

**Brand identity guidelines**

Module two: House style and plain English

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## INTRODUCTION

**The house style**

A house style is a set of guidelines you should use when writing and designing internal and external communications for an organisation. It covers the phrasing, punctuation, spelling and capitalisation of frequently used words and phrases.

Many words and phrases can be written in different ways. By using a house style, we ensure that all of our communications are consistent and that we avoid as much as possible using jargon or terminology that feels exclusive or unclear to other people.

Using a house style helps to ensure that we project ourselves as an accessible, inclusive and contemporary organisation.

**Using the house style**

You should use these guidelines when writing any communication as part of your work for Arts Council England.

This may include:

* letters and emails (both internal and external)
* print publications
* web copy
* material for One Place
* presentations
* event materials
* press releases
* news stories
* social media/blogs

If you get into the habit of writing in house style, then it’ll just be part of how you communicate at work across all platforms.**External suppliers**

Please give these house style guidelines to any external consultants, writers, editors, designers or web developers working for the Arts Council. Use of the house style is one of the standard terms for our supplier contracts, so if necessary you are entitled to hold a supplier to it. All designers should also follow module one of the *Brand Identity Guidelines*, which covers fonts, colour palette, etc.

Both modules are available on One Place, from the marketing and events team, or from brandidentity@artscouncil.org.uk.

## PLAIN ENGLISH GUIDANCE

**Plain English**

At the Arts Council, we follow the principles of the Plain English Campaign. We believe that communications should be clear and concise, with as little jargon as possible.

You should strive to avoid formal or complex language, as well as excessive use of acronyms or abbreviations. This means the widest possible audience can understand our messages and mission.

**Sentence length**

The key to producing clear texts is often the way you write, rather than what you write about. Sentence length is an extremely important part of this.

Sentences like this one, that run for several lines, with several clauses (and asides including brackets), are not easy for people with reading difficulties.

Keep your sentences to one or two clauses. Where you would usually put a comma or semicolon, try a full stop. If possible, stick to one main point per sentence.

Shorter paragraphs are easier to read, so insert line breaks often.

**Choice of words**

Don’t be afraid to use simple words. For instance, you can repeat ‘said’ rather than using ‘stated’, ‘revealed’, ‘declared’, ‘claimed’, etc.

In general, the ‘active voice’ is easier to understand. So rather than saying ‘This action plan was put in place’, use the phrase ‘We put an action plan in place’.

**Addressing organisations**

If you’re writing to or for artists and organisations, address them directly. For example, ‘Please consider how an action plan could help you’ or ‘You may find an action plan helpful’, rather than ‘Artists may benefit from having an action plan’.

**Confidence**

As a champion, developer and investor in arts and culture, there are times when we need to give a clear direction or response. Our tone needs to be as confident as our message. Tips to reflect this confidence in your writing tone:

* refer to any work as having been done by the Arts Council as a whole – don’t attribute work to particular departments, teams or individuals. The exception would be if you’re discussing a regional initiative.
* phrase sentences in the active voice – this makes it clear who is doing the action, e.g. ‘The musician played the piano’ rather than ‘The piano was played by the musician’ (passive)
* don’t turn verbs into longer, unnecessary, noun phrases, e.g. ‘We arranged’ rather than ‘We made arrangements for…’
* praise the art and activities we fund, but don’t gush – we should sound calm and credible

## STYLE NOTES

**Dates**

* Day: 1 June 2015 (day month year; no commas). If the day of the week is especially important, then include it in the format Monday 1 June 2015.
* Decade: 1990s; the 80s
* Century: The 21st century
* Specific period of time: 2008–9
* Financial year: 2006/07
* Season: autumn 2008 (should be lower case)

**Times**

Specific time: 9am;6.30pm. Leave out full stops, spaces and unnecessary zeros. Do not use ‘o’clock’ or the 24-hour clock.

**Numbers**

* Zero to nine: Write out as words
* 10+: Write out as numbers, e.g. 237

Exceptions:

* Measurements: £3; 3cm; page 6
* Ranges: 5-14
* Tables or figures
* Stages in education: year 5; Key Stage 1

Ordinal numbers:

* One to 20: Write out in full, e.g. first; eleventh
* 20+: Use numbers, e.g. 21st

Other notes:

* Write out in full any number that starts a sentence
* Commas in thousands: 1,000
* 3.5 million; not 3½ million
* Fractions: Write out simple ones (e.g. two-thirds) but use numbers for more complicated fractions (e.g. 3/7)
* Percentages: 10 per cent (spelt out); unless presenting a lot of data (e.g. in tables or spreadsheets)

**Money**

* £ and p not pounds and pence
* £1 not £1.00
* 99p not £0.99
* £2.5 million not £2,500,000 or £2.5m
* Commas in thousands: £1,000
* 1 billion is defined as one thousand million
* Non-sterling units: Write out in full in body (e.g. yen) but use symbols in tables or captions (e.g. ¥)
* Dollars: assumed to be US unless otherwise stated (e.g. NZ$10)

We follow the **Guardian style guide**. Go to [www.theguardian.com/styleguide](http://www.theguardian.com/styleguide) if you need guidance on a point of style or formatting not listed here.

**Titles**

Where possible, copy the capitalisation of the original title. Use italics for titles of the following when they appear in full (you do *not* need to italicise later abbreviations):

* albums
* artworks
* books
* exhibitions
* films
* newspapers
* performances
* plays
* radio shows
* TV programmes

See the next page for guidance on referring to Arts Council publications.

**Lists**

Introduce bulleted lists with a colon, begin each new bullet in lowercase and do not put full stops at the end of each point (see above for example).

**Oblique**

Otherwise known as a forward slash, used in phrases like he/she. You may use these to save space within a table, but otherwise you should write the phrase out in full (e.g. ‘he or she’).

**Quote marks**

For quotes, use double quote marks. Single quote marks should only be used for a quote within a quote.

When quoting a large passage, don’t use quote marks but instead indent the text and attribute where the passage came from, e.g.:

The report emphasised that:

Arts and sport, cultural and recreational activity, can contribute to neighbourhood renewal and make a real difference to health, crime, employment and education in deprived communities. (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1999, page 8)

## WRITING ABOUT THE ARTS COUNCIL

**Our name**

Where possible, you should refer to our organisation as “the Arts Council”.

Our legal name is ‘the Arts Council of England’ – this must be used in legal, financial or contractual documents. Please contact the legal services staff for guidance.

Do *not* use “the Council” (this refers to our national governing body).

The abbreviation “ACE” is used by many people, both internally and externally. The issue is that a lot of people outside our staff and immediate contacts will not know what this means. Use of this abbreviation creates an impression of exclusivity and can act as a barrier to clear communications.

Across all communications, use the acronym very sparingly and only when absolutely necessary – for example, if space is very short. In all cases “Arts Council” must be written out in full first, with the abbreviation in brackets after it. Only use it when you’re certain that the intended audience knows what it stands for.

You should refer to the Arts Council as ‘we’, not ‘it’ – this creates a more approachable, friendly tone.

**Publications and initiatives**

The titles of Arts Council publications or initiatives should be italicised and each word capitalised, aside from connecting words and prepositions like ‘and’, ‘the’, ‘in’, ‘for’, etc. See section titled ‘commonly used terms’ for guidance on specific terms.

**Abbreviations and acronyms**

Try to avoid abbreviations and acronyms, as they can be confusing – especially if your reader is not familiar with the Arts Council.

In general, abbreviations are more acceptable for use in internal documents that will only be seen by Arts Council employees and other close partners.

If space is short and you must abbreviate, you should write the term out in full first, with the abbreviation or acronym in brackets after it. You may then use the abbreviation for subsequent references, e.g.

‘*Grants for the Arts* (GFTA) is our open application funding programme. To find out if you are eligible to apply for GFTA…’

**Commonly used terms**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Spelling or phrasing** | **Notes** |
| Accredited museum(s) | Uppercase ‘A’, lowercase ‘m’ |
| Annual Review | Capitalised when referring to our Annual Review document and accounts; not capitalised when referring to the yearly assessment of a National Portfolio Organisation |
| Archive Service Accreditation | Capitalised |
| art, the arts | Lowercase |
| artform | For simplicity keep this as one word, with no hyphen |
| Arts Award | Two words |
| Artsmark | One word |
| Black and minority ethnic | Always use in full; never abbreviate to ‘BAME’. ‘Black’ should always be capitalised (e.g. ‘a Black person’), while ‘white’ should be lower case |
| Bridge organisations | Uppercase ‘B’, lowercase ‘o’ |
| Comprehensive spending review | Do not use the abbreviation ‘CSR’, as this can be confused with ‘corporate social responsibility’. |
| Creative Employment Programme | Capitalised |
| Department for Culture, Media and Sport | Capitalised; abbreviation: ‘DCMS’ |
| Department for Education | Abbreviation: ‘DfE’ |
| the Freedom of Information Act, freedom of information | Capitalise the title of the act, but use lowercase when referring to the concept |
| Grants for the Arts | Abbreviation: ‘GFTA’ |
| Grant-in-Aid | Only use to make the distinction between the different types of funding we receive. For most purposes, rephrase to ‘our direct grant from the government’. Abbreviation: ‘GIA’ |
| Great art and culture for everyone | Not capitalised if referring to our mission statement; capitalised if referring to the title of the publication |
| Major Partner Museum | Abbreviation: ‘MPM’ |
| the National Lottery, the Lottery | Always use the full term in the first instance. If necessary, you may use the shorter term subsequently (always capitalise) |
| National Portfolio Organisation | Abbreviation: ‘NPO’ |
| One Place | Two words; capitalised. If using in an external document, explain that this is our intranet |
| performing arts | Lowercase |
| race equality scheme | Lowercase |
| showcase | One word |
| The Space | Capitalised (thespace.org) |
| strategic funding | An umbrella term that may apply to multiple different funding streams. It should not be capitalised, as it’s not the name of a specific project |

## ACRONYMS

Some acronyms you may find within Arts Council communications are listed below. As previously mentioned, you should only use an acronym if you’re certain that your audience is familiar with it. Even then, it is best practice to write out the full term in the first instance, followed by the acronym in brackets. You can then use just the acronym for subsequent references.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Acronym** | **Full phrase** |
| AELCU | Acquisitions, Exports, Loans and Collections Unit |
| ALG | Area Leadership Group |
| AMT | Area Management Team |
| CSR | Comprehensive Spending Review |
| CYP | Children and young people |
| DCMS | Department for Culture Media and Sport |
| DfE | Department for Education |
| EB | Executive Board |
| GFTA | Grants for the Arts |
| GIA | Grant in aid |
| HLF | Heritage Lottery Fund |
| L&D | Learning and development |
| LJCNC | Local joint consultative and negotiating committee |
| MPM | Major partner museum |
| NAT | National |
| NLG | National Leadership Group |
| NPO | National Portfolio Organisation |
| PI | Arts planning and investment |
| PMR | Performance Management Review |
| RM | Relationship Manager |
| SMO | Senior Manager, Operations |
| SMT | Senior Management Team |

## REFERRING TO PEOPLE

**Gendered pronouns**

Where possible, strive to use gender-inclusive language. In most cases it’s possible to replace gendered pronouns (‘he’ and ‘she’) with ‘they’. If your sentence reads awkwardly, try one of these rephrasing techniques:

* make the whole sentence plural, e.g. ‘Artists take up their residencies in the spring’, not ‘The artist takes up his residency’
* make the pronoun plural, e.g. ‘The artist takes up their residency’
* repeat a profession or title, e.g. ‘If an artist wants to…, the artist should contact’
* rephrase other parts of the sentence, e.g. ‘A promoter needs protection from…’ rather than ‘A promoter needs to protect himself from…’

**Titles**

It’s not necessary to use full stops in contractions like ‘Dr’ or ‘Mr’. If you’re unsure of a woman’s preference for her title, use ‘Ms’.

When giving a person’s specific job title, where possible find out the correct title from the person or their organisation. When referring to a job title in general, without reference to a specific person, always use inclusive terms:

* remove the gendered portion of the title (e.g. ‘chair’ instead of ‘chairman’)
* replace -man with -person (e.g. ‘spokesperson’ instead of ‘spokesman’)
* use an alternative title (e.g. ‘flight attendant’ instead of ‘steward’ or ‘stewardess’)
* choose a more specific title (e.g. ‘potter’ or ‘weaver’ instead of ‘craftsman’)
* always use ‘actor’ rather than ‘actress’, unless the person expresses a wish otherwise

**Age**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Phrase** | **Description** |
| underfives | 0-4 |
| early years | 0-6 |
| children | 0-17 |
| pupils | Children attending primary school |
| students | Children attending secondary school |
| young people | 0-25 |
| youth | Only to be used as an adjective, not a noun |
| adults | For general use |
| vulnerable adults | People who need (or may need) community care services because of mental disability, other disability, age or illness, and who are (or may be) unable to take care of themselves or protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation. |
| parent, carer or guardian | Use all three words where relevant, not just ‘parent’ |

## EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Any reference to race, ethnicity, faith, disability, sexuality, class and economic disadvantage should be respectful and knowledgeable.

**Disability**

The definition of “disability” under The Equality Act 2010 is if a person has:

* A physical or mental impairment
* The impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to perform normal day-to-day activities

Among others, the Equality Act covers people who have diabetes, multiple sclerosis, people living with HIV and AIDS, learning disabled people, survivors of the mental health system; people with heart conditions; people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment (this is not an exhaustive list). Many people have rights under the Act but they may not refer to themselves as disabled.

The former Disability Rights Commission established that:

Disabled people do not have the same opportunities or choices as non-disabled people. Nor do they enjoy equal respect or full inclusion in society on an equal basis. The poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by many disabled people are not the inevitable result of their impairments or medical conditions, but rather stem from attitudinal and environmental barriers. This is known as “the social model of disability” and provides a basis for the successful implementation of the duty to promote disability equality. (Disability Rights Commission, *Statutory Code of Practice*, paragraph 1.6)

We use the term “disabled people”, not “people with disabilities”, in line with the social model of disability which locates the discrimination in the barriers created by society – physical, financial, social and psychological.

Disabled people are not a homogenous group. They include people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered men and women. Disabled people also have a diversity of impairments and will experience discrimination differently. Half of all disabled people are over 60 and all disabled people are at a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion.

If it’s necessary to specify the nature of the impairment, use accurate wording. For example, many more people have visual impairments than are registered as blind. When stating someone’s impairment use person-focused wording, eg “someone with epilepsy” not “an epileptic”.

**Note on the word “deaf”:**

In general publications, it is fine to use “deaf” with a lower case ‘d’. However in specialist disability publications, we must follow the request of this sector to differentiate between “deaf” and “Deaf”.

Include this explanation as a footnote where appropriate: “The use of a capital “D” in Deaf refers to those born Deaf or deafened in early or late childhood. Their primary experience is using sign language and being part of the communities and culture of the Deaf collective.”

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Do *not* use** | **Replace with** |
| Disabled toilet | Accessible toilet |
| The blind | Blind people; visually impaired people |
| Dumb | Without speech |
| Deaf and dumb | Deaf without speech |
| People with disabilities | Disabled people |
| The disabled |
| Cripples |
| Invalids |
| Special needs | Access requirements; reasonable adjustments |
| Condition | Impairment |
| Problem |
| Able-bodied | Non-disabled |
| People suffering from / afflicted by … | People with [specific impairment]; people who have [specific impairment] |
| Victims of … |
| Mentally handicapped | Learning disabled people; people with learning disabilities |
| Psycho; lunatic; nutter; schizo | A person with a mental health impairment |
| A schizophrenic; a depressive | A person with a diagnosis of [impairment]; currently experiencing [impairment]; are being treated for [impairment] |
| A person suffering from; a sufferer | A person with |
| The mentally ill | Mental health patients; people with mental health impairments |
| Prisoners or inmates (of a psychiatric hospital) | Patients; service users; clients |
| Released (from hospital) | Discharged |
| Physically handicapped | Physical impairment; mobility impairment |
| Dwarf; midget | Person of restricted growth / height |
| Wheelchair-bound; confined to a wheelchair; in a wheelchair | Wheelchair user; person who uses a wheelchair |

**Other common misuses:**

* Don’t use the names of mental health conditions as descriptors, e.g. describing something that has two contrasting sides as ‘bipolar’ or something with many different elements as ‘schizophrenic’
* Someone who is angry is not ‘psychotic’
* A person who is unhappy is not the same as someone experiencing clinical depression

**Race and ethnic background**

When describing groups of people, consider what type of labels you’re using and whether they’re consistent. For example, to refer to “Black and Muslim people” would be to compare a grouping based on race and ethnicity (Black) with one of religion and community (Muslim).

**Asian:**

* A very general term, so be more specific if relevant and helpful, e.g. South Asian, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Sri Lankan, Burmese, Afghan, Malaysian…

**Black:**

* Be more specific if relevant and helpful, e.g. African Caribbean
* Black should always be written in uppercase, e.g. a Black person, and white should be lowercase
* Not acceptable as a noun but acceptable as an adjective. Don’t say “a Black” or “Blacks” when referring to people

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Do *not* use** | **Replace with** |
| BME | Black and minority ethnic |
| Coloureds; coloured people | People of colour (if that’s the preference of the group) |
| Community languages | The specific language name (every language is a community language) |
| Gypsies | Travellers; Roma (whichever the group uses) |
| Ethnic minority | Use the specific name of the group (though ‘minority ethnic’ is acceptable as an adjective) |
| Non-whites, non-Blacks, non-Asians |  |
| Mixed race | Dual heritage; from more than one ethnic group |

**Gender / sexuality**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Phrase** | **Notes** |
| Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender | Acceptable as adjectives, but not as nouns. Don’t say ‘a gay’ or ‘the lesbians’. |
| LGBT | Common abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. Where possible, do not use this but name whichever of the four groups are relevant. |
| Queer | Some artists refer to themselves as queer rather than using gay or lesbian to distance themselves from more mainstream LGBT ideologies and thinking. Don’t use it unless the artist had previously referred to themselves in this way. |
| Transgender | Describes the general case of a person adopting clothing, appearance or lifestyle of a different gender than that assigned to them at birth. The term embraces many different variations of gender. |
| Hermaphrodism; intersexuality | Where a person’s physiological sex is ambiguous or dual |
| Gender identity | One’s personal sense of being a man or woman  (boy or girl) |
| Gender expression | External manifestation of gender identity, usually  expressed through “masculine”, “feminine” or  gender-variant behaviour, clothing, haircut, voice or  body characteristics |
| Sexual orientation | Describes an individual’s enduring physical, romantic  and/or emotional attraction to another person. Not the same as gender identity. |
| Cross dressing | To occasionally wear clothes traditionally associated with people of the other sex. Cross dressers are usually comfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth and do not wish to change it. Should not be used to describe someone who has transitioned to live full time as the other sex (or who intends to do so in the future). |
| Transition | Altering one’s birth sex is not a one-step process: it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition includes some or all of the following personal, legal and medical adjustments: telling family, friends and /or co-workers; changing name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more forms of surgery. |
| Transgender woman | A person born male and transitioning to female |
| Transgender man | A person born female and transitioning to male |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Don’t say** | **Replace with** |
| Transgenders; a transgender | Transgender people / person |
| Transgendered | Transgender |
| Sex change; pre-operative; post-operative | Transition; transitioning |

Other terms considered defamatory:

* Deceptive, fooling, pretending, posing, masquerading or trapping
* She-male, he-she, it, tranny, shim, gender-bender
* Bathroom Bill

Also remember:

* Always use the chosen name of the individual
* Where possible, ask the individual what gender pronoun they would like you to use
* If it’s not possible to ask, use the pronoun that is consistent with the person’s appearance and gender expression
* It is usually best to report on transgender people’s stories from the present day instead of narrating them from another point, thus avoiding confusion and potentially disrespectful use of incorrect pronouns.

## QUOTATIONS, FOOTNOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES

**Referencing quotations**

If you include a quotation within your text, you should reference the source. As well as lending credibility to the quote, it gives the reader the information they need to look up the original source.

You can make your reference either within your text immediately after the quote, or at the bottom of the page as a footnote. The source for the reference should be listed again in the bibliography.

For more than one author, use the first initial and surname for each author, or use ‘et al’ if the list of authors is very long.

To reference in the main body of the text:

* for a publication with no author – *Art at the centre* (Southern & South East Arts, 2002, page number if needed)
* for an authored book or report – *Strategy and report on street arts* (by Felicity Hall, Arts Council of England, 2002, page number if needed)
* for an authored article – ‘To art and beyond’ (Jo Noone, in *ArtReview*, London, March 2006, page number if needed)
* for more than one author – ‘A study of the effects of visual and performing arts in healthcare’ (R L Staricoff et al, in *Hospital Development*, June 2001, 25–28)

To list publications in a footnote or bibliography:

* for a publication with no author – *Art at the centre*, Southern & South East Arts, 2002
* for an authored book or report – Hall, Felicity, *Strategy and report on street arts*, Arts Council of England, 2002
* for an authored article – Noone, Jo, ‘To art and beyond’, in *ArtReview*, London, March 2006
* for more than one author – Staricoff, R L, Duncan, J, Wright, M, Loppert, S, Scott, J, ‘A study of the effects of visual and performing arts in healthcare’, in *Hospital Development*, June 2001

Double-check the spelling of authors’ names.

Any publications with references to the organisations that became Arts Council England should be listed with their name as it was at the time of publication.

For the bibliography, list the references to print publications in alphabetical order by author or editor. If there’s no author, use the title. List references to websites in their own, alphabetical section – likewise for electronic publications.

## EMAIL SIGNATURES

In order to give a view of the Arts Council as a united organisation, we suggest that all staff follow a few guidelines on email signatures:

* Use either black or very dark grey text – this is more accessible for people with visual impairments
* All the text in your signature should be the same size
* Don’t include images – many email programmes have spam filters that will cause these to come up as errors or add them as attachments. Images also make your email more likely to be flagged as spam and not delivered
* Please don’t include messages about ‘think before you print this email’ – as well as giving a negative impression, they have been proven to be ineffective

**Suggested signature layout:**

Name

Job title

[**Arts Council England**](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/)

**Email:** [**firstname.lastname@artscouncil.org.uk**](mailto:firstname.lastname@artscouncil.org.uk)

**Direct line: 0000 000 0000**

**Mobile: 07000 000 000**

In addition, you could include any of the following content:

Links to the Arts Council social media feeds - or your personal feeds, if you use them for professional purposes

[Twitter](http://www.twitter.com/ace_national) | [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/artscouncilofengland) | [Instagram](http://www.facebook.com/artscouncilofengland)

Make the case for investment in arts and culture: [**check out our refreshed Advocacy Toolkit**](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/toolkit)

Find out more about our mission: [**Great art and culture for everyone**](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/mission)

Just remember that the recipient may have to scroll through your signature multiple times if you exchange many emails in a single chain. Keep it short and interesting.