

The LSIS style guide

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LSIS style guide – for use by LSIS staff, associates and contractors

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service is an energetic and inspiring organisation with a forward looking and dynamic attitude to life.

We aim to “communicate clearly and in a plain language” and believe this can be achieved with a clear, simple and consistent editorial style guide that can be used by LSIS staff, external contributors or contractors, who write, edit, proofread or design documents.

This guide contains the answers to common questions of style with the aim of ensuring consistency and readability across the range of documents we produce. It goes hand in hand with the LSIS brand guidelines. (Available to download at www.lsis.org.uk).

Most of the points in this guide apply to material written both for traditional channels, such as print, and electronic media, including websites unless otherwise stated.

How to use the guide

The guide contains advice on LSIS style and tips on good writing as well as an A-Z of house style points.

To use the guide on screen:

1. Search for the entry you want using Word's search facility.
2. Use the contents at the beginning of this guide.
3. URLs underlined in brand colours are hyperlinks and will take you to a further information.

LSIS style (please also refer to our branding guidelines)

The language we use to communicate with clients, stakeholders and suppliers is an important part of our identity. What we write and the tone used helps reflect LSIS's personality. Ensure style is consistent and easy for the reader to read.

LSIS

- When using the abbreviation LSIS never use 'the'. When using the full name it should be referred to as the Learning and Skills Improvement Service. Only use a capital T for 'The' at the beginning of a sentence.
- Use the full title if your audience is unlikely to know our organisation. Write it out in full only the first time you use it followed by (LSIS) in brackets. You can then use LSIS alone.
- LSIS is singular. LSIS is, does etc.
- LSIS and apostrophes.

When referring to something that belongs to LSIS, use an apostrophe eg. LSIS's staff. In a title you may use it without an apostrophe eg LSIS chief executive launches new programme.

To describe what LSIS do we use the boilerplate:

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) is the sector-owned body supporting the development of excellent and sustainable FE provision across the learning and skills sector. Its aim is to accelerate the drive for excellence and, working in partnership with all parts of the sector, builds on the sector's own capacity to design, commission and deliver improvement and strategic change.

Guide to writing

Writing should be clear and concise with no jargon or long sentences. Use active verbs and short sentences. Plan it out first.

The simpler the writing style the easier it will be to read and understand. Edit your work after the first draft as you can often cut it by 25 per cent without altering the document's meaning.

- For guidance on using plain English visit: www.plainenglish.co.uk
- Avoid qualifiers like such as a bit, a little, sort of, kind of, rather, pretty much and empty phrases such as a number of – use several or few.
- Get spelling right. LSIS subscribes to the Oxford English Dictionary www.oup.co.uk
- Check spelling of people's or organisations' names. Reference CRM
- Use active sentences and simple sentence construction.
- Shorter sentences are easier to read than longer ones.
- Be consistent in tense and the use of pronouns – I, we etc.
- Write to be understood, not to impress.

Writing for the web

Most good writing rules apply to the web as they would traditional reports but there are a few fundamental differences.

Remember:

- Page design and content:
- Make the words and design easy to follow- short sharp sentences work best.
- Web pages can look easily cluttered. Make the content useful, informative and valuable.
- Reduce the word content by at least 50 per cent when compared to a printed document.
- Users look at heading and sub-headings first so make them catchy!
- Use consistent and clear design with easy navigation

Style and structure

- Headings vital on the web but must be short and direct
- Use a style that makes personal contact with user – use friendly, upbeat tone.
- Display content on three levels where you can – a heading, a concise summary, followed by the text or a link to the full document.

Format

- Break large blocks of text into manageable chunks starting with most important information first
- Make links clear and easy to locate
- Do not change fonts at random or change design without connection

Equality and diversity

- Not just about images of people and ensuring you do not offend.
- Equality and diversity is about how we treat people as individuals, how we show them respect and how we take them into account in our communications.
- LSIS publications must ensure information is as accessible to as wide an audience as possible. Read the 'Do it right - accessibility' document for some useful tips.
- Do not stereotype people or make judgements on them based on gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, faith, social background, age or disability.
- Basic points: Remember that while Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people may all be Asian – they are distinct from one another as are African and black Caribbean people.
- Remember the generation gap and portray differences in age.
- There are a range of abilities of language within ethnic families.
- Don't assume advantage or disadvantage – members of ethnic groups often among high achievers

Disability

- Disabled and handicapped are terms to avoid
- Disabled people and a person with disabilities is acceptable see www.equalityhumanrights.com

Disability Discrimination Act

- Best practise is required when communicating with disabled people and those with literacy difficulties. You must communicate clearly on all topics not just those relating to disability.
- Under this act it is a legal obligation for government communicators to make their information accessible to disabled people.

Gender

- Use men and women rather males and females.
- When using pairs of terms use men and women not men and ladies or girls, keep consistent.
- Avoid the word kids, instead use young people.
- Use gender-neutral words such as headteacher not headmistress, headmaster. Use police officer rather than police man or woman and actor rather than actress.
- Chair is less acceptable so use chairman or chairwoman if you know the sex.

Producing reports and documents

Always use LSIS template – communications team can help with this.

Title

When giving a report a title, think imaginatively.

Structure

Foreword

Place before the contents page. It should be a short message from the report's sponsor or supporter.

Contents page

Makes it easier to navigate the report. Include page numbers. Title it Contents not List of Contents.

The front page of text (excluding the contents page) forms page 1.

Executive summary

Can be useful especially for longer reports but keep it as short as possible. It should cover just the key points of the report.

Main body

Chapters

These should start on a right hand page.

Tone of voice

Clear, positive and inclusive.

Headings

Keep to a logical structure. Make them informative and concise.

Running heads

A shorter version of the title of the report which appears on every page. It helps readers find sections of document quickly.

Subheads

Use these to guide the reader through the report and highlight key findings in bold text

Paragraphs

Number them sequentially 1, 2, 3 etc to help reader cross-refer to specific sections of text.

Copy

Make sure it follows a logical argument. Keep sentences short and simple. Edit rather than reduce type size if there is too much copy.

Diagrams

Diagrams such as pie charts can help break up copy and are useful to illustrate points.

Bullet points

- Used for lists – keep them short, make sure they follow a logical order.
- Leave a line space between each bullet.
- Keep each point to less than 12 words
- Each bullet point should begin with a lower case letter and end with a semicolon;
- Introductory words should end with a colon and the last point with a full stop.
- And and or – and for exhaustive list, or when only one additional point.
- No and/or is needed for a list of incomplete examples.
- If bullets are complete sentences then use initial caps and full stops.
- Lists – don't need punctuation except at the end.

Bullets within bullets

The same rules apply – can use different shapes or colours, asterisks, or numbers eg 1, 2, 3 or i ii iii.

Dating documents

Date them in the footer and don't forget our style: day-month-year eg 1 June 2010

Footnotes

- Can be used within the text rather than in brackets.
- End note used on press release denotes end of the copy or text and goes before Note to Editors and contact details.

Company registered address and copyright statement

- The company registered address and copyright statement should be displayed at the bottom of the back page of a publication or PDF, in white font, size 12 text. The details should include the copyright statement, full company address, registered number and charity number. Where applicable the publication month, year and LSIS publication reference number should be included. An example is shown below;

© Learning and Skills Improvement Service 2011 September 2011 LSIS 262

Registered address; Friars House, Manor House Drive, Coventry, CV1 2TE

Company number 06454450 Registered charity number 1123636

Annexes

- For supplementary information in a document – use an annex rather than an appendix.
- Annexes are useful to keep material separate from the main body of a document and can also house the glossary, bibliography and references.
- Name them annex a, b.

Glossary

Will that help readers, add acronyms for easy reference.

Proof read!

A-Z index

A

Abbreviations

- Avoid full stops in abbreviations such as Mr A C Smith. Allow one space between each initial.
- Use a full stop at the end of the abbreviation if it does not end with a full word eg para. cont.
- In tables you can shorten months and days to three letters eg Mon, Wed, Jan, Feb.

Acronyms

- Spell the subject out in full at first mention with acronym in brackets eg (LSIS) and then use the acronym afterwards.
- Not all acronyms start with *the*.
- Not all are upper case like BBC eg Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).
- Avoid using acronyms in headings and don't add full stops after every letter.
- Don't use apostrophes with plural acronyms eg FTEs, STARs.
- Some can be used without explanations eg BBC, NHS, TUC.
- Don't need to spell out CD, DVD, UK either.

Acknowledgement not acknowledgment

Adjectives

A word that expresses an attribute of a noun.

- Combine adjectives – where two words are brought together as one adjective to describe something eg full-time students
- compound adjectives – half-baked idea (use hyphen) if first word ends ly eg newly formed organisation – no hyphen.

Adverse

unfavourable, bad.

Averse

strong disliking or opposed to

Advice

noun

Advise

verb

Affect

effect (noun) had no effect

This was not affected (verb)

But also no effect (verb)

All right

not alright !

Ampersand

use in company names ONLY when they do eg: M&S

Avoid use in copy.

Apostrophes

used to show either a letter is missing ie. don't or to show belonging eg. John's book.

Appraise

assess

Aprise

inform

Augur

to predict

Auger

used to make holes

B

Boiler plate:

(REVISED) The Learning and Skills Improvement Service is the sector-owned body supporting the development of excellent and sustainable FE provision across the learning and skills sector. Its aim is to accelerate the drive for excellence and, working in partnership with all parts of the sector,

builds on the sector's own capacity to design, commission and deliver improvement and strategic change.

Brackets and slashes

Avoid overuse of brackets. Do not use a forward slash / to mean or in a sentence.

C

Capitals

Capital letters tend to interrupt the flow of reading. They can also look pompous, so try to reserve them for their proper uses.

The basic rule is that capital letters should only be used for the first letter of a heading or sentence, eg for a heading: 'When to use capital letters' and not 'When To Use Capital Letters'.

Avoid putting whole words or chunks of text into capitals - it is much harder to read than lowercase letters. Use bold or italics if you need to emphasise text (see Emphasising text).

Names of programmes should have initial capital letters, eg Equality and Diversity Programme. Projects should not have capitals. The same goes for specific job titles, eg Chief Executive, Programme Manager for Inclusion. General job titles such as manager or lecturer do not need capital letters.

'The LSIS Council' needs capital letters as it refers to a specific body. When writing about councils or boards in general, capitals are not necessary.

Similarly, 'the Government' refers to a particular body and therefore needs a capital letter, but 'government policy' is standard English as 'government' is being used as an adjective.

As 'local authority' is not a proper name, it does not need capitals.

It is tempting to give capital letters to policies because their abbreviations take the form of capitals. However, while 'CPD' is perfectly correct, 'continuing professional development' does not need capital letters.

Captions

For use with tables or figures and under a photograph to tell the reader who is who from left to right

Clichés

- try to avoid them
- eg 'thinking outside the box', 'singing from the same hymn sheet' etc.

Collective nouns

when using words like jury, committee use the singular verb or pronoun but use the plural when taken as collection of individuals eg. - the committee gave its approval but the committee enjoyed success with their project.

Colon

(:) use between sentences with a preposition and to introduce quotes – too often a semi-colon (;) is used by mistake.

Compass points

except in titles use lower case north, south, east, west

Compare to

liken to

Compare with

a comparison

Complement

make complete

Compliment

praise

Complementary

enhancement of an existing thing

Complimentary

free of charge, praising

Cooperate

Cooperation – no hyphen.

Coordinate**Coordinator****Continuous**

without interruption

Continual

occurring repeatedly with intervals in between

Council

administrative body

Counsel

advice or guidance

D

Dangling participles

are clunky and difficult to read. Avoid sentences like having died, they buried him. Instead John died and then they buried him.

Dash (same as a hyphen)

often overused. Commas better or even brackets. Can be useful tool to break long sentence if sparsely used

Dates

- day, month year eg 4 August 2010 - no commas and no nd,th etc.
- Forward slash / for 2007/8
- Use a dash for a range of years eg 2007-10
- months and days can be shortened to three letters Jan, Feb, Tue, Wed.
- seasons should be in lower case eg spring, summer, autumn, winter.

Definite

certain, sure

Definitive

decisive, with authority

Dos and don'ts

E

Email

- no hyphen.
- but e-shot, e-newsletter, e-learning

Emphasis

Emphasise using bold but not underlining, capitals or italics

Enrol

one l

Example

Use for example not eg unless space is tight. If eg is used, should have no full stop or comma.

Exclamation marks

Use sparingly!

F

Focused not focussed

Fonts

LSIS corporate font 12 point. Use Arial for web and for Word documents. FS ALbert for Indesign products.

Flagship

often over-used cliché

Forever

continually

For ever

always

Fewer

smaller in number eg fewer coins. Use less for smaller in quantity e.g less money.

Fractions

Spelt-out fractions should be hyphenated eg. three-quarters.

Use decimals rather than number fractions eg 2.5

G

Government

capital G for elected administration but small g when referring to general machinery of government.

H

Hardline

adjective.

Hard line

noun.

Headings

keep them brief and relevant

for titles and executive summaries. Subtitles, content headers and section headers see the brand

guidelines and templates.

Hyperlinks

Appear as underlined words in electronic documents and are used to link reader to website or email. They must be in a brand colour and in bold – not blue. Please refer to the brand guidelines for examples. They should not be underlined in printed materials but be bold and in a different colour.

Hyphenation

- Compound words (nouns and adjectives) should be hyphenated eg first-hand but use online.
- Use hyphens for compound adjectives that precede the noun eg up-to-date, 16-year-old.

I

Ie

ie should have no full stop or comma

Imply

suggest, hint

Infer

deduce, surmise

Immigrate

to arrive

Emmigrate

to leave

Immune to

not immune from

Indispensable

not indispensable

Ironic

don't use for strange or coincidental

...ise

not ...ize at end of word.

It's

it is.

Its is a possessive pronoun and doesn't need an apostrophe.

Italics

for titles of books, research documents etc. Not for emphasis

J

Jargon

avoid in general documents – can be alienating or irritating

Judgement

for general documents

Judgment

for legal documents

K

L

Learners

use rather than students or pupils

Liaise

Login and log-in

both acceptable but tend to use login as a noun and log-in as a verb.

Logos (refer to Isis brand guidelines)

Any use of LSIS's corporate identity or brand must comply with LSIS brand guidelines. To use a logo of another organisation first obtain permission and follow our joint branding guidelines.

Loose

unfasten, set free

Lose

cease to have, unable to find

M

Measurements

- use metric and keep consistent
- when shortening measurements use numerals, leave space before abbreviation eg 24 mm, 87 mph
- never plural eg mms.

Million

- use m for money, inanimate objects
- use million in full for people.

Monetary values

- use numbers eg. £6,000 not £6 thousand
- use words not hyphens to link amounts eg £4,000 to £5,000
- use a comma to separate blocks of three numbers, ie: 6,000 and 6,000,000

N

Numerals

- in text spell out numbers under ten eg one, seven.
- Use numbers for ten and above eg 21, 49.
- Avoid starting a sentence with any kind of number

O

Occurred

two rs

On demand

no hyphen!

On to

not onto

P

Parentheses (brackets)

Use round brackets () in general text, [] to indicate words inserted in a quotation

Paragraphs

- use numbered paragraphs in documents, but can be dropped when there's a wide readership

- Keep succinct, for a new topic and use single line space between each one.

Passed

Verb - past tense, to pass an item.

Past

describing things in past eg past times

People

- use a person's full name the first time they appear in a document or report

Percentages

always write per cent in full and use numerals even for numbers below ten eg 6 per cent.

Phone numbers

- use spaces rather than hyphens between numbers
- international numbers should start +44 (0) 20 7999 9000

Policymaker

not policy-maker

Practice

noun

Practise

verb

Part-time

Principal

noun, head of college, first in order of importance.

Principle

noun, thought or belief

Programme

not program unless computer programs

Q

Quotation marks

only use double ones at the start and end of a quoted section

use single ones sparingly for impact or for quotes within quotes

Quotations

- if reproducing a quote from a speech or document reproduce it exactly and attribute
- for short quotes of fewer than 12 words run them in the text and use double quotation marks around them.
- For longer quotes use a new paragraph
- If the quote runs over one paragraph begin each one with open quotation marks but only close them at the very end of the quote

R

References and cross-references

Italicise titles of publications when referred to by name but leave shorthand versions of titles in roman eg the Leitch report.

Be consistent with cross-references so that they tally

S

Sector

sector more inclusive than FE

Semi-colon (;)

compromise between a full stop and a coma.

Spelled

she spelled it out for him.

Spelt

it is spelt like this.

Spoiled

she spoiled her son

Spoilt

he was a spoilt brat.

Stationary

adj, not moving or changing

Stationery

noun, paper, envelopes.

Spacing

the usual spacing in word documents is single line spacing.

Spelling

Oxford dictionary style see www.oup.co.uk or www.oxfordreference.com for further details

Statistics

check to ensure accuracy.

Symbols

Do not use symbols such as & + > and avoid /

T

Tables

Use to represent data using Word facility. Number tables consecutively

Takeover

one word

Targeted

one t

Tenses

stick to one through out

That

that defines, which gives extra info.

Thinktank not think tank

Time

use 24 hour clock eg 15.30 not 3.30pm

Titles

Specific job titles, eg Chief Executive, Programme Manager for Inclusion. General job titles such as manager or lecturer do not need capital letters. Programme titles should also have capital letters.

U

Under way

two words

Underlining

Do not use an underlined font as it can be confused with a hyperlink

U-turn

with a hyphen

V

Version control

When preparing drafts keep track of different versions

W

Watermarks

Use watermarks in LSIS documents where appropriate eg to indicate it is a draft and which version

Website addresses

Do not put http:// just use www. eg www.lsis.org.uk

Who or whom

- whom for singular people eg he, she
- who for plurals eg they

X

Y

Z

Glossary

ACL	Adult and community learning
Blog	Short for weblog – journal or comment updated frequently for public consumption
CMS	Content management system
CoVE	Centres of Vocational Excellence
DAISY	Digital Accessible Information System – talking books system which aims to make them accessible to everyone with print disabilities
e-portfolio	A collection of electronic documents that demonstrate a person’s skills or education and the benefits they offer a target reader
FE	Further Education
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
eLPS	e-learning position statement. A diagnostic tool used within the eQUIP programme to assess where organisation is on relation to the transformation model.
eLT	e-learning and technology - used to support the core business of colleges and management of learning
Ferl	Web-based information service managed by LSIS and available through Excellence Gateway
GPS	Global Positioning System highly accurate location system that uses latitude and longitude to pinpoint structures.
IfL	Institute for learning – professional body for teachers, tutors and trainers in the FE and skills sector.
LA	local authority
LMS	Learning management system
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSN	Learning and Skills Network – not for profit organisation offering services to policymakers who manage and provide education
LSIS	Learning and Skills Improvement Service – sector owned, it is dedicated to supporting excellence and leadership development in the FE and skills sector.

MIT	Massachusetts Institute of technology
MP3	A means of compressing a sound sequence, used to download files from internet
NIACE	National Institute for Adult Continuing Education – non governmental organisation whose aim is to promote advancement of adult education
Podcast	A digital media file distributed over the internet
PRINCE2	Projects In Controlled Environments 2 – project management developed by government and used in IT
QIA	Quality Improvement Agency set up in 2006 to support quality improvement and raise standards in learning and skills sector. In 2008 combined with the former CEL.
SLICT	Strategic leadership in information communication technology
VLE	Virtual learning environment – software system designed to help teachers manage educational courses for students
WBL	work-based learning
Wiki	website that allows visitors to add, edit change info sometimes without need for registration