



Writing style guide

Updated October 2021

Introduction

This updated editorial style guide has been written by the LPT communications team. It aims to help everyone in the Trust write effectively for any audience, inside or outside our organisation.

The guide has two aims:

- **to set a good standard for written communication**, making it clear and meaningful for the audience. This will help to make it effective
- **to support consistency** in written information across all areas of LPT.

If we all follow these principles, alongside [NHS branding](#) and [LPT branding guidelines](#)^{*}, we will create an LPT 'voice' that builds and underpins a reputation for high standards.

Basic principles:

Using plain English is the most important step you can take to make your written words accessible and meaningful for your intended audience. The basic rules encourage short, clear sentences and active verbs along with the use of 'you' and 'us' for easy, friendly communication.

Avoid jargon (acronyms and technical language) wherever possible.

Patient-facing content: When a patient will be exposed to medical terminology or acronyms (written or verbal) during their care or pathway, please include but explain fully what they mean in easy-to-understand language.

Be consistent in the style and formatting used throughout your article or publication

Proof it by asking someone to cast a second eye over your content. They can highlight typos you might miss or where language or tone needs adjusting.

^{*} StaffNet resource (you will need to log in to access).

Plain English examples

Avoid using

amend
commence
comply
conduct
consequently
financing
funding
legislative or legislation
mandatory
participants

Use instead:

change
start or begin
meet or follow
carry out
leading to or following on
paying
paying for
law making or law
required or necessary
members, users or those taking part

Use British English rather than American English, for example:

- spell words such as generalise, emphasise, organisation and visualisation with an 's' and not a 'z'
- use 'centre' not 'center' and 'colour' not 'color'.

Online help:

We back the Plain English Campaign (<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/>) and encourage you to read their basic guides

- [How to write in plain English](#)
- [The A-Z of alternative words](#)

Acronyms

- Write a name or term in full followed by the acronym or initialisation in brackets, for example Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) the first time you use it. After this you can continue using just the acronym or initialisation.
- Only use acronyms to refer to organisations, areas of the health and social care system and medical conditions, for example:
 - BBC and CCG but not TLC or IDK.
- Universally known acronyms and abbreviations such as NHS and BBC do not have to be written in full first.
- Do not put full stops in acronyms or abbreviations, for example NHS not N.H.S.
- Avoid using acronym or abbreviation to refer to a job title (mental health practitioner not MHP) the title of a publication (Health Service Journal not HSJ), or the name of a policy.
- If you use the plural do not insert an apostrophe – CCGs not CCG's - unless it is possessive, eg the CCG's workforce or CCGs' workforces (see more on singular on plural on page 13).

Online help:

- The NHS Confederation has compiled a useful online [jargon buster](#)

Punctuation

Full stops:

- Use only one space after a full stop. This is the standard practice for both online and print publishing.

Commas:

- Always insert one space after a comma. Exception: when writing out numbers, for example 12,500.

Brackets:

- Use brackets for acronyms or abbreviations after they have been mentioned for the first time, for example arm's length bodies (ALBs).
- Use brackets for cross references, for example 'this topic is explored in more detail later in this report (see chapter 3)'.

Use of forward and back slashes:

- Do not use a back or forward slash as part of your text. From and to, not from/to, for example 'from/to' should be written 'from and to' (**Exception** if you are using the phrase 'and/or').
- Do not use ampersands (&). Instead, spell out the word 'and'.

Apostrophes:

- Apostrophes are used to show possession or to represent missing letters or numbers.
- Don't use them for plurals of numbers and abbreviations, the correct way to write these is:
 - during the 2000s
 - a number of PCs
- Don't use them for the possessive form of 'it'.
 - the car passed its MoT (not the car passed it's MoT)
 - the dog scratched its ear.
 - Do use apostrophes for the possessive form of abbreviations:
 - the PC's memory
 - the BBC's house style.

Apostrophes (continued):

- Used with a singular noun they appear before the s
 - Hannah's socks were always falling down
 - Used with a plural noun they appear after the s
 - The girls' dresses were neatly pressed.

- Do use them for the shortened form of 'it is' or 'that is'
 - it's obvious we won
 - that's all that matters.

Spellings

- Flu not 'flu
- All right (not *alright*)
- Among (not *amongst*)
- Any more (not *anymore*)
- Under way (not *underway*)
- Anti-social behaviour (use the hyphen)
- Programme (not program, unless you are referring to computer software)
- while (not *whilst*).
- bipolar (not bi-polar or bi polar)
- inpatient (not in-patient)
- outpatient (not out-patient)
- Huntington's disease (not Huntingdon's)
- Use % not per cent or percent

Use of capitals:

Never use capital (upper case) letters for a whole word: People recognise the shape of words as much as read them – using all capital letters negates this and makes the word less accessible.

Places and people: Only use capital letters at the beginning of a sentence or for proper nouns (such as names or places). **Hinckley and Bosworth Community Hospital** would have initial capitals because it's a proper name but Leicestershire's community hospitals would have only the initial or proper name in capitals.

Job and service titles: Do not give these initial capitals, for instance use head of communications, senior dietician, crisis team, nutrition and dietetics service.

In headlines: Do not use all capitals for headings and sub-headings, in line with NHS accessibility guidelines.

Do not use capitals for every word in your headings – only for the first word and any proper nouns.

Relating to illnesses: Unless diseases are named after an individual and are therefore a proper noun, use lower case for example cancer, measles, but Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, Huntington's disease (If in doubt, please follow examples from the national NHS website).

Use lower case for the names of (generic) drugs unless they are a trade name, for example aspirin, paracetamol, Zantac.

Parliamentary committees, reports and inquiries should be all lower case, for example trade and industry select committee unless they have been named after an individual, such as Lawrence report.

Institutions: Use initial capitals for names of institutions such as British Museum and Tate Modern.

Educational establishments: For universities and colleges of further and higher education, use capitals for the institution and lower case for departments, for example Sheffield University department of medieval and modern history.

Local government: Capitalise each part of a council name for example Leicester City Council, Blaby District Council, Leicestershire County Council. When referring to them generically use lower case, for example the council.

Abbreviations:

- Do not use commonly used abbreviations like eg, ie and etc.
 - for example – not eg
 - that is – not ie
 - and so on, and so forth – not etc
 - Do not use full stops in abbreviations, or spaces between initials, including those in proper names: IMF, mph, 4am, No 10, AN Wilson, WH Smith.

Dates

- Use the format Monday 14 December 2021. Do not use th, st, rd or nd.

Do include the day of the week. This makes it clearer for the reader.
- Spell out 'from' and 'to' or 'between' to describe date ranges, for example 'from July to November 2005' or 'between 1968 and 1988', The exception is short date ranges, such as 24-26 August.
- Use full stops for shortened date formats, for example **12.3.21** Do not use back-slashes 12/3/21.

Times:

- Write times using numerals. Put a full stop between the hour and minutes and then either am or pm, for example 12.30pm.
- Do not use the 24-hour clock format, like 14.00, or write the time out in full two o'clock.
- Use 'from', 'to' and 'between' when presenting time spans, for example: From 12.30 am to 1.45 am, between 6.15 pm and 7.30 pm.
- Do not use 12am or 12pm (they do not exist) Use noon or 12 noon and midnight or 12 midnight.

Numbers

- Numbers from one to nine should be written in full. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine.
- Numbers from 10 upwards should be written in numerals. 10, 11,12,13.
- £1m not a million pounds or £1,000,000.
- Use of k as in £20k is acceptable.
- Use commas for figures of more than thousand £1,000 not £1000.
- Avoid starting sentences with numbers. If you must use a number at the beginning, write it out, for example: Sixty-five beds... not 65 beds...
- **Money:** If you are giving a figure of money to start a sentence spell it out (Three million pounds) or start the sentence 'A total of £xxx... '
- Avoid putting two numbers next to each other or write one of them as a numeral for example:
 - More than thirty 13-year-olds.
- **Financial years** should be written with a hyphen and without needing to repeat the first two digits of the second year: 2014-15.
- **Phone numbers:** In text, break up phone numbers so that they are easier to read for example 0116 295 0801.

Less vs fewer:

- These are not interchangeable. Use 'fewer than' when the subject can be counted in whole numbers. Use 'less than' when the subject is not counted in whole numbers:
 - "I am seeing fewer patients tomorrow than I saw today." (I saw eight patients today; I will see five patients tomorrow)
 - "I drank less tea than my colleague." (I drank half as much tea as my colleague).

Weights and measures

- Use the metric system unless describing something where imperial measures are still used widely, for example gallons of petrol, a pint of beer.
- Don't add a space between the number and the unit of measurement.
- In text, use figures, even for numbers below 10, for example:
 - The parcel weighed 5kg
 - The margin was 1cm wide.
- **Exceptions** Use miles (to avoid confusion with metres), pints and gallons
 - The 100-mile bike race was a big challenge.
 - Write the number and unit of measurement out in full if it starts a sentence, for example: • Ninety-four kilograms was the heaviest weight he could lift.
(You can avoid this with a proactive sentence:
 - The heaviest weight he could lift was 94kg.
- In tables and spreadsheets, use the most appropriate style for the format.

Grammar

- People who, not people that.

Affect or effect?

Affect is a verb which means to influence. Effect is the noun which describes the change or result of something:

- Traffic was affected by heavy rain
- It was obvious what effect the rain had on traffic.

Practice or practise?

Practice is a noun and refers to a habit or surgery. Practise is a verb that describes activity:

- I am going to practise fastening my laces
- It's my usual practice to keep my socks on.

Addresses

When you write an address on separate lines, don't use commas:

Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust

Bridge Park Plaza

Bridge Park Road

Thurmaston

Leicester

LE4 8PQ

When you write an address in the body of the text, use commas to separate the different parts of the address. For example:

- Write to Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, Bridge Park Plaza, Bridge Park Road, Thurmaston, Leicester, LE4 8PQ.

About us

Referring to our Trust:

- Use words like 'our' and 'we' where possible, instead of talking in the third person, particularly with an internal audience.
- Do use 'the Trust' or 'our Trust' with capitalisation when talking about LPT, but if you are talking about trusts in general, it should not be capitalised, for example:
 - It is one of the country's largest NHS trusts.
- Use 'services' or 'directorates' not 'divisions'.

Boilerplate: To summarise our Trust for external audiences you can use:

"Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) provides mental health, learning disabilities and community health services for the 1.1million people of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland."

Referring to our values: It is important that anything we communicate relates back to how it helps deliver our vision of creating high quality compassionate care and wellbeing for all.

We do this in a way that reflects our values and leadership behaviours, because we are a values-led organisation and we value compassion, respect, integrity and trust in everything we do and say.

Our Step up to Great strategy sets our direction of travel to achieve our vision. Please ensure you relate your content back to how it helps us to step up to great, which objective it is related to, why this matters for our patients and staff, and how we will know we have achieved this.

We refer to ourselves collectively as our WeAreLPT family, always using you and us wherever we can to help us embed an inclusive, collaborative culture. Ultimately, always ensure your communication focuses on why it is important for our service users and staff in relation to creating high quality, compassionate care and wellbeing for all.

Referring to our staff:

- Use 'you' and 'us' or colleagues where appropriate in preference to the third person 'staff'.
- Use chair not chairman or chairwoman when referring to the head of our Trust board.
- Use chief executive and not CEO when referring to our chief executive.

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Referring to people who use our services

- Use 'patients', 'service users', or where appropriate, the more generic 'people'. Never 'customers'.
- If providing statement on behalf of the Trust which are not attributed to an individual, us spokesperson and not spokesman or spokeswoman.

Referring to mental health

- Use mental health needs, mental ill health or mental illness, not mental health problems.

Singular or plural?

- The plural of person is “people”, not “persons”.
- Nouns such as team, committee, family, government, jury, take a singular verb or pronoun, as a single unit, for instance: ‘The team agrees with this decision’ but a plural verb when referring to the members, for example: ‘Team members agree’.

Using quotes

- Use speech marks at the beginning and end of quotes.
- Introduce quotes with a colon, for example:
 - She explained: “We are all in it together.”
- If a quote continues into a second paragraph, don’t close the quote but start the new paragraph with opening quotes.
- If there is a quote within a quote, use single quotation marks around it, not double for example:
 - Helen Thompson said: “We know that some communities are referred to as ‘hard to reach’. However, we are confident we can overcome this.
“We have plans to meet community leaders.”

Social media

Hashtags

- Use capitals to break up hashtags and make them easier to read for example #WeAreLPT rather than #weareLPT.
- Do not put spaces in a hashtag, for instance #ValuedStars not #Valued Stars (the computer or device reads a space as the end of the hashtag).

Our Trust website address is www.leicspart.nhs.uk

Formatting

Layout of your text

- Always left justify your paragraph in the body of your text. Never use full justification or centre paragraphs, as this makes documents hard to read. The **exceptions** are headings and captions which can be centred.

Font

- Arial 12 point is our standard font and size for print publications, to ensure it is accessible, unless you are producing information for a visually impaired audience, in which case seek advice from your target audience or our communications department.

Spacing

- Use even spacing between paragraphs
- Avoid splitting words on separate lines with hyphens.

Use of bold type

- You can use bold for headlines and subheadings and to emphasise key words or phrases but avoid extensive use of bold type in a document.

Underlining

- Do not underline headings or text for emphasis as this can make text harder to read. Underlined text is widely recognised as an internet link.

Bullet points

- Use standard round bullet points as your default but if an alternative must be used ensure you are consistent throughout your article or document
- You can begin each line with a capital letter or lower case (provided you are consistent throughout your document)

You can end each point with a semi colon or no punctuation (provided you are consistent) but the final point should close with a full stop. For example:

- this
- that
- the other.
- Sub bullet points should be further indented.

Bookmarking

- Using in-document bookmarks (links) in electronic communications is a useful tool to speed up access to key information. Please bear in mind that this will not enhance navigation through a printed document.

Accessibility

Font

You should always use Arial for the main body of text (national NHS regulations). You can use **Arial rounded MT bold** for headings or to highlight specific text. If you are producing information.

These are national regulations designed for ease of reading. Consider readers who might have poor eyesight or reading skills (the national average reading age is nine).

Coloured text?

Minimal use of coloured text is recommended in body type. If you need it for design reasons, ensure you have deep contrast to increase legibility.

Black text on a white background gives the clearest contrast but people with disabilities might need a different combination (for example black text on yellow).

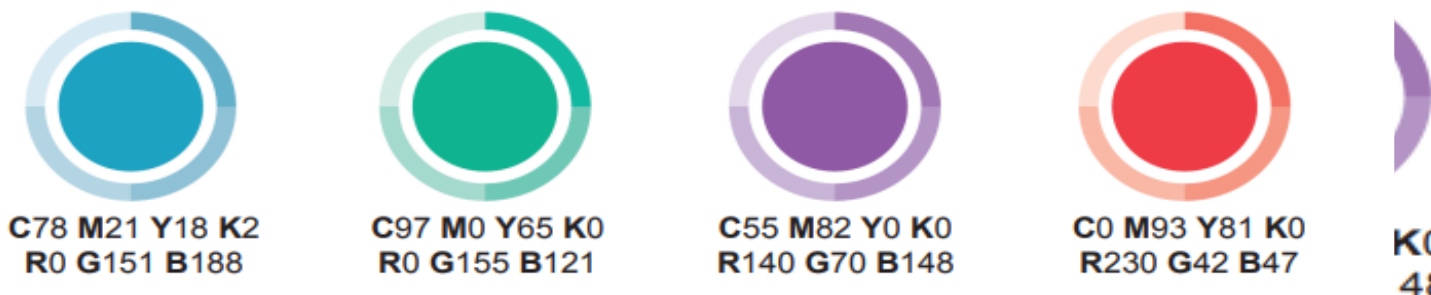
Never use white with yellow – either white text on yellow or yellow text on white.

To emphasise a word or phrase, use bold or larger text but do this sparingly.

Avoid using block capitals, italics, underlining and shadowing, as people recognise words by their shape as much as reading the letters and capitals negates this, making it difficult to read.

Avoid using unusual, coloured text such as red, unless you are trying to communicate with a young audience.

Our colour palette is as follows:



All text should be left justified with a “ragged” edge.

Restrict the use of centre alignment to headlines or occasionally captions but not for, not for body text.

General rules for making written information accessible

- Do not try to squeeze in too much information. Think about reducing the content before reducing the type size.
- Keep the layout neat and uncluttered.
- Page numbers, where used, should be in the bottom right-hand corner.

Meeting individual and group accessibility needs

As a general rule of thumb, consult your intended audience (or their family or carer) to clarify needs and tailor your individual correspondence to address these.

If you are producing information for a large number of people with specific communication needs, the communications team can provide advice and help you to meet accessibility regulations.

Please refer to our [easy read and Widget guide](#) to help you comply with the 2016 Accessible Information Standard.