

APC House Style Guide¹ v 1.02

Please take into account the following recommendations when writing and editing for APC.

For easier reference you will find them in alphabetical order. Cross-referencing has been included when deemed necessary.

It is not possible to cover all stylistic aspects in this document, so if you are in doubt and provided it does not contradict any of the points in this Style Guide, we recommend consulting the style guide of The Economist at:

www.economist.com/research/StyleGuide/

Abbreviations (including initials and acronyms)

Spell out name in full the first time it appears and provide the abbreviation in brackets: “World Health Organisation (WHO)”. After that, you can use the abbreviation only.

Well-known acronyms which are recognised internationally do not require explanation. Examples include: EU, USA, UN, UNESCO, UNICEF, AIDS.

Note: as a general rule, try to minimise the use of acronyms that do not add to the reader’s understanding of the text.

If an abbreviation is “word-like” and can be pronounced (e.g. UNICEF, UNESCO) it does not usually require the definite article. Other abbreviations should generally be preceded by “the” (e.g. “the FAO”)². APC generally appears without “the”.

Abbreviations

No full stops for “Dr David Samuels”.

Full stops for “e.g.” and “i.e.”

Initials

No full stops for “JA Peterson” or “Andrea Smith MP”.

Acronyms

No full stops for UNICEF.

Use of acronyms and organisation names in translation

When there is an official translation of the organisation name/acronym, there is no need to translate it yourself. Use the official version. Example: [EN] World Health Organisation (WHO) > [ES] Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS).

¹ This style guide is adapted from the Social Watch House Style Guide. Permission kindly provided by ITeM (host of the Social Watch international secretariat) to APC to adapt to our own purposes.

² See <http://www.economist.com/research/styleGuide/index.cfm?page=673905> for documentation of this rule.

When dealing with an organisation that is only known in a region or country, translate its name, keep the acronym in the original language, and include the entire name in the original language too. The original language acronym goes first in the parentheses, so it will be easier for the reader to remember. Example: “National Women's Institute (INAMU - Instituto Nacional de la Mujer)”.

Ages

“There were 32 five-year-old children in the class”. “She is a lively five-year-old”. “They are in their mid-thirties”. But “He is five years old”.

AIDS

Use capitalised with no full stops. Be careful to distinguish between HIV and AIDS and to use a formulation like “HIV-positive” or “a person living with AIDS” rather than “AIDS sufferer/victim”.

Bullets and lists³

Use dot or small bullets. There must be parallelism in the construction of the lists. If the bullets are sentences or long phrases, use full stops. If the bullets are short, do not use full stops except for the last item. See the example below.

This text is the introduction to the bullet points and might be a couple of sentences long:

- All items in the list must begin with a capital letter
- If most of the items in the list are shorter than 25 words then there is no full stop at the end
- If most of the items are longer than 25 words they will have a full stop at the end
- This restricted form of punctuation for the bullet points is to ensure that the website does not look littered with colons, semi-colons and commas
- The last item always has a full stop at the end of it.

Capitalisation

Shortening commonly used terms

In general, the shortened form of a phrase is capitalised but the full phrase itself should NOT be capitalised. E.g. “information and communications technology (ICT)” but never “Information and Communications Technology (ICT)” unless it is part of a title. Other common examples include internet service provider (ISP) and free and open source software (FOSS) but note the unusual acronym for voice over internet protocol (VoIP), with a lower case “o” in the middle.

Words beginning with a single letter and a hyphen (usually e-something)

When these words appear at the beginning of a sentence or in a title, capitalise the “e” rather than the first letter after the hyphen, i.e. “E-government” rather than “e-Government”.

Job titles

Job titles should be given in lower case except when used as titles, e.g. “Anriette Esterhuysen, executive director of the APC, said ...” but “APC Executive Director Anriette Esterhuysen announces new programme”.

³ This item is based on the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (www.gsdr.org) Style Guide and is reproduced with permission.

Collective nouns

Collective nouns (government, board, committee) can be singular or plural, depending on whether the group of people is seen as a singular entity or as a collection of individuals. It is APC editorial policy that collective nouns should be singular, except when a statement becomes incongruous, e.g. “The committee has now taken its seats.” It is more natural to say “The committee have now taken their seats.”

Commas

Use the minimum number that permits an unambiguous reading. In “Eventually the law was passed.” a comma is unnecessary after “eventually”. “However” at the beginning of a sentence rarely needs a comma.

Contractions

In general, APC strives to write in a style that is less formal, but contractions (e.g. don’t, I’ll, isn’t) should generally be avoided because they are not used frequently in other languages and might confuse non-native English speakers.

Currency

Approximate currency exchange rate should be given in US dollars whenever a different currency amount is given. If the currency fluctuates a lot, give the date of the exchange rate. The format for US dollars is **USD** (not US\$, or U\$\$, or \$). When citing another local currency give the dollar equivalent in brackets, e.g. EUR 1,082 (USD 2,260).

Dates

Days: “1 July 1989” (not July 1, 1989, nor 1st, 15th or 23rd). Decades: “throughout the 1960s and 1970s” (not the 60s and 70s). Centuries: “the 19th century” (no capitals).

Dashes

Use a short dash (–), with no space after the dash. The only time a space after the dash is allowed is when the text that follows ends with a full stop.

Footnotes and endnotes

When writing for the web, use numbers in square brackets (i.e. [1]) for any references that need to come at the end of the text, rather than traditional footnotes or endnotes

Hyphens

No spaces on either side of a hyphen: “clear-sighted”, “protein-rich”.

Internet, information society

APC uses internet with a lower-case “i” and information society with lower case “i” and “s”, unless in titles or organisation names.

Italics [printed publications only]

Use italics for “sub-subtitles” and the names of publications (but not for titles of instruments, plans of actions or declarations), and occasionally to give special emphasis to a word, phrase or key quotation. Italics are also used for non-English words, see Language and spelling below.

Language and spelling

British English (of the –ise, –mme variety) will be used throughout. This will be more noticeable in the spelling, e.g. *centre*, not *center*; *traveller*, not *traveler*; *colour*, not *color*. The *-ise* verb ending will be preferred, thus *realise*, rather than *realize*.

Exceptions: content from countries where English is the first language.

When using local terms that do not exist in English, please write a definition or explanation in brackets after the local expression.

Italicise non-English words if they have not yet been absorbed into English, so no italics for “coup d’état” or “fait accompli”.

Online, email, website and audiovisual are all spelled as one word, without spaces or hyphens (i.e. on-line, e-mail, web site and audio-visual are wrong).

Names of state and private organisations, NGOs

Spell names of organisations fully and correctly. In some countries there are institutions with similar names: the Meteorological Institute is not the same as the Meteorological Centre or the Institute of Meteorology.

Numbers

In running text use: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, 21, 156, 216,000. In fact charts use only figures.

Thousands should be rendered using a comma: 10,000 and 427,971 (but not in the case of years: 2006). A thousand or 1,000 are both acceptable.

For large round numbers in running text use words if possible: one million, three million, but 375 million.

One billion =1,000,000,000, i.e., one thousand million, not one million million.

Decimals are indicated by a point: 0.75.

Two numbers in the same sentence should be in the same style: “children aged between five and fifteen”. A number at the beginning of a sentence is always spelled out: “Fifty-four workers were fired as a result of the strike”. But the sentence can usually be reorganised so that the number is not at the start: “The strike resulted in 54 workers being fired”. The same applies to percentages at the beginning of sentences: “Forty-five percent of people living with HIV...”

Paragraphing, indentation and spacing

No indentation at the beginning of a paragraph. Do not use a double space after a full stop or colon; use single spaces only. Use double spacing between paragraphs.

Percentages

Write number followed by percentage symbol, e.g. 63%. There should be no space between the number and the percentage symbol.

Percentage rises

An increase from 3% to 5% is a 2 percentage point increase or a 2-point increase, not a 2% increase; any sentence saying “such and such rose or fell by x%” should be considered and checked carefully.

Poverty

When defining poverty in your country or region, avoid qualifying it using adjectives (i.e. “abject”, “moderate”, “severe”, etc.), but rather indicate the method used for measuring it (i.e. UNDP or World Bank definitions, national poverty line, etc.).

Quantities

Do not say “a number of”, “a lot of”, “a large number of”, etc. It is better to say “many”, “several”, “a few”. “A number of” could be any number and is therefore meaningless.

Quotation marks

Only use single quotation marks for a quote within a quote. For example, “The authorities told us they would look into the matter ‘immediately’ but we have still received no reply,” said the activist.

The comma at the end of a quotation is always positioned before the closing quotation mark, except when it has to do with a quoted expression, e.g. “I’m looking into the file,” he said before looking at the “mirror”, a shimmering piece of metal on the wall opposite his office.

Double quotation marks are used for direct quotations, mini-quotations (e.g. “particularly in areas that fall within the “core competencies” of the ITU”) and to imply a word or phrase is being used ironically.

In print publications, longer quotations (over three lines) should be separated and indented and do not use quotation marks. In online texts, try not to quote as much as three lines in a row. If you need to quote more, do so interspersed by other context text.

References

For full details, see separate **Guidelines on Reference Listing**.

In a references section or bibliography translation is not necessary (except for names of cities for the place of publication, etc.) and only the name of the document in the source language should be provided, unless an English version of the same document exists, in which case the English version should be referenced.

State and government

Clear definitions of the words “state” and “government” should be used (see glossary). Do not capitalise “state” or “government” except in titles or proper nouns.

Ministers, ministries, etc.

Minister is capitalised when it is used as a title (e.g., Communications Minister Jane Doe) but otherwise not, e.g. “the minister of communications is responsible for these decisions, although the minister of education is usually consulted”.

Ministry is capitalised when referring to a specific ministry (almost always the case). Where it is a general article it is not capitalised, for example when referring to the number of countries that have a ministry of communications.

Time

Use the twelve hour clock: 9.00 am, 8.30 pm.

Do not say “recently”, or “last week”, or “last month”, or even “last year”. Always give dates and years.

Span of years: write “between 1995 and 1999”, not “between 1995-1999”.

Titles and headings

For titles and headings in online texts, capitalise only the first word and any other word that is capitalised in its own right, plus the first letter of any word that follows a full stop, colon or dash within a title.

Translation

Always include a translation of any other language included in the text. Use square brackets, i.e. [translation].

Place the translation of a short quotation or title in square brackets immediately after the original. E.g. “text in Spanish” [“translation in English”].

Weights and measures

Use metric system only.

Words of Latin origin

This is a tricky area, since not all authorities agree on the singular and plural forms of words like agenda (plural: agendas), criterion (plural: criteria), forum (plural: fora or forums, but never mixed in the same article), media (singular or plural). Where there is disagreement, we will adopt the usage suggested by the Merriam Webster Dictionary or the Oxford English Dictionary.

APPENDIX 1

SOME WORDS AND EXPRESIONS TO AVOID

(from BBC News Styleguide at www.bbctraining.com/pdfs/newsstyleguide.pdf)

Superfluous words and phrases

Here are some of these and their (brief) equivalent

At this moment in time	now
By virtue of the fact that	because
In the absence of	without
Made good their escape	escaped
Leaves much to be desired	poor
Was of the opinion that	thought
Put in an appearance	appeared
On account of the fact that	because
In conjunction with	and
A large proportion of	many
Placed under arrest	arrested
In the event that	if
With the exception of	except

Some words are superfluous because the elements in a phrase have the same meaning:

New innovation	innovation
Red in colour	red
Razed to the ground	razed
Exactly the same	the same
Close proximity	close
In the field of biology	in biology
Collaborate together	collaborate
Consensus of opinion	consensus
Future plans	plans
Prior experience	experience
Revert back	revert

APPENDIX 2

ALTERNATIVES TO SEXIST LANGUAGE

(from: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/index.html>)

Generic Use

Never use a masculine generic form that might conceivably include women. The meaning of “man” is so closely identified only with adult male that the generic use of “man” and other words with masculine markers should be avoided.

Examples

mankind
man’s achievements
man-made
the common man
to man the stockroom
nine man-hours

Alternatives

humankind, humanity, people, human beings
human achievements
synthetic, manufactured, machine-made
the average person, ordinary people
to staff the stockroom
nine staff-hours

Occupations

Avoid the use of “man” in occupational terms when persons holding the job could be either male or female.

Example

chairman

businessman
fireman
steward/stewardess

Alternatives

chair, moderator (of a meeting), coordinator (of a committee or department), presiding officer, head
business executive
firefighter
flight attendant

“Spokesman” and “spokeswoman” are preferable to “spokesperson”, but if possible attribute a quote to the organisation, e.g. “The AA said ... “

Pronouns

Because English has no generic singular- or common-sex - pronoun, we have used HE, HIS, and HIM in such expressions as “the student needs HIS pencil.” When we constantly personify “the judge,” “the critic,” “the executive,” “the author,” and so forth, as male by using the pronoun HE, we are subtly conditioning ourselves against the idea of a female judge, critic, executive, or author. There are several alternative approaches for ending the exclusion of women that results from the pervasive use of masculine pronouns.

a. Recast into the plural.

Example

Give each student his paper as soon as he is finished.

Alternative

Give students their papers as soon as they are finished.

b. Reword to eliminate gender problems.

Example

The average student is worried about his grades.

Alternative

The average student is worried about grades.

c. Replace the masculine pronoun with “one”, “you”, or (sparingly) “she or he”, “her or his” as appropriate.

Example

If the student was satisfied with his performance on the pre-test, he took the post-test.

Alternative

A student who was satisfied with his or her performance on the pre-test, took the post-test.

Indefinite Pronouns

Using the masculine pronouns to refer to an indefinite pronoun (everybody, everyone, anybody, anyone) also has the effect of excluding women. In all but strictly formal uses, plural pronouns have become acceptable substitutes for the masculine singular.

Example

Anyone who wants to go to the game should bring his money tomorrow.

Alternative

Anyone who wants to go to the game should bring their money tomorrow.