Usage

The RSSB Style Guide is presented in sections; these are:
- Writing style
- Punctuation
- Grammar
- Spelling and word use
- Notes, footnotes, endnotes, and bibliographies

Introduction

This section of the RSSB style guide includes information about commonly misspelled, misused, or overused words. This is presented in alphabetical order.

A

A, an

Use 'a' before all words beginning with a vowel, but use 'an' before a silent h, as in an honour. An should not be used in these examples: 'an hotel'; 'an historic' and 'an heroic'. You should also use 'an' before all abbreviations and acronyms that begin with a vowel sound.

All

When using ‘all’ in phrases where there is a ‘the’, there is no need to insert an ‘of’. For example, ‘all the locomotives’, not ‘all of the locomotives’.

It is always all right, never alright.
Alternate and alternative

Alternate means one and then the other.

Alternatives are options, previously only between two, but now acceptably between three or more items.

Amid, among

Not ‘amidst’ nor ‘amongst.’

And/but

Using ‘and’ or ‘but’ to start a sentence can emphasise a point. But don’t overdo it.

Annex/annexe

Historically the noun was spelled with an ‘e’ at the end, as in ‘the new station annexe’. Today, annex is an accepted spelling for both the noun and the verb, as in ‘to annex some land for building’.

Any more

This is always 2 words.

Appraise, apprise

Appraise means evaluate; apprise means inform.

Assure, ensure, insure

You assure your life; ensure means to make certain; you insure against risk.

B

Basically

This is greatly overworked word which rarely adds anything to a sentence. Always try to avoid it.

Basis

‘On a ... basis’ is a cliché and should be avoided. For ‘employment on a part-time basis’ say ‘part-time employment’.

(See Clichés)
Between/among

Between is used generally when there are two things or people, and among is used for larger groups.

For example, 'there was a disagreement between the drivers' would imply a personal argument, whereas 'a disagreement among the drivers' would imply that more than 2 were involved.

Bi-

This prefix means 2, not half. For example: bicentenary and bicentennial (a two-hundredth anniversary). 'Biennial' means every two years, whereas 'biannual' means twice a year. To avoid confusion, write out 'every 2 years', or 'twice a year'.

Bored

Bored with, not bored of.

Bus, buses

A bus or several buses, is spelt with one s. But the verb form takes two. For example, “the firm is bussing passengers”.

By

By-election is hyphenated, and so is by-product. Bylaw, bypass (either as a noun or verb) and bystander are not.

(see Hyphens in the Punctuation section)

C

Capitals (upper case)

Use capitals for specific titles or people. The Association of Train Operating Companies uses leading capitals, but if you then refer to it as the association, this is lower case.

As a quick guide, the times when a capital letter must be used are:

- Names of people, places, trade names and institutions
- Days of the week and months
- Calendar days, like Christmas or Good Friday
- Political parties, Bills, Acts of Parliament (but not government)
- Specific groups, such as the Emergency Services Liaison Group

Do not use capitals for general nouns, for example, when talking about local authorities. When referring to the government always
use a lower case g, but government departments, such as the Department of Health, should have leading capitals.

Use capitals for recognised and official place names, for example, North London, the North East.

AGM is in capitals, but “annual meeting” is better.

(See Abbreviations in the Writing style section; and Government departments, and Seasons in this section)

Census

Use a leading capital letter only when referring to a specific census, such as ‘the 1901 Census’ or ‘the 2001 Census’.

Circa

Latin, do not use.

Commence

Use simple words wherever possible. In this case ‘start’.

Compare with/to

‘Compare with’ is the most common usage and is used when differences or contrasts are the point, for example, ‘compared with last year’s figures’. Use ‘compare to’ for likenesses, such as, ‘Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day’.

Comprise

Something may comprise several smaller components. See Include/comprise

Compass points

Except in titles, use lower case for points of the compass, such as ‘south’ and ‘north’.

For points midway between the four main compass points, use a hyphen: ‘north-west’, 'south-east'.

When a compass point is part of a title, use an initial capital letter. For example: Virgin Trains West Coast or South Eastern Trains.
Complement/compliment

'Complement' is used in the sense of suiting something, for example, 'The station signs complement the paintwork' or in the sense of completing something, such as 'a full complement of staff'. 'Compliment' is used to denote praise or tribute; while complimentary means free, as complimentary cups of tea.

Counties

Spell out names except in lists or tables. Do not add -shire to Devon (except in Devonshire cream or the Duke of Devonshire), Dorset, Somerset. Irish counties should be as Co Donegal (cap “C”, no full stop); Co Durham takes the same style. Take great care with new, reorganised, or abolished counties.

D

Defuse/diffuse

'Defuse' means to remove the fuse from, or reduce tension in an emergency. Diffuse means to scatter.

Deliver/delivery

Deliver is a great word for babies, newspapers, and groceries. But in the hands of politicians and some companies it has become a dreadful cliché. Always try to think of an alternative; for example 'promises are kept', 'policies are implemented', 'public services are provided', and 'improvements are made'.

Despite

'Despite' is a good alternative for 'in spite of'. But do not say 'despite the fact that'; use although.

Different

Always use 'different from', never 'different to' or 'different than'. Also, it is always 'differ from'.

Discreet

Discreet means tactful, or circumspect (its noun is discretion); discrete means individually distinct (noun discreteness)
Disinterested

Disinterested means impartial, unbiased (noun disinterest). Do not confuse this word with uninterested, which means having a lack of interest.

Down

Avoid unnecessary use of this word after verbs, as in close down, shut down. (See up)

Drier/dryer

Drier is the comparative of dry; dryer is the noun, as in tumble dryer.

E

Each, every

Although singular, 'each' and 'every' are acceptable now with plural pronouns, as the plural is increasingly becoming a way of saying he or she, or his or her. Hence, 'everyone has what they want'.

Effect/affect

These two words are often confused. Effect is most common as a noun meaning a result or consequence – 'the new measures had no effect'. Affect is most common as a verb meaning to have an effect on – 'the new measures seriously affected us'.

Eldest/oldest

Both words mean the same, but eldest can only be used for people (for example, 'my eldest child and my oldest dog')

Elicit/illicit

'Elicit' means to evoke, bring to light, or draw out; never confuse with 'illicit' which means illegal.

Enquiry/inquiry

Use enquiry when dealing with passengers’ questions. Use inquiry for a formal investigation.

Enormity

'Enormity' does not mean great size; it means the quality or character of being outrageous; or extreme wickedness or serious error. For great size, use immensity.
Ever

'Ever' is rarely necessary; avoid phrases such as 'best-ever, fastest-ever', and say simply 'best' and 'fastest', possibly qualifying with 'yet'.

Never write first-ever.

F

Fact that

Avoid phrases like 'owing to the fact that'. 'Because' is much simpler.

Farther/further

'Farther' is used only in terms of distance (literal or figurative); for example, 'nothing could be farther from the truth'. Further means in addition to, for example, 'a further point'.

Fewer/less

'Fewer' is used in numbers (fewer people, fewer trains); 'less', is used in terms of size quantity, or singular nouns (less population, less food).

(See less)

Fitment

Fitment is a noun, not a verb.

Fortuitous

Fortuitous does not mean fortunate. It means by chance or accidental.

Fractions

When referring to a fraction in text you should write 'three-quarters', 'a third' (but, one-third), 'half', and so on. Use numbers in figures and tables. Do not mix fractions with decimals.

(See decimals)
Going forward, let's consign this inane phrase to history

Superfluous, meaningless but ubiquitous, it arrived from corporate America and now permeates every area of our lives

Barack Obama does it, David Cameron does it; film stars and advertising people do it; even national newspaper editors do it. But let's not do it. Going forward, let's not utter or write the superfluous, meaningless, ubiquitous "going forward".

It is impossible to get through a meeting today without being verbally assaulted by this inanity. And it nearly always is verbal; you have to be truly unthinking to commit it to paper. When I hear those two words it is my signal to switch off and think about something more interesting, such as Preston North End's prospects going forward. See how easy it is to lapse into this vacuousness.

It is sometimes deployed as an add-on – a kind of burp – at the end of a sentence; sometimes, as with "like" or "you know", it seems to serve as punctuation. But it is especially infuriating when used with the word plan. I heard somebody say a few days ago: "Going forward, the plan is … " How can a plan be about anything but the future? Planning the past would be a remarkable facility.

### House style

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<td>Working Group</td>
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</table>
I

Impacted

Avoid 'impacted on', try 'affected' instead.

Include/comprise

Do not confuse these two words. 'Comprise' is for complete lists, 'includes' just mentions some items in a list. For example, 'breakfast includes toast and coffee', while 'breakfast comprises cereals, toast, butter, marmalade and coffee'. Do not write 'comprises of'.

Infer/imply

Do not confuse 'infer' with 'imply'. 'To infer' is to draw a conclusion from a suggestion; 'to imply' is to make the suggestion.

In order to

Just say 'to'.

Invite

'Invite' is a verb; do not use as a substitute for invitation

J

Jargon

Avoid using jargon in your documents and instead substitute plain English that can be understood by audiences with no specialist knowledge of the subject. You will achieve clarity by using shorter sentences, simple words, and active rather than passive constructions.

(See Plain English)

K

k

Avoid as an expression for 1,000, except as part of a recognised abbreviation such as kVA, or kWh.

(See numbers and abbreviations)

Kilogram

It is not spelled kilogramme.
Kilometres per hour

The correct abbreviation is km/h rather than kph.

Kilowatt-hour

The correct abbreviation is kWh. The cost of generating electricity at a power station is usually expressed in pence per kilowatt-hour (2.9p/kWh).

L

Last/past

'Last' does not mean 'latest'. 'The last few days' means the final few days; 'the past few days' means the most recent few days.

Latin

Writing in plain English means avoiding obscure Latin (or Greek) words, especially Latin abbreviations, where you can. The following Latin abbreviations should be replaced with the full English version.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Latin</th>
<th>Plain English</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eg</td>
<td>for example:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ie</td>
<td>that is,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etc</td>
<td>and so on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>per annum</td>
<td>each year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pro forma</td>
<td>form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>via</td>
<td>through, by</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many everyday Latin words, such as criteria, data and memorandum are, of course, fine to use. Avoid Latin plurals, such as 'for a', 'consortia' and 'memoranda'. Just use the more common English form – 'forums', 'consortiums' and 'memorandums'. The singular of criteria is criterion.

(See also: Abbreviations)

Launch

A new scheme 'is launched'. Do not say, for example, 'the scheme launches today'.
Licence/license

Licence is the noun, as in driving licence. License is the verb, as in licensed premises.

(See also: practice/practice)

Like

Do not use 'like' instead of 'such as', for example, 'trains such as these are being used all over Europe'. Also, 'like' cannot be substituted for 'as if', for example 'the scheme looks as if it is succeeding', not 'it looks like it is succeeding'.

Locomotive names

These are italicised, as with ship or aircraft names, for example: 'Mallard'. Do not use 'the' unless you are certain it is part of the name.

M

Militate/mitigate

'Militate' means to work against; 'mitigate' means to lessen the effect of.

Minimal

Do not use this to mean 'small'; it means smallest, or the least possible.

Midnight/noon

The 24-hour clock is the RSSB preferred style. If referring to midnight or noon, use 00:00 or 12:00.

Motorways

Write, for example, 'the M1', not 'the M1 motorway'. A motorway junction should be styled, for example, 'Junction 6 of the M25'.
N
National

Do not use this in place of 'citizen' as in 'American national'.

New

This is often redundant. Try the sentence without it and see if it really adds any meaning; always omit in, for example, 'setting a new record'.

Normalcy

Use normality instead

Not only

This should be followed by 'but' (and usually) 'also'. However, it is generally preferable to say simply 'both ... and'

Now

Use now instead of 'at present' or 'at this time'. Don't use 'as of now' or 'going forward'.

(See Plain English)

O

Oblivious

The correct usage is 'oblivious of' not 'oblivious to'. It means forgetful of, or unaware of. It does not mean ignorant or uncomprehending.

Ongoing

Avoid this word, use 'continuing' instead.

P

Past tense

Use the shorter form, with the final 't', for example 'spelt', not 'spelled', or 'dreamt' not 'dreamed'. But it is always 'earned', not 'earnt'.
Percentages

Use the % symbol rather than ‘per cent’; so, 20%.

Do not write ‘%age’ in place of ‘percentage’. Don’t use percentage as a substitute for ‘many’ as in, ‘a large percentage of people’; write ‘many people’, or ‘a lot of’.

(see Numbers)

Plus and minus

Don’t use these as a substitute for ‘and’ or ‘without’.

The plurals are ‘pluses’ and ‘minuses’.

Populist/popular

These do not mean the same thing. Populist means supporting the interest of ordinary people, or pandering to mass public taste.

Possibly

This word can usually be left out.

Potters Bar

There is no apostrophe. Location of fatal train crash on 10 May, 2002.

Practice/practise

‘Practice’ is the noun, as in a doctor’s practice. ‘Practise’ is the verb as in ‘he practised every day’.

(See licence/license)

Premise/premises

A ‘premise’ is an assumption in an argument; ‘premises’ are property and are always in the plural.

Presently

Presently means soon, not ‘at present’.

Prestigious

This word is overworked; try to avoid it. Use substitutes such as highly regarded, admired, eminent, esteemed, leading, noted, outstanding, powerful.
Principal/principle

Principal means chief, main, important; for example 'the principal of a school', or 'the board's principal objective'. 'Principle', means a concept, ideal, rule, or moral, as in 'his strong principles'.

Prior to

Use 'before'.

Private sector/public sector

These are not hyphenated even when used as adjectives, for example public sector works.

(see hyphens)

Program/programme

A program is used in computers; a programme is used in the arts or on TV.

Q

Quango

There is no need to spell this out. It is short for quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation.

(See abbreviations)

Queueing

Don't omit the middle 'e'

Questionnaire

Spelling.

Quicker

Use 'more quickly', unless you are using it as an adjective, such as 'the board chose a quicker route'.

Ranging from

Use this phrase only when you have a scale in which the elements are ranged: 'ranging from 15 to 25 years' is correct, 'passengers ranging from businessmen to tourists' is not.

Re-

Whenever possible, run this on to the word it qualifies, for example readmission, remake, rework.

There are two main exceptions:

Where the word after re- begins with an 'e', such as re-election, re-emerge, re-examine, re-enter.

Where there could be ambiguity such as:

- Re-creation (to create again) or recreation (things done as leisure activities)
- Re-cover (to cover again) or recover (get better)
- Re-dress (put on clothes again) or redress (to adjust or make more even)
- Re-form (to shape again) or reform (change).

(See also Hyphens in the Punctuation section)

Register office

Not registry office. Registers are kept at the National Archives.

Research

Do not say that research shows... in most cases it merely indicates, suggests, hints at, or implies.

Respect of

Avoid this phrase where possible and never use 'in respect to'.

Result in

Avoid. Try instead to use: cause, bring, create, evoke, lead to.

Run-down/rundown/run down

'Run-down' (adjective) means decaying or exhausted; 'rundown' (noun) is a briefing; and 'to run down' (verb) means to insult or run over (often with a vehicle).
Sat

Sat is the past tense and the past participle of 'to sit'. Never write that somebody 'was sat' in a train, write 'was seated' or 'was sitting'.

Scientific measures

Write out the measure at first use, with the abbreviation in brackets. Then refer to in its short form. The abbreviation takes no point and no 's' in the plural; for example: 14km, not 14kms.

Some basic international units and their abbreviations are: metre (m); gram (g); litre (l); ampere (A); volt (V); watt (W); note also kilowatt-hour (kWh). Only abbreviate mile to m in mph and mpg; and gallon to g in mpg (otherwise gal). Beware of using m for million or for miles in any scientific context when it might be taken for metres.

Seasons

These are generally lower case, unless they become attached to a title, for example, Winter Olympics etc. Note that it is 'summertime', 'wintertime', 'springtime', but British Summer Time (BST), and Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).

(See Capitals and Dates)

Shall/should

Good practice is that 'shall' and 'should' go with the first person singular and plural (I shall, we shall), 'will' and 'would' with the others ('he will', 'they will'). 'Shall' with second and third person singular and plural ('you' and 'they') has a slightly more emphatic meaning than 'will'.

Also consider that 'shall' and 'will' are used to indicate that something is mandatory. 'Should' and 'would' suggest that something may be permissive or optional.

Singular/plural

Generally speaking this is an issue of choice, but one that you should apply consistently. Technically, 'data are', 'none was', 'the board is' and the 'government is' are correct. 'None' is a contraction of 'not one'.

Majority and minority can be 'is' or 'are' depending on the sense. In certain contexts the 'public is'; but although correct, can sound
awkward. Try turning the construction around, for example, 'members of the public are'.

**Slam-door train**

Is hyphenated.

**Stations**

Keep 'station' lower case when referring to places such as Euston station, Waterloo station, Birmingham New Street station, and but where possible, simply use Euston, Waterloo and so on.

**T**

**T&G**

The T&G, formerly the TGWU is the Transport and General Workers' Union (now with an apostrophe).

**That**

Use this word after verbs such as said, denied, claimed. 'The board decreed that the safety measures should be implemented', is more elegant than 'The board decreed the safety measures should be implemented'.

It is almost always better to use 'that' instead of 'which' in a defining clause, for example, 'the train that was derailed began at Euston'.

As a general rule, use which for descriptive clauses and place it between commas. For example: 'the night train, which used to carry newspapers, stops at Crewe'.

Also, 'which' tends to be preceded by a comma whereas 'that' does not.

(See Which)

**They**

This should always agree with the subject. Avoid sentences such as 'If someone likes old trains they should preserve them.' Say instead 'If people like old trains they should preserve them.'

**Together with**

Just use 'with'.

Avoid tautologies such as 'blend together', 'meet together', 'link together'.

**Transpire**

This means to come to light, to become known, to leak out, or to exhale. Also now used as an alternative of to happen or occur.

**Try to**

The verb 'try' must be followed by 'to' before the next verb, never by 'and'. For example, 'I will try to cross the road', not 'I will try and cross the road.'

**Tube**

You can use this on its own when referring to the London Underground. Remember to use capital letters for the various lines, such as: Central Line, Metropolitan Line, Victoria Line.

**U**

**UK**

Be careful of this abbreviation for United Kingdom. The United Kingdom comprises Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Britain or Great Britain consists of England, Wales, Scotland and islands governed from the mainland (not the Isle of Man or Channel Islands). The British Isles is a geographical area that includes the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, the Isle of Man, and Channel Islands.

**Unique**

This means only one, having no like or equal. Describing something as 'quite unique', 'very unique', or 'even more unique' is nonsense.

**V**

**Various**

Do not use this as a pronoun, as in 'various of the passengers protested'; write 'several [or many] of the passengers ...'
Viable

Do not use to mean feasible or practicable; it means capable of independent existence.

W

Which or that

(See That).

Who and which

Organisations and teams are 'which', individual people are 'who'.

Worse/worst

Worse = when comparing between only two.
Worst = when comparing more than two.

X

Y

Z