



UCL web content style guide

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Top tips for UCL web editors

Language

- 1) **Get to the point.** Don't waste space welcoming people, giving lots of background history or providing unnecessary context – especially on your home page.
- 2) **Avoid jargon, slang or complex language.** Use plain English.
- 3) **Make things concise.** Where possible, aim for 10-15 words per sentence; 20 to 50 words for paragraphs.
- 4) **Keep it simple.** Remember, for many of your users English will be a second or third language. Many more will be reading on a small mobile screen. Simpler is better.
- 5) **Be consistent.** Don't use different approaches to language, style, formatting or design within the same website.
- 6) **Don't assume people know what you're talking about.** Write out acronyms in full the first time you use them. Briefly explain complicated concepts; if necessary, provide links to further explanation. Each individual page should make sense when viewed in isolation.
- 7) **Use the active, not the passive voice.** This is more direct and easier to understand, e.g. 'the professor delivered a good lecture' NOT 'the lecture was delivered well by the professor'.
- 8) **Avoid language that is too formal and stiff.** Don't write copy as if you were writing an academic essay. Communicate with your user in a relaxed but confident manner.
- 9) **Avoid too much capitalisation.** Capital letters are for proper nouns and the beginning of sentences, not for emphasis, or words that you think are important.

Formatting

- 1) **'Frontload' all your information.** This means, where possible:
 - the most important information goes at the top of the page
 - key ideas go at the beginning of each paragraph
 - the main point goes at the beginning of each sentence
 - the priority keyword goes at the beginning of each heading.

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For good examples of how this works, most newspaper news articles frontload their information.

- 2) **Use headings and bullets** to make your content easier to scan.
- 3) **Avoid complex design or fancy functionality.** Visitors to your site will only say 'wow!' once. Then they want quick answers to their problems –in the form of good content.
- 4) **Avoid too many 'inline links'.** An inline link is a link within a sentence, often a single word or short phrase. Use them sparingly, as they encourage users to navigate away from your page whilst reading. If possible, bullet your links at the end of the relevant paragraph or at the end of the page.
- 5) **Avoid unhelpful link names:** Avoid writing just 'click here', 'download', 'find out more', etc. Link text should be specific, self-explanatory and preferably identical to the title of the page or document it links to. Warn people if you are linking to a document.
- 6) **Avoid *italics* and never use underline for emphasis.** Italics are hard to read and underline suggests a link. Use **bold emphasis** very sparingly.

Useful links

- Some good editorial resources, originally designed for US government departments: <http://www.howto.gov/web-content/manage/write-for-the-web>
- A comprehensive book on web editorial style – available to read online: <http://webstyleguide.com/wsg3/index.html>
- Lynda.com: Writing for the Web: <http://www.lynda.com/Web-Content-Strategy-tutorials/Writing-Web/180104-2.html>
 - Use your UCL credentials to access Lynda.com courses.
- Government Digital Service:
 - Style Guide: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/style-guide>
 - Planning and Managing Content Guide: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/content-design>

Plain English

As far as possible, use plain English. This means avoiding overly complicated or technical terms and communicating in a clear and straightforward way. This is especially important because 1-in-4 of your users will be located in countries which are not majority native English speaking.

Here are some of the key principles of writing in plain English:

- Keep sentences short (10-15 words on average). The same applies to paragraphs (20 to 50 words are ideal). Remember, people want to move around websites quickly. Keep your text brief.
- Write in the active voice, e.g. 'The research team published a report' rather than 'A report was published by the research team'.
- Don't use long words when a short one will do (e.g. 'helpful' instead of 'advantageous'; 'improve' instead of 'ameliorate'; 'help' instead of 'facilitate').
- Don't use technical jargon unless you are sure that your target user is familiar with it.
- Avoid using slang. Some of your users will not understand it.
- Avoid using metaphors, e.g. 'keep an eye on something'; 'one-stop shop'; 'ring fencing'. Some of your users will not understand them.
- Avoid using too many abbreviations and acronyms. If you have to use them, write them out in full first and put the abbreviation / acronym in brackets afterwards, e.g. 'Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)'. You can then use the abbreviation / acronym for all subsequent references.
- Do write in a tone that speaks to users as human beings. So use 'I', 'we' and 'you' to keep your writing friendly.
- Making writing clear and simple. It should help the user understand something as quickly as possible. Many of us learnt to write in a wordy, academic way at school or university. This does not work well on the web.
- When you've finished, read what you've written out loud. Does it sound natural? If not, edit it some more.

Useful tool: use Hemmingway Editor (<http://www.hemingwayapp.com/>) in your web browser to see how clear your writing is.

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If you're using Word and want to know how clear your writing is, go to Tools > Options > Spelling and grammar and tick 'Show readability stats'. Then highlight the text you want to analyse and run a spell check. You'll be able to see:

- number of passive sentences (keep this as low as possible)
- Flesch Reading Ease score (the ideal is 60% for plain English, although anything above 50% is good)
- the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (the ideal for web content is a score of 7, which equates to a reading age of 12).

Writing for display on mobile devices

Remember that your web page is likely to be viewed on many different types of device, including smart phones and tablets.

These tend to restrict the amount of content that can be viewed in one go, so you should aim to keep your language brief, simple and direct. Your audience will appreciate it.

Useful tool: To get some idea of how your current site looks on a mobile or tablet, simply put the web address in the field on <http://quirktools.com/screenfly/> and then click the icon of the device you want it to show you.

Tone of voice

UCL is a large and diverse university. There are differences in the way departments and divisions need to communicate with their audiences, but we should aim for some consistency of voice and tone. This helps people build trust, confidence and a positive rapport with UCL as a whole.

The common UCL tone of voice is based on the following UCL core values:

- fairness and equality
- diversity
- collegiality and community-building
- inclusiveness
- openness.

In keeping with these, try to use the following guidelines:

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Be clear and direct

- **Use simple, concise and uncomplicated language.**

For example: 'Students can discuss exam issues with their personal tutors' rather than 'If students are concerned about any aspect of the examination process, they should raise it with their personal tutors'.

- **Use the active voice rather than the passive voice.**

For example: 'The professor delivered an inspiring lecture' rather than 'The lecture was delivered in an inspiring manner'.

Be personal and engaging

- **Use natural, conversational language.**

Avoid the temptation to be too stiff or formal, but equally do not be too chatty or colloquial.

For example: 'UCL is one of the top-ranked universities in the world. We think you'll enjoy it here' rather than, 'UCL offers a superlative academic environment' or 'You might have heard of UCL, we're kind of a big deal'.

- **Use personal pronouns, such as 'we' and 'you', to build rapport with the user.**

For example: 'If you are a researcher, please apply to assist with our world-class research projects' rather than 'Researchers are welcome to apply to assist with the department's world-class research projects'.

Note: some contexts may require a bit formality, e.g. HR policy, recruitment information, finance. Use your discretion.

Be open, accountable and trustworthy

- **Use facts, figures and real-life examples** to illustrate any points you make. Try to avoid making unsubstantiated claims.

Be relaxed but confident

- **Avoid using too many adjectives** or self-indulgent language. The facts about our work should speak for themselves.

Understanding the structure of a web page

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You should give special attention to the following page elements when preparing copy for your web page:

URLs

For every web page you create, you'll need to specify a URL. Here are some guidelines:

- A URL should be **permanent** and **unique**. A document should exist in only one place and its URL should not change.
- URLs should be **consistent** and **hierarchical**. They should reflect the structure of the site you're working on (e.g. www.ucl.ac.uk/laws/research/publications, which clearly shows that the publications sit within the research section of the laws website).
- URLs should be as **meaningful, readable** and as **short as practicable**. You should avoid using acronyms and abbreviations and use easily identifiable keywords instead, e.g. www.ucl.ac.uk/child-adolescent-mental-health-services not www.ucl.ac.uk/camhs
- Use hyphens rather than underscores to separate words in URLs.
- Don't use capital letters in URLs.

Examples of bad URLs:

http://www.university.ac.uk/for_prospectivestudents/undergraduate_study_at_ucl/degrees/ubafinsing05.php

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/Prospectivestudents/Undergraduate&%20study/degrees/ubafinsing05.html>

Example of a good URL:

<http://www.university.ac.uk/degrees/undergraduate/ancient-history-ba>

Page titles (and short titles)

Page titles are displayed in large text at the top of each page. They should be unique, specific and self-explanatory, e.g. 'About the psychology department' rather than 'About' or 'About us'. This is because search engines – including UCL's internal search – display the page title in search results. When pages are given generic titles, such as 'About us', it is likely that other pages will have the same title. This is not helpful to the user if their results show lots of different pages with the same name.

However, the corresponding left-hand navigation links may be abbreviated. For example:

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- **Page title:** About the Psychology Department
- **Left-hand navigation link:** About us

Ideally, page titles should be no more than 70 characters, and left-hand navigation links no more than 25 characters.

Page summaries

Your page should start with a short summary of its content. This helps with:

- **search engines** – it provides a useful snippet for Google to use to introduce your page
- **social media** – if a link is shared through social media, it may be pulled in as a summary to add context to the link
- **your user** – the summary will give your user a sense of whether they need to read the rest of the page.

As a guideline, your summary should quickly cover the ‘what, why, who, when and how’ of the issue you’re covering. Aim for 30 words or less, e.g. ‘UCL’s Student and Registry Services provides support to students during their time at UCL, and help academic departments and administrative staff deliver a high quality student experience’.

Headings and sub-headings

You should aim to break up your content using headings and sub-headings. In UCL’s web content management system, Silva, you should follow this hierarchy:

- 1) Page title
- 2) Heading
- 3) Sub-heading
- 4) Sub-sub-heading

As with your page titles, make your headings specific and self-explanatory rather than clever or cryptic. Someone scanning just the headings and sub-headings on your page should be able to understand what your article or guide is about.

On the web, headings should be the title of a section or sub-section. Don’t use the wording of a heading to start a list. If necessary, introduce a list with a line of text underneath the heading.

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Do not use **bold**, *italics*, underline or BLOCK CAPITALS instead of proper headings and sub-headings because you personally prefer the visual effect. Doing so will materially harm your users, make your site harder to upgrade and can affect your ranking in search engines.

Writing inclusive content

When we use the words 'inclusive' or 'accessible' in relation to web content, we mean that the content can be accessed by as many people as is practical, considering diverse range of ability that our audience has.

It is important to make sure that your website is accessible, firstly so that you can be confident that as many people as possible can access the content on your page, and secondly because this is a legal requirement. A visually impaired person has a legal right to be able to understand all of your web content.

Some typical issues that make it hard for some people to use the web are:

- poor eyesight, colour blindness, blindness
- deafness
- dyslexia, or other cognitive difficulties
- impaired ability to easily control mice, keyboards, touch controls
- literacy, barriers to accessing content in unfamiliar languages
- poor internet connections, often from mobile devices, rural areas or overseas.

Some of these problems require a design solution, e.g. avoiding red and green / red and black combinations for colour blindness; avoiding fiddly drop-down menus for people with poor fine motor skills. But there are editorial solutions for many of them:

- **Dyslexia / learning / literacy difficulties:** write in clear, direct, simple and uncomplicated language.
- **Poor eyesight / blindness:** use specific, unique and self-explanatory text for your links and your headings (screen readers used by blind people can navigate a web page using links or headings).
- **Poor eyesight / blindness:** do not provide important information in images or graphics without a text alternative.
- **Deafness:** do not provide important information in video or sound files without a transcript of the audio.

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- **Poor connectivity:** limit the amount of large files on your page, e.g. big images, embedded sound and video – if possible, include these on their own page and link to them.

If you follow the guidance in the rest of this style guide, your content should already be accessibility improved, at least from an editorial standpoint.

Tables

Content presented in tables can be problematic for people who use screen readers. Currently, it is hard for the Silva content management system at UCL to present them in an accessible way, so use them very sparingly.

Only do so if both of the following apply:

- you need to present tabular data in an easily digestible format
- the non-table alternatives for displaying this data would do so in a confusing or complex way.

Never use tables to try and hack the layout of your page into a design you prefer.

For more on creating accessible tables, see <http://webaim.org/techniques/tables/data>

Useful tools and resources for general accessibility:

<http://webaim.org/resources/>

Images and multimedia

Images

Working with images is a skill. Avoid using them just to make your page ‘look pretty’. Ask yourself the following questions about any images you want to use:

- Do you have copyright to use it? Does it need to be credited?
- Is the image relevant and understandable to someone without detailed knowledge about the topic?
- Is it clearly related to the subject or topic on the page?
- Does it enhance the content?
- Is the image actual content, or merely décor for sighted users?
- Are the dimensions and file size correct and appropriate?

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For guidance on sourcing and creating images or graphics, UCL offers a range of services:

- Creative Media Services, design and print team – visit http://www.ucl.ac.uk/isd/common/creative_services/design
- Communications and Marketing (for corporate materials) – visit <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/cam/communications/print-design>
- Medical Illustration Unit (for medical imagery) – contact medill@ucl.ac.uk

When publishing your images online, bear in mind:

- **Textual alternative:** all images should have an ‘alt tag’. This is a bit of content that explains with ruthless brevity what the content in image is describing. The alt tag is detected and read aloud by screen-readers, meaning blind users have access to the ‘information’ conveyed in the image. If the image is merely decoration it should have an ‘alt tag’ of “Null” so that it is not read aloud. When you upload an image to Silva, the Alt tag is taken from the ‘Title’ field that you have to fill in.
- **Alternative versions:** where an image conveys important or complex information, e.g. a diagram, chart or infographic, you should provide a text alternative for all of the information contained within the image, so that a visually impaired user can understand it.
- **Image size:** keep the size of your image as small as possible without substantially compromising the display quality. Making an image as small as practicable helps make your webpages fast to download, which improves the user experience and your ranking in search engines. Ideally, you should know the exact pixel dimensions of the image you need so that you can create it to scale in your graphic design program. Most popular graphic design programs have an ‘optimise for web’ option that allows you to save your image in the most size-efficient way.
- **Image credits:** Preferred UCL style is to add credits directly below the image. This cannot easily be done in the Silva content management system. If possible, add the credit using image editing software *before* uploading it to Silva. Use Arial font. Use one of the following styles:
 - © [Name of individual copyright holder], [organisation], e.g. © Sally Smith, UCL; © Joe Blogg, Reuters
 - © [Name of copyright-holding organisation], e.g. © University College London; © Reuters
 - © [Name of copyrighting-holding organisation, year], © UCL 2013; Reuters 2013

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If you are unable to add the credit to the image, add image credits at the foot of the page on which the image appears, e.g.

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/1213/051213-Bartlett-students-make-clean-sweep-of-2013-RIBA-Presidents-Medals/>

Video, audio and other multimedia

For guidance on video, audio and multimedia production, UCL offers two services:

- Creative Media Services (for events, learning materials or promos) – visit http://www.ucl.ac.uk/isd/common/creative_services/film
- Communications and Marketing (for anything with a UCL ‘news’ angle) – visit <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/cam/communications/digital-comms>

When publishing your multimedia online, bear in mind:

- If video or audio contains meaningful information not covered elsewhere on the page in question, it should have a text transcript – to make the content accessible to deaf users, those with literacy issues and people who cannot use audio in their context of use.
- As with other forms of web content, keep videos short, snappy and interesting. Although the average human attention span is thought to be about 20 minutes, recent research suggests that, on average, half of all viewers of online videos do not make it past 50 seconds. You need to grab your audience’s attention quickly – and work hard to maintain it.

Links

Hyperlinks are the basic building block of the web. Yet they are often poorly managed. Here are some pointers for creating good links in your web copy:

Don’t use too many links, especially ‘inline links’. Every link you create is an opportunity for the user to navigate away from your page. Think carefully about whether you want them to do this.

Links should connect to resources that enhance the user’s experience and should not detract from what you need them to take away from your own page. ‘Inline links’, or links that appear within paragraphs, can be especially disruptive. With inline links, users are invited to leave the page often in the middle of sentences. This creates a disjointed user journey and makes it harder for you to communicate what you need to.

Further, with inline links it is more difficult to provide suitable link text, since the text needs to fit in with the flow of the sentence. Unless unavoidable, try to separate your links from your main text. If they relate specifically to issues discussed in a particular

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paragraph, try to list them at the end of that paragraph. If they refer in general to the page you are writing, try to list them at the end of the page.

For example:

Wrong:

'Staff should visit the departmental intranet for specific guidance on UCL's expenses policy'

Right:

'Staff should visit the departmental intranet for specific guidance on UCL's expenses policy'

- Department intranet (login required)
- UCL Expenses Policy (PDF, 2.5Mb)

Don't worry too much about repetition, unless it looks awkward or clumsy. People tend not to mind having important information repeated on a web page.

Prepare your user for anything unexpected. In the example above, one link takes the user to a password protected area of the intranet, the other link takes them away from the site they're currently on. If you do not prepare the user for this, it can be disorientating and frustrating. They will suddenly find themselves on a different website or having to provide a username and password to continue their journey.

The most common expectation of a link is that it will open up a new web page on the same site in the same web browser without creating any obstacles that slow down the user journey. You'll therefore need to prepare your user if your link is pointing at any of the following:

- **an uploaded file**, e.g. Word doc, PDF, Excel spreadsheet, PowerPoint (you must include the file format in brackets in the link text, e.g. 'Undergraduate admissions manual (PDF)'). If the file is bigger than 1 megabyte, include the size alongside file type in the link text to the file, e.g. 'Download the Undergraduate admissions manual (PDF, 1.5Mb)
- **an email address** – avoid hiding email addresses behind text, instead write the email addresses out in full, e.g. 'For more information email: web-support@ucl.ac.uk'
- **a different website** – you'll need to include the name of the website after the link text, e.g. 'Guide to research ethics on the ESCR website').
- **a password-protected page** (you'll need to flag that login is required and perhaps even provide an explanation of any restrictions on access, e.g.

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[‘UCL staff salary scales \(PDF\)’](#) – login required; available only to Finance staff’.

Make sure that link text is specific, succinct, unique and self-explanatory. This is important for accessibility and usability. Screen readers for blind users will often read out just the links on a page. If links are vague, confusing or repetitive it can be disorientating for people who rely on screen readers for navigation.

Never just use ‘Download here’, ‘Find out more’, ‘Click here’ or ‘More information’ as link names. This makes your page inaccessible to blind users who can navigate in ‘links reading mode’ in their screen reader. Also, as search engines look at link text for keywords to rank your site, you’ll be missing out on an opportunity to improve the search ranking of your web page.

Try to make your link text match the title of the target page or file. This reassures the user that they have gone to the right place. On occasion, the title of the target page or file may be too long for your link text, in which case shorten it appropriately, but use the same shortened version each time you need to use the link.

A note on ‘navigational links’

Every UCL website should have a consistent set of links that appear on every page – usually in the secondary column. These help users to navigate between different sections and sub-sections of the site.

It’s rare that you’ll need to change the links to higher levels of the site, but you’ll often need to create new pages or sub-sections at lower levels. This will often create new navigational links that appear in the secondary navigation. Some things to bear in mind for these navigational links:

- Never link to any of the following:
 - a file
 - an email address
 - another website, or web application
- Do not apply password restrictions to navigational links. If some sections are password-protected, get your web designer to separate them from the other navigational links and add warning text like ‘The following link(s) require login’.

Search engine optimisation

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Search engine optimisation (SEO) involves helping search engines match a users query to your content. Done well, it will ensure that your content appears on the first page of results for relevant search queries.

Different ways to display information

The UCL content management system (Silva CMS) has a range of standard user interface patterns for displaying web content. These include tables, accordions, tabs, and various widgets for pulling in content from central databases.

We advise that you use these features **sparingly** and **consistently**. Most web content can be handled using the conventional formatting built into the Silva editor.

Table, accordions and tabs can provide useful ways of displaying complex or lengthy information – but once you have decided to use this approach for a particular type of information, make sure you follow the same rules across all similar web pages. For example: if you decide to display contact information in a standard page layout on one page, don't switch to an accordion for contact information on the next.

Text alignment

A general rule for any text on a website: always make sure it is aligned left (or 'ragged right'). This is much easier to read than aligned right, 'justified' or centred text.

Working with PDFs, Word docs and other file formats

Where possible, your content should appear as standard text on a web page. However, there may be rare occasions when you need to include content in a different, but proprietary, format, e.g. Word docs and PDFs. For example, a PDF may be preferred when:

- the material being presented is meant solely for print and offline use, e.g. manuals, posters, flyers and publications
- the document is very long and cannot be easily made web-friendly
- the document is a form intended to be printed and faxed or emailed.

You should bear in mind the following things when using non-webpage file formats:

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- Word, Excel and PowerPoint are 'proprietary file formats' that people have to pay to use. That is, they are usually only accessible to users who already have these programs installed on their computers. Don't assume that everyone does.
- Many non-html file formats provide accessibility problems for disabled users. PDF files, for example, need to be prepared properly in the source program before being converted into PDF. Bear this in mind before deciding to include lots of information in a PDF.
- Any file uploaded to your website (whether PDF, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc) is usually harder for search engines to index, and therefore harder for users to find and search. Where you have to include an uploaded file, we recommend you give it a separate landing or holding page that summarises the content and provides a link to it.
- If the file is bigger than 1 megabyte, include the size alongside file type in the link text to the file, e.g. 'Download the [Undergraduate admissions manual \(PDF, 1.5Mb\)](#)
- Over-use of uploaded files can quickly turn your website into something that looks more like a document library. In the long run this will be much harder to maintain.

UCL PDF guidance

For specific style guidance on preparing PDFs at UCL, see Appendix A: 'Publishing UCL policies and reports as PDFs'.

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Style guide A to Z

Abbreviations and acronyms

When you first use an acronym, spell it out and put the acronym in brackets, e.g. 'Information Services Division (ISD)'. Do not presume your user knows what your acronym means, unless it is in common usage, e.g. UK, US, EU, VAT, MP.

You can later use the acronym by initials alone. Don't use an acronym if you're not going to use it again later in the text.

The following abbreviations **never** carry full stops:

- contractions (abbreviations which end in the same letter as the full word), i.e. write Dr, Mr, Mrs, Jr, Sr. Never contract the title 'Professor'.
- standard works of reference, e.g. OED, BMJ
- countries, institutions, societies and organisations, e.g. UK, BBC, RSA; WHO, UNESCO
- degree titles: BA, BSc, MA, MSc, MPhil, PhD, DEng, DPhil
- am (for ante meridian), pm (for post meridian) and CV (for curriculum vitae).

The following abbreviations **do** carry full stops:

- initials of names (e.g. John D. Rockefeller, T. S. Eliot)
- lower-case abbreviations of lower-case phrases carry full stops (e.g., i.e., and etc.).

Alumni

Use alumnus (male, singular); alumna (female, singular); alumni (male plural, or mixed plural); and alumnae (female, plural).

If known, state a graduate's department and year of graduation in brackets after their name. Include the abbreviation of second degrees e.g.: Dan Dare (UCL Biology 1962); Anna Karenina (UCL Economics 1985; PhD Computer Science 2001)

Ampersand

An ampersand (&) should only be used to replace 'and' in UCL subdivision names and titles (e.g. Department of Spanish & Latin American Studies) – it should not be used in normal prose.

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Bullet points and lists

Always use a lead-in sentence to introduce a list. Make sure the sentence ends in a colon.

For **lists of items**, start each new item with a capital letter. Do not end an item with a punctuation mark, unless it is a necessary quotation mark. You may end the last item in the list with a full stop if the sentence ends there.

For example:

The college organises three-week summer schools in the following subjects:

- Fine art
- Physics
- Biology
- Theology.

For **lists of full sentences**, start each new sentence in the list with a capital letter. End each sentence with a full stop, e.g.:

The society's three rules are:

- All members have to wear green when entering the Common Room.
- No speaking is permitted between lunch and tea-time.
- Members must never use the word 'blast'.

For lists of **partial sentences**, start each new line in lower case and end the list with a full stop, e.g.:

The researchers determined the following symptoms:

- a high fever accompanied by hallucinations
- discharge from the left eye
- wobbly knees.

Use **numbered lists** if you are talking about a stepped process, e.g.:

Prospective research students should:

- 1) Check entry requirements

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- 2) Investigate research opportunities
- 3) Make a research enquiry
- 4) Submit a formal application
- 5) Await decision.

Use bullets to list **useful links** at the end of a paragraph or article, e.g.:

Further information:

- the BBC website
- the Guardian website
- The Economist website.

Capitalisation

There is a tendency for people to use too many capital letters in their copy. As a rule, capitals should only be used:

- at the start of sentences
- in abbreviations and acronyms
- in titles of books, films, songs, plays, websites, etc
- for proper nouns referring to people, organisations and places.

On the web:

- use title case for the title of websites, e.g. Teaching and Learning Portal, Current Students.
- Use normal, sentence case for the title of web pages and sections within a website, e.g. 'Training and development', 'Changes to your registration status'.

Do not capitalise words just because they are important to you or your work. Think carefully about whether the word you want to capitalise is widely understood as a proper noun.

Do not capitalise articles, conjunctions or short prepositions in titles, unless these occur at the beginning or end of the title; e.g.: Decline and Fall, The Origin of Species.

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Foreign titles are capitalised according to their form in the original language, e.g. *Le Monde*, *Die Zeit*, *La Repubblica*.

Never use capitalisation for emphasis – people find block capitals in text hard to read and often interpret it as SHOUTING.

Capitalisation rules for individual words and phrases can be found throughout this style guide A to Z.

Compass points

These are usually lower case and hyphenated, e.g. south-east, north-western.

Capitalise compass points only when they form part of a recognised geographical or political region, e.g. the West Midlands, South-East Asia.

Currencies

All numbers associated with currencies should be spelt as figures.

Abbreviate dollars like this:

- \$1 (US)
- A\$1 (Australia)
- HK\$1 (Hong Kong).

For amounts of money, the style is £Xmillion/billion, but abbreviated to £Xm or £Xbn, with no space between the currency symbol and the abbreviation.

Dates

The general format for dates is 23 April 1964, or Sunday, 23 April 1964.

When referring to decades, an 's' should be attached to the end, e.g. 1970s, 1420s. Not that no apostrophe is needed.

For each century after the ninth, use figures (e.g. 10th century).

When using 'BC' or 'AD', leave a blank space between the number of the year and the 'BC' or 'AD'. Both 'BC' and 'AD' come after the year.

Spans: Dates of lifespans should be given in full, connected by an en-dash (alt key + hyphen on a Mac), with no spaces on either side (e.g. 1913–1991).

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Circa should be abbreviated as c. followed by a space (c. 145 BC, c. 1975) when giving approximate dates.

When expressing a timespan in continuous prose, use words or en-dashes but not a mixture of both: 1826–1850 or from 1826 to 1850.

Departments

Academic departments take the following format:

UCL English

UCL Mathematics

Use 'Department' in lists of three or more departments (e.g. The event was organised by the Departments of Geography, Anthropology and Cell & Developmental Biology).

Use an ampersand in all UCL subdivision names (e.g. UCL Spanish & Latin American Studies, and UCL Civil, Environmental & Geomatic Engineering).

Only capitalise the word 'department' when used in the name of a department.

Divisions

For the correct, full format for UCL division names, see the UCL listings:

- For an alphabetical list of departments, see www.ucl.ac.uk/departments/a-z
- For faculties, and departments by faculty, see www.ucl.ac.uk/departments/academic-departments
- For interdepartmental and cross-faculty research groups and centres by research theme, see www.ucl.ac.uk/research/departments/themes

First reference:

In the first reference to a UCL faculty, school, department, centre, institute, committee, etc., the full official name is given, prefixed by 'UCL' (e.g. Student numbers have soared in UCL Biochemistry & Molecular Biology).

Subsequent references:

Abbreviations are fine – these should be introduced in brackets after the first reference, e.g. the UCL Centre for Intercultural Studies (UCL CICS).

Retain 'UCL' and 'at UCL' for abbreviations.

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Note that the definite article is always given in lower case (e.g. the UCL Centre for Intercultural Studies).

Special cases:

- The UCL Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment should be used in the first instance and the UCL Bartlett subsequently
- The UCL Slade School of Fine Art may be referred to as ‘the UCL Slade School’

Certain centres and institutes have ‘at UCL’ in their name instead, often for funding reasons (e.g. ESRC Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre at UCL, the Wolfson Institute for Biomedical Research at UCL).

E.g., etc., and i.e.

Lower-case abbreviations of lower-case phrases carry full stops (e.g., i.e., and etc.).

Events

Lectures and all other events should be in roman type (i.e. not bold or italicised), with the first letter of each noun capitalised. Conjunctions (e.g. ‘and’, ‘but’) and pronouns (‘the’, ‘an’) should be lower case.

Faculties

Only capitalise the word ‘faculty’ when used in the name of a faculty.

UCL is in the process of grouping sets of faculties into schools; the Faculties of Biomedical Sciences and Life Sciences have already undergone this process, and are now called collectively the ‘School of Life & Medical Sciences’.

The faculties will remain the primary academic and financial unit.

Only capitalise the word ‘school’ when used in the name of a school.

Full stops

On the web, do not add a full stop at the end of a sentence that finishes with a web address or email address. This can make it easier for people to copy and paste these addresses into their browsers or email programs.

You will need to prepare your copy so that the web or email address never falls in the middle of a paragraph.

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Government

UCL style is to use government and the coalition in lower case.

Terms such as conservative, democratic, independent, liberal, nationalist, republican should be capitalised when they refer to specific political parties or movements, e.g. He was a lifelong Conservative, but his wife was more liberal in her views.

Hyphens

Use a hyphen for the following:

- numbers (e.g. twenty-four, five-year-old; 12-month period)
- words with the prefix 're-' that begin with an 'e' (e.g. re-entry, re-emerge, re-examine)
- words with the prefix 'cross' and 'multi' (e.g. cross-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary)
- but note 'interdisciplinary' is one word
- those following 'non-', 'anti-' or 'pro-' (e.g. non-invasive, anti-inflammatory, pro-life)
- those following 'semi-', 'quasi-', 'ex-' and 'vice-' (e.g. semi-quaver, Vice-Provost)
- constructions with prefixes and combining forms before a capitalised name, numeral or date (e.g. pre-1950, mid-August).

Follow towns or cities' own conventions for hyphenation (e.g. Newcastle upon Tyne, but Stratford-upon-Avon).

-ise

Use '-ise' and '-isation' (e.g. capitalise, nationalisation).

Italics

Although italics should never be used online for emphasis, other normal grammar rules still apply:

Italicise foreign (including Latin and Ancient Greek) words that have not passed into regular English usage, e.g. *trompe l'oeil*, *abaya*, *Chung Yung*, *logos*, *Lieder*, and

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Latinate or other foreign scientific terms, e.g. *Canis lupus*, *C. difficile*, *phospholipase C zeta*.

Words such as genre, avant-garde, status quo, vice versa, angst and leitmotif are, therefore, not italicised.

Punctuation should not be italicised, unless it falls within the title of a publication or work of art, e.g. *Cry, the Beloved Country* or *The Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers*.

Measures

Abbreviate as follows:

- centimetre/s cm
- kilogram/s kg
- kilojoule/s kJ
- kilometre/s km
- feet ft
- metre/s m
- millimetre/s mm
- pounds lb
- square metre/s m²

Close up a number written in figures and a subsequent abbreviated unit of measurement, weight or percentage (e.g. 5kg).

If both miles and metres are referred to in the same text, continue to spell these out, even when abbreviating other weights and measures.

Do not mix numbers given as words with abbreviations (e.g. fifty inches, not fifty in.).

Numbers

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight and nine should be spelt out in words. Numbers from 10 upwards should be written as digits.

First, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth should be spelt out. 10th upwards should be written as digits, with unpunctuated abbreviation.

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Except for dates, all numbers at the beginning of sentences should be written in words (e.g. Fifteen candidates were interviewed).

Use figures for volume, part, chapter, section, and page numbers, except when used descriptively (e.g. In the second chapter, he elaborates on the theory outlined in the first).

Numbers higher than 999 are written with commas separating the thousands, e.g. 2,589; 125,397; 9,999,000,000.

Obliques (slashes)

Obliques should be used with no spaces on either side (e.g. Tea/coffee will be served).

Percentages

Percentages are given in the form of either 23% (when writing numbers in figures) or three per cent (when writing numbers in words).

Professor

Always spell out in full.

Programmes and modules

The names of courses and modules must correspond to the naming conventions used in the online prospectus.

- Undergraduate Prospectus (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/undergraduate-study/entry-2014>)
- Graduate Prospectus (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate/>)

Pro-Provost

Capitalised, hyphenated.

Provost

Professor Michael Arthur should be referred to as 'UCL President & Provost, Professor Michael Arther', or 'Professor Michael Arthur, UCL's President & Provost'. The reason for this is that it is a single, not combined title.

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Publications

Italics are used for the titles of all works individually published under their own titles, i.e. books, journals, newspapers, reports, plays, longer poems (e.g. Wordsworth's *Prelude*), pamphlets, films, radio programmes, albums, substantial musical compositions, works of art, and any other entire works published in one medium or another.

Titles of newspapers and magazines: in the course of a sentence, italicise English newspaper titles but not a preceding 'the' (i.e. write the *Times*, the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, the *British Journal of Psychiatry*).

Exceptions: the Bible, Koran, Talmud and Upanishads, which are printed in roman type without inverted commas, as are the Bible's constituent books.

Capitalise foreign titles according to the publication's own convention (e.g. *Le Monde*, *Die Zeit*, *La Repubblica*).

Chapters in books, articles in books or journals and individually named episodes of television or radio series should be in roman type, enclosed within single quotation marks.

Poems, first lines of poems used as titles, short stories, or essays that form part of a larger volume or other whole should also be in roman type and single quotation marks (e.g. 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'; 'Of Superstition').

Qualifications

A level

Bachelor's degree, Master's degree

First class, upper second class, lower second class, third class – these should be hyphenated when used immediately before a noun, i.e. 'she was awarded an upper second-class degree'.

Also 2:1 and 2:2.

Quotation marks or inverted commas

UCL web style uses **single** inverted commas for:

- quotations
- reported speech
- titles of books, plays, articles, etc.

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- highlighting an unusual word or phrase.

Use **double** inverted commas when quotation marks are required *within* quotation marks, e.g. The guide states, ‘Never say “Boo” to a goose’.

References

The web is not an ideal medium for footnotes and referencing source material. If your content is very complex, you may want to consider whether it is more suitable as a PDF. Make sure you read the guidance in this style guide about working with PDFs, Word docs and other file formats.

For web pages that require simple references, you are best linking to source material using normal links, separated from the body copy. Include author name and publication date if they are known.

For example:

‘John Gruber’s “About the Footnotes” (2005) prompted a number of demonstrations of both footnotes and sidenotes, e.g. “CSS Footnotes Revisited: Sidenotes” (2005–2006); “Sidenotes with CSS” (2005). Joe Clark’s “There’s No Such Thing as a Footnote” (2005) chided both Gruber and the W3C “standardistas”.

- About the Footnotes, John Gruber (2005)
- CSS Footnotes Revisited: Sidenotes (2005-2006)
- Sidenotes with CSS, Beau Hartshorne (2005)
- There’s No Such Thing As a Footnote, Joe Clark (2005)

You should never have to add extra content in a footnote. Writing on the web should be simple and direct, avoiding the need for tangential details.

Spacing

Use a single space in between sentences not a double space.

Students

Reference current students in the following format: John Smith, Psychology BSc, second year.

Telephone numbers

Tel: 020 7111 4444

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Mobile: 07777 111 444

International telephone style:
Tel: +44 (0)20 7111 4444

Terms

Capitalise Autumn Term, Spring Term, Summer Term because these are the names of the terms; when combining two or more terms in a date range, capitalise only the season (e.g. the seven seminar series will run throughout the spring and summer terms), since 'spring', 'summer' and 'terms' in this context are generic words.

Time

Write all times in the 12-hour format, adding 'am' and 'pm' immediately after the number (e.g. The event starts at 4pm).

Use a colon to separate hours and minutes (e.g. 11:30pm).

For time ranges, use an en-dash (e.g. 2–5pm, 3pm–5pm, 11am–1pm).

Do not mix up words and dashes (e.g. either the seminar takes place from 1 to 2 pm, or the seminar takes place 1–2pm). Close up spaces either side of the dash where it links two digits.

Titles

Capitalise professional titles (e.g. Professor Hilary James, Head of UCL English Language & Literature, was absent) unless the title is used in the abstract (e.g. Clare had always wanted to be an administrator).

Always capitalise the titles of UCL President & Provost and Vice-Provost.

UCL

UCL is always UCL; the only exception is the UCL address, which is University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 2BT.

UCL can also be referred to as 'the university' or as an 'institution'.

Vice-Dean

Capitalised, hyphenated.

Web conventions

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APPENDIX A: Publishing UCL policies and reports as PDFs

The following guidance is designed to help you prepare a Word document so that it can be turned into a PDF that is:

- usable
- accessible
- readable
- easy to navigate
- consistently-styled.

This approach is ideal for important UCL policy documents and reports that need to be accessible to all users, including those who use assistive technologies online.

It is not suitable for PDF files that are for print only, such as brochures, flyers, posters, forms, leaflets, etc.