RSSB style guide 2015: top tips

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. If you don’t follow these guidelines your document will be returned for editing.

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 if they are long, or comprise more than one sentence
- Have no punctuation at the end, even if they comprise more than one sentence

If your list items contain verbs, would they be better written as standalone paragraphs?

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. For example: names of groups, committees, organisations, and place names. For document titles you should use upper case leads on the first word and all others, except for articles, conjunctions, and prepositions. As examples:

- Platform Train Interface Strategy
- Guidance on the Preparation and Use of Company Risk Assessment Profiles for Transport Operators

Please use sentence case for project titles, document headings and subheadings.

Do not use for diesel multiple unit, rail industry, train operator, train operating company, 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 example: European Rail Traffic Management System and Safety Management Information System, but ‘automatic vehicle identification’ and ‘safety management system’.

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, Table, and Section 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.

Figure and table titles should be placed above the figure or table, not below.
Numbers

All numbers up to ten should be written as words. From 11 up, use 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.

There are exceptions to the 1-10 rule; for example in number ranges. All numbers relating to units of measurement should use figures not words; also compound adjectives. So

- Three trains
- 3-car DMU
- 4 metres
- 4-fold

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:

Although in common usage in the industry, ‘fitment’ is a noun, not a verb.
Don’t use Latin abbreviations or words, such as: i.e., e.g., etc., N.B., per annum, or inter alia. You may use et al in Harvard system references to other publications.

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 (RSSB system only)
- Meeting papers, agendas, and minutes (RSSB system only)
- A4 documents: with plain headings, outline numbered headings, and appendices with numbered headings

If you work within RSSB, you can find the templates for RSSB documents in Word on the RSSB installation. Those for writing content that RSSB will publish are also on the RSSB writing and templates web page.

There is also a standard RSSB template for PowerPoint presentations. You can find this in the PowerPoint program under File > New > PERSONAL.

Typefaces and typography

- Always use approved corporate typefaces (Calibri)
- Do not underline text
- Use italics for references to other documents, for cross-references to other sections of the same document (but do not insert automatic cross-references), 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

• If you want to use the template with outline numbered headings, for your executive summary, foreword, glossaries and lists of abbreviations, please use the _SectionTitle paragraph format as a heading, not Heading1. In RSSB publications the executive summary and glossaries are placed before the table of contents, and are not numbered. Using Heading1 for these will make any cross-references to other sections of your document wrong.