Introduction

This top tips list is based on most frequently observed issues that need correction to meet good practice and what the RSSB Style Guide asks.

Abbreviations

- If some of your target audience may not be familiar with an abbreviation, at first use, spell out the words in full first, followed by the abbreviation in brackets.
- Do not include the abbreviation in a heading.
- Do not include the abbreviation if the term is not used again.
- Words to be abbreviated should not be capitalised unless they are proper nouns; for example, signal passed at danger (SPAD), Safety Management Information System (SMIS).
- Do not use Latin abbreviations such as ie, eg, etc, or NB.

Apostrophes

- Pronouns don’t have apostrophes (his, hers, its, theirs, yours).
- It's is a contraction of it is and it has.
- Do not use apostrophes in plurals for example, SPADs, 1980s, TOCs.

Bulleted lists

- Introduce a list with a colon (not colon and dash).
- Bulleted lists should (ideally) contain at least 3 items.
- List items start with a capital letter.
- Short list items have no punctuation. If a list item contains a verb it constitutes a sentence and takes a full stop.
- Be consistent with punctuation. If one item in a list takes a full stop all items in that list should have one.
- See Lists in the Writing style section for more details about how to use bulleted lists.

Capitals

- Keep capitals to a minimum, only use them for proper nouns.
- Do not use for diesel multiple unit, rail industry, train operator, infrastructure controller, or job titles (except as part of a signature in a letter, or when it comes immediately before the name of the person in that post).
- Just because an abbreviation uses capital letters is not a reason to capitalise the first letters of the words.
- For more details see Capitals in the Spelling and word use section.
Figures and tables

When referring to figures and tables (and sections of a document) using their identifying number, the words Figure and Table should have a leading capital letter. Please also use the title or description of the figure or table. Each title or description should be unique within the information you provide to RSSB.

For example: (see Figure 7, Class 70 locomotive hauling coal near Sankeys Bridge)

Do not refer to figures or tables as ‘above’ or ‘below’. We may reuse them in other information where the relative position may change, and we only want to keep one version of your text.

Figures and tables should each be numbered consecutively throughout a document. Numbering must not restart with each new section in a document. For example: Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3; not Figure 1-1, Figure 1-2, Figure 2-1.

Numbers

- Numbers should be written using Arabic numerals, except at the beginning of a sentence where words should be used.
- In the case of large numbers, try to write the sentence so that the numbers do not appear at the start.

Minimalism

Write only as many words as you need to convey the essential message.

For instance, in the phrase ‘stopping at a red light’ the word red is critical to the meaning. But the phrase ‘taking effective action’, for example, is woolly. The word effective is not needed. Just write ‘take action’, and then give details. Similarly, the phrase ‘relatively useless’ should be simply ‘useless’. And how little is ‘comparatively little’?

'At the present moment in time' means the same as 'now'.

It is important to note that... No it isn't, at RSSB we only publish information that is important. You shouldn't need to use this phrase.

The conclusions that we can draw from this are: Not ...are as follows:
Plain English

Use easy words to describe things. For example:

- Start a project rather than commence it
- Make rather than manufacture
- Get rather than obtain
- Need rather than require (only laws and regulations require)

Don’t make up words or use them in the wrong way. For example:

Fitment is a noun, not a verb.

References to other documents

Please use the Harvard (name date) system. See the Notes, footnotes, endnotes, and bibliographies section of the Style Guide.

Speech marks

- Always use single quotation marks.
- Double quotation marks should only be used for quotes within a quote.
- Do not use speech marks around defined terms or document titles that appear in italics.

Templates

If a Word template exists for the type of document that you are writing, use it. It will save time for you and your colleagues. Do not change the paragraph formats included in the template.

Word templates exist for:

- Letters, memos, faxes and e-letters
- Meeting papers, agendas, and minutes
- A4 documents
- Booklets – A5 and A6

You can find the RSSB Word templates in Word on the RSSB installation, or on the RSSB writing and templates web page.

There is also a standard RSSB template for Powerpoint presentations. You can find this in the the Powerpoint program under File > New > My Templates.
Typefaces and typography

• Always use approved corporate typefaces.
• Do not underline text.
• Use italics for references to other documents, for cross-references to other sections of the same document, and for defined terms when used with that meaning. Do this using the Emphasis style, not the in-line formatting button.
• Use bold sparingly to draw attention to words or phrases. Do this using the Bold style, not the in-line formatting button.
• Use the Heading formats in a template consistently. They are designed to show readers where they are within the hierarchy of a document.
• Don't switch between numbered and un-numbered headings, and don't use bold to create the appearance of a heading.