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Numbers

Writing numbers

Write all numbers 10 and over as numerals, up to 999,999.

Write numbers one to nine as words unless they are technical or precise, such as dates, figure or table titles, or relate directly to the statistics being presented.

Example

On the one hand…
This is the most effective of the two measures…
7 March 2017
1,000

Where a range crosses the boundary, use numerals

Example

9 to 12 respondents, not nine to 12 respondents

Write out rankings first to ninth, then use numerals. Don’t use superscript for “st”, “nd”, “rd” and “th”.

Example

first
10th

A sequence of numbers should use the same format for both, which should follow the higher number.

Example

6th out of 12

Don’t use abbreviations of “numbers”, such as “no” or “nos”. They can be read incorrectly.

Use commas after every 3 decimal places in numbers of 4 digits or more, and never spaces. Years should have no punctuation.
Avoid writing sets of numbers together.

**Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>100,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use a 0 where there’s no digit before the decimal point in a number.

**Example**

| 0.6% |

Don’t start a sentence with a numeral. Rearrange the sentence accordingly.

**Example**

| The number of people who drive a car is 52.4 million |

Don’t use a hyphen to indicate a range of numbers, separate with “to”.

**Example**

| Around 15 to 20 people attended the event. |

**Social Media**

Use numerals such as 1st, 2nd, 3rd etc.

**Number rounding**

Rounding numbers can make them easier to read and compare, although this must be balanced against the loss of precision.
The level of rounding you use (for example, one decimal place or two significant figures) should be effective, and chosen according to the intended use. It should also be consistent throughout your piece of writing.

For more detail about intended users go to Number rounding in the Data visualisation section.

For more information about presenting tables and graphs (including rounding on page 7), see the Government Statistical Service's Good Practice Team guidance.

**Generalised numbers**

Write out generalised numbers.

**Example**

- hundreds of years
- in their thousands

**Millions and billions**

Write out and use lower case.

**Example**

- 2.5 million
- 148 billion

Don’t use “0.xx million” for numbers less than 1 million, unless part of a sequence of numbers

**Page numbers**

Use the fewest digits possible while remaining clear. Separate them with “to”.

**Example**

- 1 to 4
- 10 to 18
- 132 to 148

**Plus and minus**

In text, when referring to positive and negative numbers, write out “positive” and “negative” in full.
Example

| positive 7  | negative 3 |  
|

In a dataset, use the symbols with no space between them and the number.

Example

| +7    | -3  |

Fractions

Write out and hyphenate fractions.

Example

| two-thirds | three-quarters |  
|

Avoid using too many fractions as it can be difficult to compare several together.

Also avoid using large denominators.

Example

| three-sixteenths |  
|

Write out decimal fractions as numerals. Use the same number format for a sequence of fractions and decimals.

Example

| 0.75 and 0.45 |  
|

Social Media

Show fractions as a number over a number on social media, so one-quarter can be 1/4.

Percentages

Use the symbol with no space between it and the number.

Example

| 6% |  
|
Always write “percentage” and never %age.
Use the same number of decimal places for a sequence of decimal numbers.

**Example**

6.25% and 7.60%

A percentage point is the difference between percentages. A value of 10% falling by one percentage point becomes 9% (10% has ten percentage points). A fall of 1% would result in a value of 9.9%.

**Dates**

Use the format “[Date] [Month] [Year]” (depending on what information you have) written out with no commas. If the day of the week is relevant, then put it before the date. No “st”, “nd”, “rd” and “th”.

**Example**

12 March 2014
Monday 3 March 2014

Write out months in full. If space is limited (such as in a table) use the shortened version with no punctuation, but not for June and July. Do not use shortened versions of months in titles.

**Example**

Jan
Apr
Sept
Retail sales in Great Britain: September 2017

**Date spans**

Use the format “[date] to [date]”. If using months, repeat the year after each month if the period spans years.

**Example**

2009 to 2010
July to September 2014
July 2013 to September 2014

For a period between two dates, use the format “between [date] and [date]”.

**Example**

between 1986 and 2014
between July and September 2014
Decades

Decades should only have an apostrophe when they are a possessive, not a contraction.

Example

a 1960s’ child
the 1960s were great

Centuries

Use ordinal numbers.

Example

21st century

Quarters

Use “[Quarter 1]” only. Always explain which months are included in the quarter.

Example

Business Investment, Quarter 1 Jan to Mar 2014 provisional results

Financial years

For financial years, write the period out in full the first time you use it in each section, followed by the abbreviation FYE for “financial year ending” in brackets. After that, use the abbreviation. This will need to be written out in full again the first instance in each section of your article or page.

Example

financial year ending (FYE) 2011
FYE 2011

Time

Don’t use the 24-hour clock. Don’t insert spaces between the number and the letters, and don’t use any punctuation except as shown.

Example

9am
10:30am
midday
midnight
11:30pm
Use the same number format for time spans.

**Example**

8:00am to 5:30pm
1pm to 3pm

**Ages**

Use the format “aged [age] years”.

**Example**

aged nine years

Use the format “aged [age] to [age] years”.

**Example**

aged 10 to 11 years

Include the months or weeks for ages under a year.

**Example**

aged nine weeks

If you refer to ages as "[age]-year-old", include the hyphens.

**Example**

24-year-old
16- to 24-year-old men

Write decades as an age as numerals.

**Example**

women in their 40s

Bottom limits for age restrictions should use “aged[age] and over”. Don’t use the plus sign.

**Example**

aged 75 and over
Social Media

- Ages in years: When a tweet needs to be shortened, the abbreviation “yrs” for “years” may be used
- Age ranges: Use a hyphen such as “10-12 yrs”
- Ages: Use the plus sign (+) when characters are limited on social media, such as “aged 12 and over” as “ages 12+”

Money

Use the major currency unit before the amount. Don’t use decimals unless using smaller units.

Example

| £15 | $76.56 |

In a sequence of numbers, use the same number of decimal places, even if every number doesn’t have a smaller unit.

Example

| £10.43 rising to £12.00. |

Don’t use “0.xx million” for amounts less than 1 million, unless in a sequence of numbers.

Example

| £3.5 million, £6.5 million and £0.9 million |

Write out the smaller unit in full.

Example

| 15 pence |

Currency should use lower case.

Example

| The euro is stronger than the pound. |

Write out currency as “British pounds”, or “American dollars”.

The euro is stronger than the pound.
Measurements and units

Use metric units of measurement, except in specific cases where imperial units are still used as standard.

Example

- miles
- yards
- feet and inches
- pints (for beer, cider and milk)
- acres (for land registration)

Write out measurements at first mention, then abbreviate. If it’s only mentioned once, don’t abbreviate.

Example

12 kilometres per hour (kph)

Abbreviations shouldn’t have full stops and are always singular. Use a space between the number and the abbreviation, except with one-letter abbreviations.

Write out “miles” and “metres” in full.

Example

12 kph
9L
10 miles
Language and spelling

Words to watch

Contents:

A or an
Accept or except
Advice or advise
Affect or effect
Altogether or all together
Because, due to and since
Between or among
Complement or compliment
Complementary or complimentary
Dependant or dependent
Expenditure
Fewer or less
Functionality
Hopefully
However
-ise and -ize
Illegitimate births
Important or interesting
Lead or led
Licence or license
Like
Mitigate
Of, from, with and to
Similar to
Practice or practise
Principal or principle
Program or programme
Recession
Stationary or stationery
That or which
www, internet and online

A or An

Use “a” and “an” as they would be said.
Example
an 18% increase
a NATO paper
a UK organisation
an IT solution

Use “a” for words beginning with “h” when the “h” is pronounced.

Example
a historian
an hour

Accept or except
“Accept” means to agree to receive or do.

Example
I accept your terms.

“Except” means not including.

Example
Bring everything except the tent.

Advice or advise
“Advice” means recommendations about what to do.

Example
The advice was very useful.

“Advise” means to recommend something.

Example
I advised him to call the police.

Affect or effect
“Affect” means to influence or to adopt.

Example
The war affected him greatly.
“Effect” means to accomplish the result of an action.

Example

The overall effect was stunning.

Altogether or all together

“Altogether” means completely.

Example

There were six altogether.

“All together” means everyone in one place.

Example

We were all together in the living room.

Because, due to and since

The words “due to” and “since” shouldn’t be used in place of “because”. “Owing to” can replace “because of”.

Example

It was wet inside owing to the window being open

Not

it was due to the rain
it has been wet inside since she opened the window

Due to

“Due to” can be used to mean either “owed to” or “scheduled to”.

Example

the money that is due to her from an inheritance
the train is due to arrive at 8:45pm

Since

“Since” is usually used in the past tense.
Example

They have known each other since 1982
Mother and I haven’t spoken since the fall of Tobruk

“Since” can be used in the present tense when it refers to the current situation.

Example

Since he went to university, he thinks he knows everything

**Between or among**

Use “between” when referring to two subjects.

Example

We divided the money between John and Michael

Use “among” when referring to more than two subjects. Don’t use “amongst”.

Example

We shared the sweets among Sarah, Lucy and Clare

**Brexit, not EU exit**

Search engine data show that many more people use “Brexit” than “EU exit”.

Example

The UK Government set out its strategy for trade policy after Brexit in a paper published in October.

The decline in transport equipment was due largely to a fall in car manufacturing, as firms planned shutdowns around the originally-intended date for Brexit.

**Complement or compliment**

“Complement” is that which completes or fills up something.

Example

A full complement of staff.

“Compliment” is an expression of admiration or praise.

Example
Complementary or complimentary

“Complementary” is completing or making up a whole.

Example

The complementary staff.

“Complimentary” means given free of charge.

Example

Here are the complimentary peanuts.

Dependant (noun) or dependent (adjective)

“Dependant” means someone who relies on another for support, financial or otherwise.

Example

I have six dependants

“Dependent” means depending, relying, contingent or relative.

Example

The trip is dependent on the weather

Expenditure

‘The act of spending’ or ‘money spent’. An item cannot have expenditure, it can only have money spent on it.

Fewer or less

Use “less” with nouns that can’t be counted or don’t have a plural.

Example

less praise
less rain

In sentences with “than”, use “less” with numbers on their own:

Example
The price fell from £18 to less than £12

Use “less” when referring to measurements or time:

Example

- Companies less than 5 years old are creating jobs
- Per capita income is less than $50 per year
- Heath Square is less than 4 miles away

Use “fewer” with nouns in the plural.
Example

fewer than 20 employees
fewer people

Don’t use “over” and “under” for quantities. Use less than and fewer than, or more than.

Example

more than 6%

Functionality

The capacity to be functional or practical; purpose. Also means ‘a specific application of a computer program’.

Hopefully

“Hopefully” means “full of hope”. Instead, use “it is hoped that” or “we hope”.

However

“However” has two meanings: “nevertheless” and “no matter how”. If you use “however” at the beginning of a sentence to mean “nevertheless”, it must be followed by a comma.

Example

The data are usually consistent. However, rounding can cause differences.

If you use “however” to mean “no matter how”, a comma is not required.

Example

However many times I write this, it’s never easy.

Don’t use “however” as a substitute for “but”.

Wrong example

It’s raining today, however we hope it will be dry tomorrow.

-ise and -ize

Use “-ise”, not “-ize” as a word ending. The Oxford English Dictionary uses “-ize”, please ignore this.
Illegitimate births

Use “born outside marriage”.

Imply or infer

“Imply” is to insinuate, signify or hint

Example

The statistician implied the crime levels had gone down.

“Infer” is to draw a conclusion from something.

Example

From the statistics we infer that the crime levels have gone down.

Important or interesting

If something is important or interesting, you should also say why and to whom.

Example

The crime statistics are important to the police in each area, as they can use them for employment estimates.

Lead (noun or verb) or led (verb)

“Lead” (verb) means to cause a person or animal to go with one or to be in charge or command.

Example

Jack will lead the horses to water.

I always lead the team on large projects.

“Lead” (noun) can mean taking the initiative or being an example to others or the metal.
Example

Britain has taken the lead in this race.
The pipe is made of lead.

“Led” is the past tense and past participle of the verb “to lead”.

Example

Annie led the meeting successfully.

Licence (noun) or license (verb)

“Licence” means being allowed or given leave. A patent or grant of permission.

Example

The police asked to see my licence.

“License” means to give permission or allow.

Example

The premises is licensed for alcohol.

Like

Use “such as”, not “like”

Example

stylistic devices such as bold and italic.

Mitigate

To appease, to make something more easily borne or to lessen the severity, violence or evil of something.

Of, from, with and to

Compared with and compared to

Use “compared with” when pointing out the similarities and differences of subjects.
Example

full-time workers in England earned £316 per week compared with only £284 per week in Wales.

Use “compared to” when pointing out similarities.

Example

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?

Use “in comparison with” and never “in comparison to”.

Consists of and comprises

Use “consists of” or “comprises” but never “comprises of”.

Example

The pudding consists of cream, berries and meringue
The pudding comprises cream, berries and meringue

Different from/than/to

Use “different from”, “different to” and “different than”.

Example

It is different from the original version
It is different to the original version
It is different than the original version

Similar to

Use “similar to”, and never use “with” or “as”.

Example

It is similar to the original version.

Practice (noun) or practise (verb)

“Practice” is the application or use of an idea, belief, or method

Example

The practice of hanging was outlawed.

“Practise” means to perform an activity or exercise
Example

I am practising my juggling.

Principal or principle

“Principal” means:

- Adjective = taking the first place.
- Noun = the head of a college or university.

Example

The principal idea for school closure. The principal closed the school.

“Principle” means a law or premise.

Example

The school was closed on principle.

Program or programme

Write “computer program” but every other type uses the extra “-me” spelling.

Example

television programme
theatre programme

Recession

In the UK, “recession” refers to two or more consecutive quarters of negative growth in GDP or output. If you are unsure if this applies to the period you are writing about, use the term “economic downturn”.

Stationary or stationery

“Stationary” means not moving

Example

The train was stationary.

“Stationery” means writing or office materials
Example

The pen is in the stationery cupboard.

That or which

“That” is used for part of a sentence that restricts another part.

Example

The statistics that show the decline are invaluable.

“Which” is used for part of a sentence that doesn’t restrict another part.

Example

The statistics, which were produced this week, show that there has been a decline.

www, internet and online

“web”, “world wide web”, “www”, “internet” and “online” are always lower case. “Online” is always written as one word.

Example

web
world wide web
www
website
homepage
web page
Words not to use

Don’t use the following words:

- agenda (unless it is for a meeting)
- advancing
- collaborate (use ‘working with’)
- combating
- commit/pledge (we’re either doing something or we’re not)
- countering
- deliver (pizzas, post and services are delivered – not abstract concepts)
- deploy (unless it is military or software)
- dialogue (we speak to people)
- disincentivise (and incentivise)
- empower
- facilitate (instead, say something specific about how you are helping)
- focussing
- foster (unless it is a child)
- impact (as a verb)
- initiate
- key (unless it unlocks something. A subject or thing is probably ‘important’)
- land (as a verb. Only use if you are writing about aircraft)
- leverage (unless in the financial sense)
- liaise
- overarching
- progress (as a verb. What are you actually doing?)
- promote (unless it concerns an ad campaign or a marketing promotion)
- robust
- slimming down (processes don’t diet – state what’s happening)
- streamline
- strengthening (unless it’s strengthening bridges or other structures)
- tackling (unless it’s rugby, football, or some other sport)
- transforming (explain what you are actually doing to change something)
- utilise (this means to use as something other than its intended purpose)

Remember these points when writing in plain English:

- drive (you can drive vehicles; not schemes or people)
- drive out (unless it is cattle)
- going forward (unlikely we are giving travel directions)
- in order to (don’t use it)
- one-stop shop (we are not a retail outlet)
- ring-fencing.
**Abbreviations**

Use abbreviations and acronyms for organisations and terms that appear frequently. Only use them where they are helpful. Never use full stops or italics.

Write the name or term out in full the first time you use it, followed by the abbreviation in brackets. After that, use the abbreviation. Acronyms need to be written out in full again the first instance in each section of your article or page.

**Example**

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a continuous survey. Users of the LFS…

**Exception**

In text, use UK Statistics Authority the first time and then The Authority. Never use UKSA, as this is the registered trademark of the UK Shareholders Alliance.

You should repeat the full term if you need to refresh the reader’s memory, for example at the beginning of chapters. Be aware that, on GOV.UK, if a user hovers their mouse over an acronym the full term is shown.

**Commonly known abbreviations**

Where something is commonly known by its abbreviation, only use the abbreviation.

**Example**

UK
EU
US
BBC
IT
NHS
G7 and G20

**Capitalisation**

Abbreviations and acronyms generally use capitals (BBC, NATO), even when the subject may be lower case (initial teacher training = ITT). Sometimes they can be a mixture of upper and lower case (VoIP, DfE). This usually occurs in brand names like PowerPoint, PlayStation, iPhone.
Cross references

If you are referring to something in the same document, use upper case:

**Example for text**

- this is mentioned in Chapter 2
- see Table 3
- Figure 4 shows this

Pages should always be lower case:

**Example for text**

- page 37
- pages 346 to 358

In references, always use lower case:

**Example for references and indexes**

- ch 2
- table 3
- fig 4
- p 37
- pp 346 to 358

Make sure that:

- there is a space between “pp” and the figure
- there are no full stops after any abbreviations

**Foreign abbreviations**

Never italicise these. The following list shows the only foreign abbreviations that should be used.

**ad hoc**

This means “for this special purpose”. It is never hyphenated, even when used as a compound adjective.

**Example**

- ad hoc request
Exempli gratia means “for example”. Use this expression only in tables, where space is limited, and in internal correspondence.

A contraction of “et cetera” which means “and other things”.

This means “that is”. Only use this in tables, where space is limited, and in internal correspondence.

Don’t use this, write ‘Note:’ instead.

Social Media

Avoid abbreviations and acronyms as social media content should be self-contained and informative to everyone. However, when a tweet needs to be shortened, the abbreviation “yrs” for “years” may be used.

Classifications

Write classifications in full the first time they are mentioned in each section and then use the abbreviation. When numbers or dates are part of the abbreviation, avoid using brackets and give the year in full.

Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard Industrial Classification 2007</td>
<td>SIC 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Occupational Classification 2010</td>
<td>SOC 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Statistics Socio-economic Classification</td>
<td>NS-SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical classification of products by activity 2008</td>
<td>CPA 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Statistics Country Classification</td>
<td>NSCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics</td>
<td>NUTS1, NUTS2, NUTS3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For SIC and SOC, insert “UK” the first time they are mentioned if you need to stress that it is UK-specific. “UK” does not need to be repeated if the meaning is clear.

**Example**

UK SIC 2007

**Data**

Use ‘data’ as a plural.

**Example**

The data are for 2012 to 2013

**Groups**

When referring to groups of people, use:

- people not persons in text (“persons” can be used in tables)
- adults: men and women
- children up to 16 years old: boys and girls
- a mixture of adults and children: males and females
- children up to 16 years old: “young people” or “under 16s”
- “disabled people” or “people with disabilities” NOT “the disabled” or “the handicapped”
- “homeless people” NOT “the homeless”
- “older people” NOT “the elderly”

Note that common usage changes so be sensitive. If in doubt, ask people for their preference or use the terminology that groups use to refer to themselves.

**Collective nouns**

Nouns such as “committee” and “government” are singular.

**Example**

the committee has reached a decision

The Office for National Statistics is always singular.

Some nouns ending in 's' are always singular.

**Example**

news
Gender and sex

Sex is biological (male or female) while gender has connotations of upbringing and choice (feminine or masculine). People can choose which gender to be, irrespective of their biological sex.

Always use the word “sex” except for the following:

- specifically discussing people’s gender (social construct) as opposed to their sex (biological)
- you are reporting on a survey that specifically asked about “gender” rather than “sex”
- commonly used and recognised terms, such as “gender pay gap”

Example

There are two sexes that children can be born into: male and female.
The “gender pay gap” as decreased over the last 5 years.

Man or men and woman or women

A population made up of only adult males should be described as “men”. If it includes children, use “males”. If it is only children, use “boys”.

Example

The over-18 football team was a group of men.
The football team was a group of males.
The under-10s football team was a group of boys.

A population that is made up of adult women only should be described as “women”. If it includes girls, use “females”. If it is children only, use “girls”.

Example

The over-18 football team was a group of women.
The football team was a group of females.
The under-10s football team was a group of girls.
Race and ethnicity

When there is a need to refer to a person’s race or ethnicity, best practice is to refer to specific ethnic groups separately.

Example

| Pakistani and Chinese |

Note the use of initial capitals for ethnic group names and remember that White British is itself an ethnic group.

If it is not possible to use separate groups then broad ethnic group categories may be used.

Example

| Asian/Asian British |

Ethnic minorities

Use terms like “ethnic minority”, “ethnic minorities”, “ethnic minority population(s)” etc, instead of acronyms such as BME and BAME which are frequently used to refer to all except the White ethnic group. This is to avoid highlighting particular groups above others.

The Ethnic Minority (GB) group includes all ethnic groups other than White British.

Where the White British group is not available, as in Northern Ireland or UK data, the Ethnic Minority (UK) group may be used instead, which includes all ethnic groups other than White. Remember that the White group also includes some minority White ethnic groups.

Ethnic groups vary, so if you do combine different ethnic groups into a single minority group, make sure it is clear who you are talking about and that it is not misleading:

- always make sure you explain what you mean by the term “ethnic minority” or “ethnic minorities”
- use the definition that is most appropriate to your context or data

Further details on how to present ethnic group data can be found in ‘Ethnic Group Statistics: a guide for the collection and classification of ethnicity data’ (ONS 2011).
Addresses and telephone numbers

Addresses should only use punctuation when written across a line.

Example

Government Buildings, Cardiff Road, Newport, South Wales, NP10 8XG

Government Buildings
Cardiff Road
Newport
South Wales
NP10 8XG

Use the plus sign, international dialling code and the area code. Add space between the international dialling code and the rest of the telephone number.

Example

+44 (0)20 7273 1234
National Statistics

Releases that are officially designated as National Statistics should display the logo and must include the following text.

“The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registrations Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs
- are well explained and readily accessible
- are produced according to sound methods
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.”

The term “National Statistics” shouldn’t appear in a citation unless it forms part of a title or series name. It also shouldn’t be written in footnotes to a table. The National Statistics quality mark is enough to tell readers that the contents of the document meet National Statistics quality standards.

Statistical language

Contributor or respondent

For ONS surveys, use “respondent”.

Enquiry or inquiry

An enquiry is a question. An inquiry is an investigation.

Example

press enquiries
Annual Business Inquiry

For surveys, use “survey”, even when referring to, for example, the Annual Business Inquiry.

Significant

This term has a specific meaning in statistics. Don’t use it in a statistical context unless you have a particular point to make about the statistical significance of an estimate. If you do have a point to be made, always write as “statistically significant”.

35
Using capital letters

Capital letters should always be used for proper nouns, at the beginning of sentences, in acronyms and in publication titles. As capital letters are more difficult to read, don’t use them in any other context.

Proper nouns

Use capital letters for proper nouns, which are names that refer to a specific thing.

Example

1991 Census  
World Health Organization  
Parliament  
Ministry for Health  
Population (Statistics) Act 1938  
Inner London  
Output Area  
Small Area

Compass directions and regions

Compass directions and regions are always lower case.

Example

the south-east (direction)  
the north (region)  
western counties (direction)

Exceptions

East End  
West End (London)  
Middle East  
Central America, North America, South America
Publications

Use title case for publication titles.

Example

Psychology Today

People and jobs

Job titles should be lower case, except when attributed to a person.

Example

managing director
chief executive
prime minister
John Pullinger, National Statistician
Prime Minister David Cameron

Capital letters are always used for The Queen.

Lower case

Begin the following words and phrases with a lower case letter:

Example

the census information
member state, accession state
section (when referring to an Act)
spring, summer, autumn, winter
local authority, health authority, unitary authority, ward, primary care trust

Using spellcheckers

Spellings should be checked against the Oxford English Dictionary. The only exception is that we use the “-ise” word ending and not “-ize”. Always use the spellchecker before submitting your content, and make sure that the spellchecker is set to UK rather than US spellings. Always use the facility in your CMS, if possible. Your work must always be proofread too, as correctly spelt words can be used in the wrong context.

Example

You have to reap what you sew
UK, Great Britain and Ireland

Use UK rather than United Kingdom.

- Great Britain is England, Wales and Scotland.
- The UK is Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Use Ireland to refer to both the country and the island.

Use the Republic of Ireland to distinguish between it and Northern Ireland.

Example

Ireland is an island to the west of England. The Republic of Ireland’s capital is Dublin, and the capital of Northern Ireland is Belfast.

South Wales is not a defined geographical area. Refer to it as “south Wales” unless it is used as part of a proper noun.

Example

South Wales Police have been tackling bicycle crime across south Wales.

The ONS Geography Guide to Presenting Statistics PDF provides a full list of UK countries and regions (on page 5).

References and sources

Using hyperlinks within your text is best practice for web writing and reference sections should be avoided. However, when a reference section is needed, use the following guidance.

When writing a reference:

- don’t use italics
- use single quote marks around titles
- write out abbreviations in full: page not p, volume not Vol.
- use plain English, for example use “and others” not “et al”
- use "to" instead of a hyphen for page ranges: page 221 to 224, not pp 221-224
- don’t use full stops after initials or at the end of the reference

If the reference is available online, make the title a link.

Example


Sources

Figures and tables must provide a source, in the following format:

[ORGANISATION] – [PUBLICATION OR SOURCE OF DATA]

Office for National Statistics – Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

Office for National Statistics – Personal well-being estimates by age and sex, January to March 2018

Land Registry – Local Land Charges Research

If the figure or table is compiled using more than one source, then list them all. However, if the list becomes very long then just provide the primary sources.

Office for National Statistics – Monthly Wages and Salaries Survey and Labour Force Survey

Punctuation

Ampersand

Write out “and” at all times. Ampersands should never be used, even in tables, charts and graphs.

Example

distribution, hotels and restaurants sector
HMRC

Ampersands don’t simplify reading. A serial comma must be added instead.

Example

distribution, hotels and restaurants, and transport, storage and communication sectors

Not

distribution, hotels & restaurants and transport, storage & communication sectors

Social Media

Use these to replace the word “and” but only when characters are limited.

Apostrophes

Only use apostrophes to show possession.

Example

Please use Sarah’s statistics
Refer to last month’s data

Possession

The apostrophe shows that something is owned by someone. For example, the Statistician’s Office is the office owned by the Statistician. Depending on who is doing the owning, the apostrophe is used differently.
If the possessor is singular, use an apostrophe followed by “s”.

**Example**

| The report’s contents (contents belonging to the report) | The statistician’s opinion (opinion belonging to the statistician) |

If the possessor is singular and ends in s, use an apostrophe followed by “s”.

**Example**

| James’s driving test | ONS’s web standards |

If the possessor is plural and doesn’t end in s, use an apostrophe followed by “s”.

**Example**

| The women’s average salary | The children’s ward |

If the possessor is plural and ends in s, use an apostrophe after “s”.

**Example**

| The statistics’ source | The statisticians’ discussion |

**Contraction**

The apostrophe here is used to show where letters are missing in a word. For example: do not → don’t

Contractions should be used. Avoid using ‘should’ve’, ‘could’ve’, ‘would’ve’ though, as these are hard to read.

The most common are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Contraction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are not</td>
<td>Aren’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot</td>
<td>Can’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not</td>
<td>Couldn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not</td>
<td>Didn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not</td>
<td>Doesn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not</td>
<td>Don’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression</td>
<td>Equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had not</td>
<td>Hadn't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have not</td>
<td>Haven't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He had/would</td>
<td>He'd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He will/shall</td>
<td>He'll</td>
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<tr>
<td>He is/has</td>
<td>He's</td>
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<tr>
<td>I had/would</td>
<td>I'd</td>
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<tr>
<td>I will/shall</td>
<td>I'll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am</td>
<td>I'm</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have</td>
<td>I've</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is not</td>
<td>Isn't</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is/has</td>
<td>It's</td>
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<tr>
<td>Must not</td>
<td>Mustn't</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shall not</td>
<td>Shan't</td>
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<td>She's</td>
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<td>Should not</td>
<td>Shouldn't</td>
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<td>That is/has</td>
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<td>What will/shall</td>
<td>What'll</td>
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<td>You had/would</td>
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<td>You will/shall</td>
<td>You’ll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are</td>
<td>You’re</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have</td>
<td>You’ve</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Brackets**

Avoid using too many brackets in text and make sure they’re always closed. If the whole statement is within brackets the final full stop should be inside them.

Use round brackets when adding supplementary information to the text.

**Example**

The arithmetic was wrong (which is unheard of)
The Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA)
(The Authority has the final say on these.)

Use square brackets when adding comments or corrections.

**Example**

The judge stated: “You [Mr Sykes] have suffered.”
On Twitter she said: “The statistecs [sic] seemed wrong”
Avoid having two brackets next to each other.

Do
(up 22% to 79,117 offences; Figure 13)

Don’t
(up 22% to 79,117 offences) (Figure 13)

Do
…as shown in the data (Figure 12, Table A1)

Don’t
…as shown in the data (Figure 12) (Table A1)

Also try to avoid brackets within brackets unless it is an acronym that you need to provide.

Do
…as shown in the data (Annual Business Survey (ABS))

Don’t
…as shown in the data (Figure 12 (Table A1))
Bullet points

We use bullet points in two different ways:

**As a list within the text**

Use bullet points to make text easier to read. Make sure that:

- you always use a lead-in line
- always use a space between the lead-in line and the bullet points
- the bullets make sense running on from the lead-in line
- each bullet is short (no more than one sentence)
- you use lower case at the start of the bullet, unless it starts with a proper noun
- you don’t use full stops within bullet points – where possible start another bullet point or use commas, dashes or semicolons to expand
- you don’t put “or”, “and” after the bullets
- there is no punctuation at the end of bullet points
- if you add links they appear within the text and not as the whole bullet
- there is no full stop after the last bullet point

Your list should have at least three bullet points. If you have fewer, rewrite your content as individual sentences or paragraphs.

**For bullet points following a heading**

There is no lead-in line and the bullet points follow on directly from a heading or subheading. Each bullet point:

- starts with a capital letter
- finishes with a full stop
- is short (no more than one sentence)

**Example**

**Main points**

- There were 240,854 marriages in 2013, a decrease of 8.6% compared with 2012 and the first decline since 2009.
- Civil ceremonies accounted for 72% of all marriages in 2013.

**Colons**

Use a colon to introduce an idea, list or quotation. The clause before the colon must be a full sentence. If not, don’t use a colon.

**An idea**

Use the colon to introduce an idea that’s an explanation or continuation of the one before the colon.
Example

There is one thing you need to know about statistics: they are fascinating.

Start the explanation or continuation with a capital letter if it’s a formal quote that’s a full sentence, or more than one sentence.

Example

There is one thing you need to know about statistics: They are fascinating and I don’t know why anyone would think differently. Truly they have made my life better.

There is one thing you need to know about statistics: “A better thing has never been created,” said the Chief Statistician.

A list

Use a colon to introduce a list.

Example

The statistics incorporate varied data: housing, schooling and population information.

Not

The statistics incorporate: housing, schooling and population information.

A quotation

Use a colon to introduce a quotation. The quotation should begin with a capital letter.

Example

The judge stated: “You have suffered.”

Commas

There are three situations in which to use the comma.

A list

Use a comma to separate three or more items in a list.

Example

For breakfast there are sausages, bacon, beans and tomato available.
The comma before “and” is usually removed. However, if the last two items in the list could merge together, it is better to separate them with a serial comma to avoid confusion. This is the only time it should be used.

**Example**

| My favourite ice cream flavours are strawberry, chocolate, banana, and toffee. |

This shows that banana is a separate flavour to toffee, so people don’t think it is “banana and toffee”.

**To separate introductory parts**

Use a comma to separate the introductory part of a sentence from the main part.

**Example**

| Despite his misgivings, the scientist felt the experiment went well. |

Use a comma if the introductory part of the sentence changes the meaning.

**Example**

| Sadly, the numbers showed he had lost the election. |

Use a comma if the introductory part of the sentence can merge into the sentence itself.

**Example**

| Inside, his heart was beating fast |

**Not**

| Inside his heart was beating fast |

The comma can be left out if the introductory part of the sentence is very short and doesn’t merge.

**Example**

| Soon the statistics will be on the website. |

**To separate asides in a sentence**

Use a comma to separate anything that is not vital to understanding the meaning of the sentence. There should be a comma at the beginning of the aside and at the end.
Example

The monthly death statistics, not always the most cheerful, were always informative.

**Dashes and hyphens**

An en dash looks like this: –
A hyphen looks like this: -

Some content management systems, including GOV.UK’s Publisher, don’t recognise the en dash and will replace it with a hyphen. If in Microsoft Word, use en dashes.

Microsoft Word automatically converts hyphens to en dashes when they are preceded by a space. Elsewhere, you can use "Ctrl" and "-" (minus on the number keypad). Be aware that the minus sign and the hyphen are easily mistaken for each other.

**Adding extra information**

This is a good device for adding extra information that isn’t essential to the rest of the sentence. Be careful: these can make writing difficult to read if overused.

Example

There are some statistics – fascinating ones at that – on the ONS website.

**Breaking a sentence**

This shows other kinds of break in a sentence where a comma, semicolon, or colon would be traditionally used.

Example

There are some statistics on the website – they are fascinating

**For headlines**

Example

Consumer Services Price Indices – expected availability

Hyphens must be used for the following situations.

Hyphens have several specific uses. These are for linking, and for compound modifiers.
**Linking**

Use hyphens as prefixes and suffixes to words, or show that these are required for a word to be understood.

**Example**

Henri IV betrayed his co-religionists

Hyphens are used for all words with “e” as a prefix, except for “email”.

**Example**

e-commerce
 e-book
 e-learning

Hyphens are used for all words with ‘co’ as a prefix.

**Example**

co-ordinate
 co-operate

Hyphens aren’t used for words with “re” as a prefix, unless the word afterwards begins with an “e”.

**Example**

replay
 re-examine

If in doubt, check using the [Oxford English Dictionary](https://www.oxforddictionaries.com/).

**Compound modifiers**

Hyphens are used in compound words where component words have a combined meaning or a relationship.

**Example**

a five-storey building,
 a well-explained report
 the long-term effects.

However, if you use this after the subject of the sentence, it is not hyphenated.
It is best to check if the word is a compound modifier in the Oxford English Dictionary.

There is one exception to this rule. The term “police recorded crime” does not require a hyphen.

**Ellipsis**

An ellipsis is a row of three full stops, used to show that words have been left out. How it looks depends on where it is in the sentence:

**The beginning of a sentence**

There should be no space between the ellipsis and the word.

**Example**

...We are aware that each country is unique.

**In the middle of a sentence**

There should be single spaces before and after the ellipsis.

**Example**

We are aware that each country ... is unique.

**The end of a sentence**

There should be no space before it and no full stop.

**Example**

We are aware that each country is unique...

If this is in a quotation, the sentence can be closed by a full stop after the quotation mark

**Example**

“We are aware that each country is unique...“.
Exclamation mark

Exclamation marks are generally used to show emotion, commands and interjections. Don’t use these unless quoting directly.

Full stops

Full stops are used to end sentences. Only use one space after them. Don’t use them after initials, or in titles, abbreviations or acronyms. They also shouldn’t be used in any heading, subheading, title, date or name that occupies a line to itself. If a sentence’s final clause is in brackets, and that clause ends in ? or !, then there must be a full stop outside the brackets. Full stops should also be used to end release calendar summaries as screen readers need this to stop reading.

Example

Mr J A Rank
Miss
etc
BBC
“What do you think it is?”

Question marks

Question marks are used to show the end of a question. The sentence after the question mark always begins with a capital letter.

Example

Where have you put the release?

If it is used in the middle of a sentence, it is followed either by a word starting with a lower case letter or another punctuation mark, such as an en dash.

Example

“Where now?” they wonder.

A question mark isn’t needed after sentences framed as questions out of politeness or common usage:

Example

May I take this opportunity to thank you for your contribution to this project

When a question takes the form of direct speech, the first letter should be capitalised and the whole question put in quotation marks:
Example
“Why are there discrepancies in the count?” she asked

Quotation marks
Use double quotation marks. Single quotation marks are only for quotations within quotations, and titles of books, journals and articles that are given but are not hyperlinked.

Example
‘A Lesson in Empathy’ in Psychology Today magazine

In longer passages of speech, such as the Statistician’s comment, open quotes for every new paragraph, but close quotes only at the end of the final paragraph.

Semicolon
Use a semicolon to show a link between two clauses. This should not be used if it makes a sentence over 25 words.

It is used to show that the second clause of a sentence is dependent on the first – that there is a link between them.

Example
Each person is different; it’s what makes life exciting

The fact that each person is different is the thing that makes life exciting. There is nothing else that can make life exciting in this situation, apart from each person being different. The ideas before and after the semicolon must be full sentences that could stand alone if necessary. If not, a semicolon must not be used.

Example
Each person is different
It’s what makes life exciting

Slash
The / symbol is usually used to show “or”. Use “or” instead of the slash to avoid confusion. If a slash is needed, there should be no space either side of it.

Example
masculine or feminine or neuter
house name or number
In statistical work, the slash can indicate rates, such as miles/day or input/output.

In computing a forward slash / is used differently to a backslash \ so make sure you use the correct one.
Writing for the web

Plain English

The UK Statistics Authority standards state plain English should be used:

Include an impartial narrative in plain English that draws out the main messages from the statistics.

Avoid: Language that needs to be “translated” by journalists or commentators into simpler English.

Plain English is clear language, with no jargon, that is understood by all readers. This isn’t “dumbing down” information, but opening up statistics and statistical commentary to everyone. Users don’t stop understanding text because it’s written clearly, but they stop understanding when it is complex.

Don’t use formal or long words when easy or short ones will do. You can generally avoid this by breaking down what you are actually doing. Where technical terms can’t be avoided, they should be explained in the text, not just in a footnote.

Find out more about words to watch and words not to use.

To write in plain English, think about the following:

Who’s your audience?

Unless you know otherwise, think of your audience as people who take an interest in your subject but have no detailed knowledge. Use your writing to guide readers through the subject and help them identify what is most important.

What are you going to say?

Think about what your readers want to know. You do not need to tell them everything. Use your opening paragraphs to:

- summarise succinctly what you’re writing about
- tell readers what information they’ll find
- put your research into context.

Hemingway Editor is a useful online tool to see if your writing is clear and concise. Simply paste your text into the tool. It will report on its complexity, give it a readability grade and make suggestions for improvements.

Do not paste sensitive information or unpublished data into Hemingway – it is a security risk. Use the Flesch-Kincaid reading level tool in Microsoft instead.
You could use Hemingway retrospectively to look at your last bulletin or article and see how you could improve your writing in the future.

Hemingway Editor will not allow you to paste into it if opened in some browsers. We advise using Google Chrome.

**Do**

**Be concise**

When writing:

- try to limit each paragraph to one or two short sentences
- be clear
- avoid complicated sentence structures
- stick to one idea or theme per paragraph
- break up large blocks of text with subheadings

**Be consistent**

Be consistent in the way you write in terms of:

- the style
- the tone
- the level of language
- the terminology used and its explanation.

**Keep it short and simple (KISS)**

KISS stands for ‘keep it short and simple’. This is the principle that information is more easily understood if language is kept simple.

Don’t use two words where one plain word will do, and always choose the shortest appropriate words or phrases:

- don’t try to cram in too much information
- stick to one main idea or statement per sentence, with no more than one or two supporting clauses
- cut out unnecessary words; it makes the important facts more memorable
- don’t start two consecutive sentences with ‘The’, if you can avoid doing so

Avoid phrases such as ‘in the event of’, ‘by virtue of the fact that’, ‘the question as to whether’ and ‘if the possibility exists’. Instead, use ‘if’, ‘because’, ‘whether’ and ‘if possible’.

**Use the active voice**

Always use the active voice, not the passive.
Example

The statistics show…

Not

This is shown by the statistics

**Don’t**

**Be ambiguous**

Sentences that can be read in several different ways may be misleading.

**Example**

Vivian worked on the development stage of the project and is now part of the policy group with responsibility for legislation.

The sentence reads as though the policy group is responsible for legislation. In fact, it’s Vivian.

It should read:

**Example**

Vivian worked on the development stage of the project and is now part of the policy group, where she has responsibility for legislation.

Make sure that there’s no ambiguity in your writing, and that your meaning is clear.

**Use repetition**

Avoid using words or phrases more than once in the same sentence (strictly speaking, you shouldn’t repeat within paragraphs).

Similarly, don’t repeat phrases such as ‘the Short-term Output Indicators’ throughout a document. You could refer to them as ‘the Indicators’, or use a standard abbreviation (but try to avoid using too many abbreviations and acronyms).

Also avoid using words that repeat something already implied in the same sentence (otherwise known as tautology).

**Example**

I might possibly
The Quarterly Report is produced quarterly
Use mismatched words and phrases

This is where a list of items doesn’t match the verb used in the sentence.

Example

This book examines the plans, decisions and talks held during the conflict.

The verb “held” refers to “plans, decisions and talks”, but you can’t “hold” a plan or a decision. To solve this problem, split the sentence into two parts and add another verb.

Example

This book examines the plans and decisions made, and the talks held…

Use confusing sentences

Don’t use sentences where a phrase qualifies the wrong part of a sentence.

Example

Surrounded by enemies on every shore, Hitler reasoned that the British would soon surrender.

The sentence implies that Hitler was surrounded by enemies, which is incorrect. This is called a “dangling participle”.

The sentence should read: “Hitler reasoned that the British, surrounded by enemies on every shore, would soon surrender.”

Use jargon

Always use plain English and be wary of any words to watch or words not to use.

Search engine optimisation

What is search engine optimisation?

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is the process of making a web page show on a search engine’s results. When you search using a search engine, the better optimised the page, the higher up it shows on the list of results. This works for searches within a website, and using a search engine. The three most important sections are the keywords, metadata description and titles.
Keywords

These are words or phrases which are relevant to the content. Search engines use these to rank the contents of a page. Check if your website has a synonym list, as this will show words which are related and linked together automatically, such as “GDP” and “gross domestic product”. These words shouldn’t be added in separately.

When writing keywords:

- use a maximum of five keywords (too many will push the content further down search results)
- make sure each word or phrase is no more than 30 characters long (including spaces)
- include relevant words or phrases that are in your content
- make sure keywords are specific and unique
- research what search terms people use when looking for your content (sites such as Google Trends are useful here)
- if you are using acronyms, include the acronym and the full name
- check if your website has a synonym list before adding keywords
- use lower case

Keywords shouldn’t:

- repeat any words that are in the title of your content
- include the singular and plural of a word, such as “property” and “properties”
- include separate terms from phrases, such as “equality training” and “diversity training” when referring to “equality and diversity training”

Metadata descriptions

The metadata description is the summary of the release content. It is mainly used for search purposes and should be searchable. This can make up the text that appears in search results. Users should be able to immediately understand what the link contains.

The description should:

- be an accurate, concise and clear description of the content
- be “frontloaded”, with a summary of the content at the start of the description
- not start with phrases such as “This page provides…”
- have a unique description that is specific to the content, which doesn’t repeat the title
- be no more than 160 characters including spaces (search engines ignore any text over this)

Titles

Titles appear in search results and should:

- accurately describe the statistics, using plain English
• include the geographical area and period covered by the content
• be unique
• use sentence case as this is easier to read, for example: “The adventure begins in earnest”

**Inverted pyramid**

This is the best practice style for web writing. The pyramid means placing information in order of importance. The nub of the story – who, why what, where and when – appears in the first paragraphs. This should be a conclusion of the main facts. Other facts are included in descending order of importance.

![Inverted pyramid diagram]

**Paragraphs**

Paragraphs should:

• be tightly written with compact sentences that follow a logical order
• be no more than six sentences
• lead with a sentence that introduces the information contained in the paragraph, meaning readers can skim through the information
• draw the reader on by making one paragraph lead naturally into the next
• be able to make complete sense on its own
• cover one subject

If a large chunk of text contains paragraphs on different topics, subdivide the chunk into different sections to make it easier to read.
**Sentences**

Sentences should be no longer than 25 words. If they are any longer they need to be divided into two.

A sentence should not start with a figure. The sentence should be restructured.

**Example**

Left-handed people make up 47% of the UK population.

For avoiding problems in construction see Don’t under Plain English.

**Reading level**

It's important to present information clearly for users.

Aim for the following statistics:

- an average sentence length of 12 words
- Flesch-Kincaid reading ease score of 60 and over

The [Flesch-Kincaid score](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flesch%E2%80%93Kincaid_formula) tells you how easily understandable text is to read. If the score is high, the sentence is more readable. To find this in Microsoft Word, follow these instructions:

  - Click the Microsoft Office Button, and then click ‘Word Options’.
  - Click ‘Proofing’.
  - Make sure ‘Check grammar with spelling’ is selected.
  - Under ‘When correcting grammar in Word’, select the ‘Show readability statistics’ check box.

**Hemingway Editor**

[Hemingway Editor](https://www.hemingwayapp.com) is another tool that will assess the readability grade of your content and suggest ways to improve your score.

Do not paste sensitive information or unpublished data into Hemingway – it is a security risk. Use the Flesch-Kincaid reading level tool in Microsoft instead.

Hemingway Editor will not allow you to paste into it if opened in some browsers. We advise using Google Chrome.

**F pattern**

Eye-tracking studies have been carried out to analyse which areas of web pages web users viewed the most.

The studies found that there were dramatic differences between how people read online content and print. Whilst reading print content, users tend to read line by line, from left to
right in Western languages. For digital content, the studies found the predominant reading pattern formed an F shape. First, users read horizontally across the upper part of the page, then move down the page and read horizontally across. Finally, users scan vertically down the left-hand side.

This means that web content needs to be written differently to print content. The most important information needs to go at the beginning of sentences. Users can then decide if this is what they want to read and continue. The way to do this is to frontload content.

**Tone and voice**

Use active verbs and not passive verbs. Active verbs are when the sentence’s subject does something. Passive verbs are when the sentence’s subject has something done to it. In the examples below, the subjects are the policy and the study.

**Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The policy encourages firms to…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Not**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firms are encouraged by the policy to…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The study shows a trend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Not**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A trend is shown by the study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

However, write “It is expected”, rather than “One expects”. Using “one” is considered old-fashioned and we refer to ourselves at ONS as “we”.

**ONS**

Best practice for web writing is to use personal pronouns when referring to one’s own organisation. Use personal pronouns (such as “we” or “our”) when referring to the ONS, apart from the following exceptions:

- when a publication has been produced in collaboration with another organisation or government body (such as Defra or Public Health England)
- when we are is one of a number of organisations or government bodies being discussed in a paragraph
- when the use of “our” with the word “data” or “statistics” would add some doubt as to where that data comes from or its objectivity
Example

This release has been produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Public Health England (PHE).

This type of information isn't always present in the ONS data but it is in the PHE data.

The data show that…

The word “the” should be used when referring to our organisation, including when using “ONS”.

Example

Welcome to the Office for National Statistics.

At the Office for National Statistics (ONS), we are responsible for…

The ONS has made the Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers’ housing costs (CPIH) its preferred measure of inflation.

Do not use “on the ONS website” or “on our website”. The user is already on our website. Provide a well-named link to the page you are referring to.

Example

This is explored further on the Retail Sales Index Quality and Methodology Information page.

Please refer to our previously published article International immigration and the labour market, UK: 2016.
Editing and proofreading

Editing

Why edit? To ensure your writing is clear, consistent and concise, and that you are conveying the intended message to your audience.

1. Look at the structure of the piece. Does it flow logically? Are there any jumps in there, assuming the reader knows what you’re talking about? Each sentence should add something to the reader’s understanding, building up in layers. If a sentence doesn’t add anything, be ruthless – and cut it out.

2. Look at the content of the piece. Does it contain repetition? Does it contain information for general interest? Organise the material carefully so that things are covered in one place in the piece of writing. Boil down what you need to say to plain English, for example:

“There has been a rise in employment on a part-time basis” should be “There has been a rise in part-time employment”.

3. Look at the clarity of the piece. Are you saying things that are obvious or extraneous? “The relevant information can be found...” – as opposed to the irrelevant information? Try “Information on this can be found...”.

Is any of the phrasing obscure? Pick the subject of your sentence, what you really want to get across to your audience, and communicate it. If you’ve done this with every sentence then you should be clearly communicating what you want to.

“The national institute in charge of the statistical files of medical personnel in France provided a list of physicians in the Rhone-Alpes region, from which 600 doctors were randomly selected.”

The fact that the 600 doctors from the Rhone-Alpes region were chosen as case studies should be the focus of this sentence, not the national institute. The sentence should be rewritten something like this:

“The case studies were chosen from a list of 600 doctors working in the Rhone-Alpes region. The list was supplied by the national institute in charge of medical personnel in France.”

If you need a quote to spur you on: “Perfection is achieved not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away”.

- leave a night between writing and editing
- read it through first without trying to pick anything up – give yourself a break
- check the legibility and structure
- the more you look through, the more you find
- use short sentences
- don’t use the passive voice
- does every sentence add something? And is it clear what it adds? If not, rip it out.
- cut before you add anything
• get someone who isn’t an expert to read it to say if they understand it
• read it slowly so you see what is there – not what you expect to see
• do it somewhere you can concentrate – quiet rooms are ideal for this work
• ask your in-house editorial team to have a look through it
• use consistent terminology, spellings, tone and formatting
• use a print version if it’s easier – you blink less when reading on screen so your eyes dry out
Proofreading

Why proofread? To make sure your work is error-free. This is different to editing. Edit then proofread, never the other way around. The proofread is the final check before you publish something. Some of the advice remains the same for proofing as for editing.

Things to remember when proofreading:

- leave a night between writing and proofing – never proofread in the afternoon
- read it through first without trying to pick anything up – give yourself a break
- comb through for spelling and grammar
- the more you look through, the more you find
- get someone else to look through it, not the person who wrote it
- read it out loud
- read it slowly so you see what is there – not what you expect to see
- split any data and charts – check one, then the other, then any references in the text to the data
- check the format – extra line spaces, check how images sit in text, how the paragraphs sit
- do it somewhere you can concentrate – quiet rooms are ideal for this work
- ask your in-house editorial team to have a look through it
- use a print version if it's easier - you blink less when reading on screen so your eyes dry out
User personas

Expert analysts

Who they are

Someone who creates their own analysis from data. This user downloads spreadsheets into their own statistical models to create personal datasets.

Access to the data for analysis is more important to them than its presentation.

Likely to say

“Written reports give helpful context, but I’d prefer to see the data. It has to be very easy to find what I want.”

What motivates them

It is part of their job to analyse data. They have a passion for data and need accurate statistics to provide confidence in their analysis. They are interested in the use of open data.

What they want

Expert analysts want to:

- have clear links through to the latest available economic data
- find specific data, such as historical data
- create datasets to support their statistical models
- access data quickly, within the hour, as they are time-pressured
- avoid being distracted by similar-sounding data
- find data in number format, not just percentage change
- know when the next release of data is due
- understand what impact changes in methodology have on data
- see clear signposting for data revisions

Behaviour and preferences

They are more likely to be critical about mistakes and shortcomings in the provision of statistics, and will phone ONS to locate new data or to query changes in data.

They may use an application programming interface (API). An API allows users to automatically import data between computer software. An example of this would be Quandl’s Financial Data API, which can be used to access datasets from multiple publishers.

How they find information

These users prefer to access data via a desktop computer. They will bookmark browser pages. They know when information is due for release, so will sit on the site to wait for it, often on the release calendar page.
What they like

- Datasets and previous releases being simple to find and re-find.
- The impact of changes to methodology being made clear.
- Data and analysis not being conflated – presentation is unimportant to them.

What they don’t like

- Delays to data releases, or changes to their frequency.
- Datasets using different formats and layouts.
- They get frustrated if they can’t find clear links to data quickly.
- Overuse of zip files.

Information foragers

Who they are

Someone who wants local data and keeps up to date with the latest economic and population trends to help them make practical, strategic business decisions.

They often don’t know exactly what to search for, until they come to it.

Likely to say

“I want to enhance my understanding of the UK economy and structure using data. Summary reports are too vague.”

What motivates them

They want to improve their understanding of the UK economy and structure, and look for official data from reliable sources to help their organisation. They need a reliable data source, with methodology they can trust.

What they want

Information foragers want to:

- keep up to date with the latest economic and population data
- use local data, with demographics, to compare with national data
- copy and share content that is easy to understand
- find data within the day of publication
- use data to make graphs and support infographics
- have trust in our methodology, and they will follow changes in it
- be confident they have the latest data
- know upcoming release dates for planning purposes

Behaviour and preferences

They know what they are looking for but sometimes have to search for this. They can find locating the correct dataset problematic and may rely on email alerts to guide them. They
find email alerts useful for finding unusual things that spark their interest. They often rely on email alerts to lead them to newly released data.

They prefer data but will use written reports.

**How they find information**

These users prefer to access data via a desktop computer. They will download data in XLS or CSV spreadsheets – they find Json formats too technical.

**What they like**

- Browsing by theme and seeing data organised in this way.
- Quick access to data, especially spreadsheets.
- Clear titles, good metadata and precise keywords.
- Tracking methodology changes.

**What they don’t like**

- Too many sites covering the same topics.
- Too many links or unclear organisation.
- Content that assumes users know what to look for.
- Being presented with technical tools or jargon.

**Inquiring citizens**

**Who they are**

Infrequent visitors to our site who search for unbiased facts about topical issues. They want simply worded, visually engaging summaries, charts and infographics. Data can help make informal decisions about pensions and investments.

They engage on social media and browse with smartphones or tablets.

**Likely to say**

“I want to find unbiased information so that I can verify the key points of what I see on the news and Facebook.”

**What motivates them**

They want to find out more about a topical issue they have seen on the news, such as house prices or immigration. Many want to track financial investments and follow changes to indexes like RPI or CPI.

Others want to find out about their local area or are looking for information to help with their studies.

They have an enquiring mind – engaging titles and images will spark their interest.
They distrust big business and government, and are looking for a trustworthy source to verify news.

What they want

Inquiring citizens want to:

- find unbiased information to verify facts given by non-government organisations or political parties
- find content with clear data points such as high-level summaries
- see visually engaging content
- quote or share links to content
- see an overview of trends
- find written reports useful for putting numbers into context

Behaviour and preferences

They will often arrive at a web page via eye-catching links from email alerts or social media. They will ring the contact centre to help find information. They will often share infographics.

How they find information

They access the ONS website on an infrequent basis from laptops at home. They will use mobile devices where following ONS on social media.

They don’t tend to download and save any content. Where they do, they’re more comfortable with spreadsheets and PDFs.

What they like

- Clear links to “popular” data.
- Being able to drill down to their local area.
- Being able to browse a website with ease.
- Interactive content.
- Intuitive labels and utilities.

What they don’t like

- Unclear naming conventions, which they can find confusing.
- Regular changes to the format or location of data.
- Language that is too complex.
- The impression of any bias or agenda.
- Having to rely on downloads to make data clear.

Technical users

Who they are

Someone who only wants data and will create their own datasets and customise their own geography boundaries. Data from ONS are frequently used in conjunction with data from
other government departments. They may be expert at what they do with statistics, but can be less expert at looking for base data.

There isn’t the urgency we see from the expert analyst. They don’t tend to use written publications.

**Likely to say**

“I need easy access to specific types of data that I can reformat, cross-reference and manipulate.”

**What motivates them**

They have a passion for building platforms of data from various sources. They need trusted data and confidence in accuracy of data.

**What they want**

Technical users want to:

- create their own datasets from merged data
- customise their own geography
- use large volumes of data
- find cross-themed data to combine
- download data to reformat, cross-reference and load into their own databank
- access data within the week of its publication, and like to see it timestamped
- see well-signposted information on geography changes

**Behaviour and preferences**

They have a strong idea of what they are looking for but sometimes have to search for it.

They are less likely to view written reports as they only want data.

They transform data to meet their needs. If geographic boundaries don’t match what they are looking for, they’ll create their own.

**How they find information**

These users prefer to access data via a desktop computer. They will download entire datasets and prefer to use Json, XLS or CSV formats.

**What they like**

- Customisable data downloads, in appropriate formats.
- Easy links to a simple interface that has access to all ONS data.
- Search that will reliably take them to the right dataset.

**What they don’t like**

- Data being in a format that they can’t easily combine with other sources.
• Changes to geography that aren’t clearly signposted.
• Not being able to find particular geographical datasets through search.

Policy influencers

Who they are

Someone who uses data for benchmarking and comparison. For some policy influencers, this requires data and analysis at a regional or local level. They rely on official government statistics, trusted by decision makers, for their reports.

Likely to say

“People make important decisions based on my work. I need to use data I can trust to build a profile of my region.”

What motivates them

They want to access our website to further their own understanding of the economy.

They will share data that may be of use to their organisation. They want to find trusted information and will look to ONS and other government data to provide this. Using trusted data gives them credibility.

What they want

Policy influencers want to:

• use ONS data they can combine with other government sources to create their own charts
• copy charts and infographics into reports for evidence
• download multiple datasets at once
• create benchmarking levels, for local areas against national data or neighbouring areas, for example
• use written reports, sometimes at a local or regional level
• find long time series of data
• create their own over-time analysis
• access methodology information so they can be aware of any changes

Behaviour and preferences

They prefer a single source for data but will use third party commercial data providers. They often rely on email alerts to learn of new data availability and releases that may be of use to them. They will refer to written reports to put data into context.

They will contact ONS for information on impact of methodology changes.
How they find information

These users prefer to access data via a desktop computer. They prefer the CSV format as it is easier to manipulate.

What they like

- Data that are easy to find, browse and share.
- Links to methodology.
- Being informed of any changes made to methodology.
- Clear, unique titles that will show in search results.

What they don’t like

- Too many similar-sounding statistical releases and datasets.
- Inconsistent data formats and layouts.
- Being unable to find information on comparability over time.
- Content that assumes users know when new releases will come out, or which releases will be useful.
Web accessibility

Website accessibility describes whether a website can be used by people of all abilities. Good accessibility makes it simple for every user to navigate, read and interpret content. These are the main standards for accessibility that should be met.

Text

- write all content in plain English, and explain all acronyms or jargon
- include a summary or key points of the main information at the beginning of content
- make paragraphs no more than five or six sentences, breaking up the text into short chunks
- use headings and sub-headings to break up sections of text
- use bullet points for all lists
- don’t use directional text, like “the list below”, which is misleading when using screen readers

Formatting text

Italic

Don’t use italics. Use single quotation marks to distinguish titles of books, articles and journals.

Bold

Only use bold in headings.

Underlining

Don’t use any underlining.

If you want to create emphasis, you can do this through what you write. If you need help rewriting, contact the Editorial team.

Tables

- acronyms should be spelt out in full or clearly explained
- column headings in tables should be clearly visible
- avoid using zip files unless spreadsheet files are very large or a number of different file types need to be bundled together

Charts, maps, infographics and other images

- all content in an image (such as axes, keys and other labels) and footnotes must be easy to read for someone with typical eyesight
- upload a larger version of the image so users can click on it to enlarge it if chart labels are not easily read
- write out acronyms in full or clearly explain them
• don’t use red and green together, as it’s difficult to distinguish between them
• make sure there’s clear distinction between different lines

All images must have alt text. When you hover over the image, a yellow box will appear with a brief, accurate description of the image. This should be around 15 words, and not repeat the image title or content in the text. Screen readers read this out for people with visual disabilities.

Images must be no more than 600 pixels wide but can be longer than 600 pixels. However, consider usability when determining the length of an image; it needs to be fully visible on-screen without too much scrolling.

**Hyperlinks**

Don’t use directional text, such as “click here” as this is misleading for users with screen readers.

When creating hyperlinks, the text containing the link should be a specific description of the destination page.

**Example**

There’s more information about accessibility within GOV.UK content if you’re interested.

The full terms and conditions for competitions explain more about this.

Assistive technologies separate out links, so each one should be easy to identify.

**Example**

accessibility within GOV.UK content

terms and conditions for competitions

If a hyperlink will involve downloading a file rather than going to another web page, users should be informed what they are about to download and its size.

**Example**

In July we published a new user guide for population statistics (PDF, 100KB)

Quotation marks are not needed around a hyperlink.

**Video, audio and interactive content**

This can present barriers for some users, but can enhance accessibility for others. Some users may prefer to access data in a non text-based format. When presenting data in an interactive format (for example, SVG or Flash), provide the data being used to create the
animation as a download file in CSV or XLS format. Give a description of the main points where possible. When using audio or video content, always provide a transcript. If the content is also on a third-party website, provide it there if possible. For example, on YouTube you should provide a transcript in the comments section.

**Accessible formats**

Websites should allow users to change viewing schemes, which change the size of text and colour contrast. Users should also be able to use assistive technologies, such as Jaws or Dragon screen reading software, to read content out loud.

**PDF content**

PDF files are less accessible than web flat pages. Make sure PDFs are altered to meet accessibility standards. The easiest way is to make sure that the source document (if in Word) is made accessible before converting it to PDF. Then check the PDF using the accessibility checker in Adobe Acrobat Pro.

The PDF should have:

- correctly tagged content within Adobe (as headings, text, tables, images, etc)
- the correct reading order within Adobe
- alt text added to all images
- bookmarks for all main headings in the navigation pane and the PDF file set to open this pane automatically
- the language specified (usually English)
GOV.UK release calendar

Release title

A release title should:

- be under 65 characters
- describe the statistics in the release in plain English
- include the coverage and time the statistics relate to
- be in sentence case
- include “experimental” if experimental statistics
- use a colon instead of hyphens or dashes, and a comma if you need a second separator

Example

UK overseas trade statistics: non-EU February 2014

HES-MHMDS data linkage report: August 2015, experimental statistics

A release title should not:

- be excessively long (or it will cut off in the search results)
- contain jargon or technical language
- include abbreviations or acronyms (unless well known, for example, UK or EU)

Example

Cereal use by UK brewers, distillers and maltsters: November 2014 (65 characters)

Not

Cereal usage by brewers, distillers and malsters in the UK: November 2014 (73 characters)

Summary

A summary should:

- be under 140 characters (including spaces)
- explain what the release is about in plain English
- be a unique description specific to the release
- not repeat the title
- begin with the most important words, so search engines can find the document (not ‘This release provides…’)
- end in a full stop
Remember: when a release title or summary is displayed in the release calendar or search engine results, users need to see whether this is what they want.

**Contact details**

The name, business area, email address and telephone number of the responsible statistician must be included.

Group email addresses and telephone numbers are acceptable for the specific statistics team; generic departmental details should be avoided.

**Example**

Kat Pegler, Business Prices, ppi@ons.gsi.gov.uk, +44 (0)1633 456 468

**Email addresses**

Write in lower case with an active link. Do not use other words as part of the link.

**Example**

ppi@ons.gsi.gov.uk

**Telephone numbers**

Use the plus sign, international dialling code and the area code. Add space between the international dialling code and the rest of the telephone number.

**Example**

+44 (0)20 7273 1234

**Dates and numbers**

**Months**

Use the format [Month] [Year]. Shortened months can be used if space is limited, as in titles.

**Example**

March 2014
Dec 2019

**Quarters**

Use months instead of quarters. When you can prove that either “Q1” or “Quarter 1” are searched for, then follow the term with an explanation of which months are included in the quarter.
Example

Business investment: Jan to Mar 2014 provisional results
Gross domestic product: preliminary estimate Q1 Jan to Mar 2014

Date Spans

Use [date] to [date]. If months are used, repeat the year after each month.

Example

2009 to 2010
July 2014 to September 2014

Non-calendar years

Use the type of year and ending month and year.

Example

financial year ending March 2011
academic year ending July 2013

Ages

Use “aged [age] to [age] years”. For ages under a year, include months or weeks.

Example

aged 6 to 8 weeks
aged 9 to 10 years

Bottom limits for age restrictions should use “aged [age] and over”, and not a plus sign.

Example

aged 75 and over

Body field

Use this to reassure the user that the release is (or isn’t) what they’re looking for. The body text should:

- not be longer than 100 words
- describe what the statistics are about and their purpose
- be clear, concise and written in plain English
- provide context if there are other similar statistics
- not repeat the title and summary
• not summarise what the publication says

Titles and metadata

So users can find what they're looking for, all text should be:

• in plain English
• as short as possible
• frontloaded (most important information first)
• Also ensure house style is applied.

Bulletin title

Format

Title, geographical coverage: date

Extra information, such as “provisional results” or “final estimates”, goes at the end of the title, after the colon and the date.

The date refers to the data not the publication.

No acronyms – include in the keywords if common and users likely to search by it.

Example

Producer price inflation, UK: September 2017

Bulletin summary

Clear, concise, frontloaded summary of the bulletin’s content. It appears directly under the title on the website. It can be the same as the meta description (as long as it’s not longer than 160 characters).

Example

Changes in the prices of goods bought and sold by UK manufacturers including price indices of materials and fuels purchased (input prices) and factory gate prices (output prices).
**Meta description**

Clear, concise, frontloaded description of the bulletin’s content. Maximum of 160 characters (can be the same as the bulletin summary). This text appears in search engine results so it needs to make sense out of context (that is, away from our website).

**Example**

Input and output index series. Contains producer price indices of materials and fuels purchased and output of manufacturing industry by broad sector.

**Keywords**

No more than five. Do not duplicate words from the title or meta description.

**Example**

PPI  
manufacturing  
output prices  
input prices  
producer prices

**Dataset titles**

This must describe what the dataset contains and be:

- frontloaded (most important information first)
- short – aim for 60 characters
- free of acronyms – put these in the keywords
- not include the word "dataset"

May contain geographical coverage, but put this in “About this dataset” if it makes title too long.

**Example**

Producer price inflation records: monthly figures

**About this dataset summary**

Clear, concise, frontloaded summary of what is in the dataset. Should contain geographical coverage (if it’s not already in the title) and the frequency of the data.

**Example**

Input and output price indices for the UK, providing months when movements were higher, lower or equal.
Statistical bulletin

Introduction

What is a statistical bulletin? A statistical bulletin is a short summary of findings and essential commentary related to a new release of data. We encourage you to start writing each bulletin from scratch rather than reworking a previous release.

Editorial principles

Write your bulletin in a consistent format and style to help users navigate, consume, understand and use it.

To do this, follow our eight editorial principles for statistical bulletins:

1. Bulletin means bulletin
2. Tell a story through the data
3. Find a topical angle
4. Understand what your users want
5. Don’t bury the story in stats
6. Every section must have value
7. Every section should be self-contained
8. Write concisely in plain English

Bulletin means bulletin

Only include new and essential commentary unique to this release. Leave any information that doesn’t change from release to release in other parts of the website, such as Methodology. Avoid lengthy commentary. Use visual elements such as charts to help users understand the information at a glance.

Tell a story through the data

Your bulletin must tell the story that the new data reveals. Replicating the previous bulletin is likely to obscure what has changed or emerged.

Find a topical angle

If your data and its analysis can help shed light on current events then place it in the context of a topical news subject or story.
Understand what your users want

Keep in mind who the users are when writing your bulletin. What do they need to know and what is the best way to tell them?

Don’t bury the story in stats

Decide what the most important messages are and only include these. Include everything else in other, more detailed, articles and methodology reports.

Every section must have a value

Write and structure your bulletin so that every section justifies its inclusion. Will commentary help users or is the information better presented just as data?

Every section should be self-contained

Bulletins are not news stories with a beginning, middle and end. Structure your bulletin into sections which discuss different subjects or information. Users must be able to read and understand each section on its own. You should not have a section that is simply used for information that doesn’t fit anywhere else, like Background notes. The new structure accommodates all your bulletin needs, and static information should be provided elsewhere on the website.

Write concisely in plain English

Put the most important information first. Follow our guidance for writing releases in plain English, and consider how users read information online.

Naming your bulletin

All release titles must include:

- the name of the release
- the geographical coverage
- date or period the data covers, using the abbreviated month format (Jan, Feb)

An example of a title that includes all three elements is “Regional labour market statistics in the UK: June 2016”.

A title could include other information such as “provisional” or “final” where appropriate.

Essentials

There are three sections all bulletins must have:

- Main points
- Things you need to know about this release
- Quality and methodology
You can include other sections when needed, as explained in Writing your analysis.

**Main points**

This is where you communicate the most important information about your bulletin. Points should be ranked in order of importance from a statistical point of view. Each point should be a single bullet point and contain one message that is expanded upon in the release.

We advise a maximum of five or six main points; if you are getting close to 10 think about whether they are really needed. Avoid putting links in your Main points; it’s not good practice to point users away from your bulletin right at the start of it.

Each bullet point should be a single sentence starting with what’s happened, followed by the significance of this. Use a semicolon to split up the sentence if necessary. For example:

“The latest 3 month on 3 month figure shows an increase in growth of 1.6%; this is now the 31st consecutive period of 3 month on 3 month growth.”

**Things you need to know about this release**

This is where you make clear any vital information the user needs to know so that they don’t misuse or misunderstand the data.

This can include:

- recommendations about how the data should be used
- guidance on how to avoid misinterpretation
- concise definitions of terms
- any important methodology approaches or changes

Also include a standard bullet point for every release that has National Statistician’s designation.

**Quality and methodology**

Information about quality and methodology of the data, which helps the user decide how it can be used.

Use this section to communicate any minor changes to methodology or caveats that wouldn’t necessarily go in “What’s changed in this release” or “Things you need to know about this release”, but can help enhance the user’s understanding of the data.

**Writing your quality and methodology**

We recommend starting this section with a definition of the survey and what data are being collected.

This section must include a Quality and Methodology Information document (QMI) and can also include metadata documentation, if available.
QMI

Use the following standard text before linking to your QMI document.

“The (add name and link) Quality and Methodology Information document contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
- uses and users of the data
- how the output was created
- the quality of the output including the accuracy of the data

Other documentation to include

Include metadata documents which provide further information on relevant data quality, legislation and procedures. This can include documents such as user guides, technical articles and any dynamic quality information such as reference tables that changes every time your release is published.

Optional sections

Outside of the three mandatory sections and those you use to tell the story of your data, there might be additional areas you want to cover. For each of these, think carefully before using any of these common recurring sections; they should only be included if they are beneficial to the user.

Statistician's comment

This section is for a comment aimed at the media, and if used it goes immediately after the Main points. The comment must be approved by the Media Relations Office. The heading can change to Analyst’s, Author’s, Researcher’s or Economist’s comment as required.

The comment should contextualise the main findings, drawing the information together to highlight something of primary interest to the media. It should not just be a figure that the user can read for themselves elsewhere in the bulletin.

The comment should be placed in double quote marks, followed by the name of the person quoted and their job title. If the person quoted has an ONS Twitter profile, include their handle as a call to action.

Example

“Fewer people got married in England and Wales in 2013, the first decrease in marriages since 2009. The fall could indicate the continuation of the long-term decline in marriages since 1972 or could be due to couples choosing to postpone their marriage to avoid the number 13 which is perceived as unlucky by many cultures.”
What’s changed in this release?

Use this section to highlight changes to the release that are noteworthy but not crucial to the user’s understanding of the data the way content in “Things you need to know about this release” is, such as a change in methodology or a seasonal adjustment review.

Links to related statistics

Use for links to other publications. You should add context or further information about the link where relevant, explaining why the user might want to read it, rather than just provide a list of links under the heading. If you have a link that doesn’t need explaining, for example, in a marriages bulletin you may want to link to a divorces bulletin, then use the You might also be interested in box instead.

You might also be interested in

This is a box on the right-hand side of the release page. It will only appear if content is provided. This is the place for links related to the publication and it only provides space for the link text with no context.

Upcoming changes to this bulletin

Use this section to highlight changes that will make future releases of your bulletin different from the latest version, from methodological changes to special events such as Chancellor of the Exchequer Budgets.

Whatever features in this section should appear in the next release’s “Things you need to know about this release”.

Writing your analysis

Once you’ve compiled the regular sections, the rest of your bulletin will consist of analysis of your data, containing only top-level information and essential analysis.

We recommend including no more than three or four analytical sections in order to keep your bulletin concise and focused.

Naming your sections

Each of your analytical sections should have a descriptive title that will tell the user a story at first glance. A good title will have an active verb, be a snappy, single sentence and encourage the user to read on. A generic title, such as “Introduction” or “June figures” is flat and uninformative.
Telling a story
A good heading almost reads like a newspaper headline, and tells a complete story in itself.

Example

England sees growth in private rental prices while Wales and Scotland remain static
Labour productivity up in the first quarter of 2016, but the productivity puzzle remains

Asking a question
Alternatively, you can grab the reader’s attention by raising a question that will compel the reader to read your analysis in order to learn the answer.

Example

What has driven the change to the long-term trend of falling producer prices?
At what age are people getting married?

Turning your data into a narrative
When writing a section, follow our guidance on writing for the web. Your text should be in concise, plain English and written with the user in mind.

Your analysis will expand upon the narrative established in your main points, giving the user more detail and context. When deciding what to write, consider what is the most important information that supports your main points, otherwise it can be left out of your bulletin. Users can still find the data in datasets and further detail can be explored in an accompanying article.

The first paragraph of each section must contain the most important fact. Use further paragraphs and figures to add more detail and context to broaden the user’s understanding.

Example

Introduction: Productivity – as measured by output per hour – grew by 0.5% in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2016. This leaves productivity 0.2% higher compared with Quarter 1 2008, just before the recent economic downturn.

Second paragraph: Quarterly growth of 0.5% is equal to the 1994 to 2007 average – but taken together with recent, weaker quarters, there is little sign of an end to the UK’s “productivity puzzle”.

Introduction to figure: This puzzle is illustrated by Figure 1, which shows 2 alternative measures of productivity – output per hour and output per worker – alongside their projected 1994 to 2007 trends.
Use of visual elements

Charts and interactive products

Use charts in bulletins to deliver a clear message visually. If a chart doesn’t tell its own “story”, consider whether it’s really needed. Annotating a chart can help add context to the data and reduce the need for text elsewhere.

Use interactive charts and maps sparingly when they can bring an extra dimension to your data. Contact the ONS Data Visualisation Centre on mailto:datavis@ons.gov.uk for advice and guidance on interactive charts.

Tables

Tables can capture a great deal of data but often aren’t the clearest or most transparent way of presenting the statistics or telling the story, such as a chart. If the user does want all of the data, they can download it. Only uses tables in your bulletin if there is a strong justification for doing so.

Further reading

- Style.ons guidance on charts
- Using Y-axes in charts
- Line charts

Writing your quality information

Include quality information to help users understand data within your statistical bulletin and the quality implications for that data.

Help users avoid misunderstanding or using the data in the wrong context by making them aware of critical quality warnings or caveats on specific issues relating to the data.

There are three types of quality information within statistical bulletins:

- Things you need to know about this release
- Quality warnings within your analysis
- Quality and methodology

Selecting and structuring your quality information

Your quality information should be:

- structured in order of priority, with the most important item appearing first
- what users need to know to avoid misusing data, rather than what they may want to know
- regularly reviewed and updated to keep it current, relevant and helpful
- the most important and relevant topics for that data – avoid “default topics” you update every month
**Things you need to know about this release**

Include the most crucial quality information, for example common pitfalls, that will reduce the risk of users misusing data, in “Things you need to know about this release”.

Read our guidance in the What to consider including in your quality information section and **Things you need to know about this release**

**Quality warnings within your analysis**

Include any critical quality caveats or warnings within your commentary alongside the analysis they relate to. These can also be included in the Things you need to know about this release section.

**Quality and methodology**

This is the best place for any other quality information that enhances users’ understanding of the data and helps them to make decisions on its suitable uses, but doesn’t meet the criteria for Things you need to about this release or relate to a specific area within your commentary.

This section should also signpost to further information on methods used to create the data and what the data is used for. Give a clear reason for the user to access the information so that they understand the benefit of doing so.

Read our guidance on **Quality and methodology**.

**What to consider including in your quality information**

Think about what users need to know to understand how to/how not to use the data within the bulletin. This could include, but is not limited to:

- are there any common pitfalls or areas of misunderstanding from previous bulletins?
- is there discontinuity; how does this affect the use of the data?
- what is the most relevant and useful information from your users’ point of view?
- is there uncertainty in the data and how does this affect its use?
- what are the main data sources?
- can you compare this data to other statistics?
- what are the strengths and limitations of the data?
- are there important issues affecting data, such as boundary changes requiring revisions?
- what is the coverage, and what is not included?
- what's the periodicity?
- what similarities and differences are there with alternative outputs?

This isn’t a definitive list of considerations. Different bulletins will have different quality information issues to raise with users.
Ordering your bulletin

A typical order for your sections would be:

1. Main points (mandatory section)
   1a. You might also be interested in (box-out in right hand rail, optional)
2. Statistician’s comment (optional)
3. Things you need to know about this release (mandatory section)
4. Analysis section 1
5. Analysis section 2
6. Analysis section 3
7. Links to related statistics (optional section)
8. What’s changed in this release? (optional section)
9. Upcoming changes to this bulletin (optional section)
10. Quality and methodology (mandatory section)

Template

Download our statistical bulletin template with the recommended structure.
Data visualisation

Keep it simple (KISS)

Keep it simple – if there are several relationships in the data and they’re not well represented using one chart, separate the data into several charts.

Chart size

The chart shouldn’t feel separate from the report. Use the same font type and size for charts as the body font in the surrounding report.

Do

Unemployed adults age 16 to 64 by region
England, 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Count (thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and The Humber</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Don’t

Unemployed adults age 16 to 64 by region
England, 1993

Unemployed adults age 16 to 64 by region
England, 1993
Location of y-axis

Locate the y-axis on the left or the right of the chart area. Place it on the right if the most recent values are the most interesting or relevant. Otherwise, put it on the left of the chart.

Gridlines and unit intervals

Use gridlines sparingly. There should usually be between four and eight gridlines per chart, depending on the size of the chart and the level of data. They should provide enough reference points to read the data values in the chart easily.

Don't use too many gridlines.
Don’t use too few gridlines.

**Do**
Choose sensible gridline intervals.

**Do**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Don't**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gridlines should always be grey: RGB value (190,190,190).

**Don’t**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>£ (millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gaps between bars**

A standard bar chart should have gaps between bars that are slightly narrower than the bars. The exceptions to this are the exception of histograms and clustered bar charts.

**Example**
A clustered bar chart should have gaps between the clusters that are slightly wider than a single bar.

Example
Borders and backgrounds

Don’t use borders and backgrounds for charts.

Don’t

Axis labels and tick marks

For continuous data axes centrally align labels over tick marks.

Example

For categorical data axes labels should be aligned between tick marks.

Example
You can use more tick marks than labels; ticks indicate the scale or level of detail of the data.

Label the final tick if there are more ticks than labels and there is space to do so.

Example

Economic inactivity rate for people aged 16 to 64
UK, January 1980 to October 2014

Number of lines per chart

The maximum number of lines plotted on a chart depends on how similar or different the data are and what you want to highlight.

You need to make sure that each line is easily distinguished from the others.

Don’t
Small multiples solution

Use small multiples if it is difficult to distinguish between the plot lines of four or more similar data sets. Use the same scale for all charts when comparing two or more data series.

Example

A singular time series of interest can also be highlighted, with all other data sets toned down.
Slope chart solution

Use a slope chart to highlight changes between selected years. The granularity of the data is not evident, however trends are easily noticed.
Line styles

Use solid lines, dotted lines and dashed lines to differentiate between time series. This also means lines look more distinct when printed in black and white or if a user is colour-blind.

Legends or keys

A legend or key shouldn’t be used, instead label the data directly. If a legend or key is necessary, place it on the chart as close as possible to the data.

Do

![Graph showing line styles and labels](image1)

Do

![Graph showing line styles without labels](image2)
Don't

The order and orientation of the legend or key should be the same as the data.

Do
Don't

Long category names

Use a horizontal bar chart rather than a vertical bar chart if your data has long category names.

Do
Don't
Subcategories

If the subcategories are not the same in all of the main categories, label the main categories and subcategories directly on the y-axis.

Example
3D and other chart effects

Don’t use 3D when creating charts. The false perspective will distort the data.

For example, categories A and B seem equal when plotted in 3D. However, category B is noticeably larger, as shown when plotted in 2D.

Example

![3D and 2D graphs comparison](image)

When plotted in 3D, the highest value appears to be around 7.9 in 2012. The same data in 2D clearly shows the highest value is 8 in 2010.

Example

![3D and 2D graphs comparison](image)

In 3D, bar W looks smaller than bar Z. However they’re both equal.
Example
Choosing the correct chart

There are eight common relationships that charts display. Prioritise what you want to highlight in the data and choose the chart type accordingly.

The eight common relationships within data are the following:

- comparisons of magnitude (size)
- time series
- ranking
- part-to-whole
- deviation
- distribution
- correlation
- spatial (maps will be covered separately in phase 4)

Choice of data

Consider the message you want to communicate and choose your data accordingly. Your message might be better conveyed by deriving variables.

Comparing data sets – shared horizons

Start data that are likely to be compared from the same point on a chart – a shared horizon. Use a clustered chart to compare values; only the first category is easily comparable in stacked bar charts.

Do

Adoptions by sex
England and Wales, 1998 to 2012
Don't

Adoptions by sex
England and Wales, 1998 to 2012
Comparisons of magnitude (size)

To show:

- X is bigger than Y
- A is almost twice the size of B

Comparisons of size are shown most effectively as horizontal or vertical bars. Always begin the y-axis at zero.

Small differences in magnitude, starting the y-axis at a non-zero value

If there are small differences between values sometimes it is necessary to start the y-axis at a non-zero value.

Always put a break in the y-axis if you don’t start at zero.

Don’t

Use a dot (or other symbol) plot to make comparisons between values. The size of the visual element representing the data (dot position) is representative of the data value itself.
You can also show small differences between data by adjusting the deviation. This is changing what data can be seen from a chosen value (the deviation section has more information).

Example
Time series

Rather than over-emphasising month-to-month or point-to-point comparisons of estimates a time series can show:

- change
- trend
- fluctuation
- growth
- decline
- increase
- decrease

Time series axes

Time should always run from left to right along the horizontal axis.

Time series charts

A time series with regular intervals can be presented using line charts, bar charts or a combination of both.
Bar charts for time series

Bars should be used to emphasize individual values at distinct points in time. Use them when data points are at equal intervals.

Example
Line charts for time series

A line chart will emphasise the overall pattern of the data and highlight trends. Use them when you have lots of data points or just a few. Multiple times series should always use line charts.

Example

![Line chart example 1](image1)

Example

![Line chart example 2](image2)
Dot plot with line for time series

Use a dot plot with a line when there are lots of data points or the interval between data points is not equal. Show if data are irregular.

Do

Don't
**Multiple time series**

Multiple time series shouldn't be presented using bar charts. Use a line chart to make sure the trends in the series are clear. Use points on a line to highlight individual data points, to read specific values or highlight when the data were sampled.

**Do**

![Line chart example](image1)

**Don't**

![Bar chart example](image2)
Small changes over time, not starting the y-axis at zero

Time series charts don’t have to begin at zero, if a chart doesn’t start at zero this must be indicated by breaking the y-axis in an obvious way.

A chart can tell a very different story depending on the scale of the axes.

This chart gives the impression that the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination level has remained high and fairly stable.

Example – an overview

MMR vaccination uptake at age 1
UK, 1992 to 2012

When the y-axis is altered a different picture emerges showing that the measles, mumps and rubella vaccination has dropped considerably since 1997.
Example – a more focused view

MMR and Diphtheria vaccination uptake at age 1
UK, 1992 to 2012

You can use two charts with different axes scales to ensure that the data are represented without bias whilst highlighting the important message.
Ranking

To show:

- greater than
- less than
- equal to
- from lowest to highest

Ranking Charts

Use bar charts to show data that are ranked, in either ascending or descending order. Horizontal bars should be used.

A bar chart should always be ranked by value, unless there is a natural order to the data (for example, age or time).

Don’t

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>£ billion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To highlight the highest values the largest value should be at the top of the chart.
Descending, largest values highlighted

To highlight the lowest values the smallest value should be at the top of the chart.

Ascending, smallest values highlighted

If you are talking about data in terms of first, second or third or “the top 10” they should always be in descending order.
Do

Top 10 girls' baby names
England, 2013

Don't

Top 10 girls' baby names
England, 2013
Plotting a change in rank

Use a slope chart to highlight a change in rank.

Ranking multiple series

Rank the most important or recent data if there are multiple series and the other data sets should be ordered correspondingly.
Part-to-whole

To show:

- ratio
- percentage
- proportion
- share
- breakdown
- make up
- hierarchy

Bar charts and pie charts should be used to show part to whole relationships.

Pie charts should only be used when there are less than six categories, otherwise use a bar chart or, if appropriate, combine categories.

Rank the categories in a pie chart and start the first segment at the 12 o’clock position.

Segments of a pie chart must sum to 100%. If the categories do not sum to a meaningful whole, don’t use a pie chart. Where appropriate categories can be combined to highlight a certain message but should never be removed.

Do

All main categories included
Do

Religion categories combined

Don't

No religion and not stated categories removed

If no categories are dominant use a bar chart to illustrate your data.
Do

Don't
Multiple part to whole

Use bars to enable comparisons to be made across multiple part to whole charts.

Example – to enable comparisons within sub-categories

Example – to enable comparisons across sub-categories
Deviation

To show:

- number of times more than the average
- the difference from

Use a bar chart to plot deviation from a fixed value, or series of values.

**Deviation where the value of data is most important**

**Example**

GDHI per head (£)
England, 2011

![Deviation bar chart for GDHI per head in England, 2011.](chart1.png)

**Deviation where the amount of change is most important**

**Example**

GDHI per head index comparison with England average (£), England, 2011

![Deviation bar chart for GDHI per head index comparison with England average.](chart2.png)
Deviation where the amount of change is most important

Use small multiples to plot deviation for multiple series. The axes should be identical for each small multiple.
**Distribution**

To show:

- frequency
- distribution
- profile
- range
- concentration
- normal curve
- population pyramid
- shape

**For one variable**

Use a histogram to show a distribution of data. Use small gaps between the bars to emphasise the profile of the data.

**Example**

** Usually resident population aged 0 to 21  
UK, 2013 **
For two variables

Use a population pyramid to show the distribution of comparable data sets and highlight differences in the profile of the data.

Example

For more than two variables

To compare four variables population pyramids can be overlaid, with the least important data set displayed using an outline pyramid instead of bars.

Example
Small multiple charts can also be used for multiple distributions. Use the same scale to enable comparison across charts.

**Example**

Box-plots can also be used to compare distributions with two or more variables.
Correlation

Correlation charts are often associated with causality and they should be used with caution.

Correlation can show:

- increases with
- relates to
- changes with
- varies with
- caused by

Anscombe’s Quartet

Anscombe’s quartet is a powerful illustration of the drawback of relying solely on basic descriptive statistics to summarise data. The data in all four of the graphs in the quartet are virtually identical when using standard descriptive methods. Looking at your data before analysing it is something that Anscombe was passionate about

Example
Chart titles

Label charts as a figure and number them in order. Figures should have a main title and a statistical subtitle. Titles and subtitles should be concise and in sentence case.

Main title

The main title should be descriptive, and tell the trend of the data or highlight the main story. Try to limit the number of words to no more than 10. This should make the description easier to read and avoid the text wrapping onto several lines, especially on mobile devices.

If you need to add context or detail to the chart, use annotations or support with your analysis.

Statistical subtitle

The statistical subtitle should be as short as possible and must include the:

- statistical measure
- geographic coverage
- time period

You do not need to include these elements in the subtitle if they are already in the main heading.

Writing chart titles to support your analysis

When writing your chart title and analysis:

- use chart titles to complement or build on, but not repeat section headings
- add further context and explanation of the chart’s message in your main text
- do not try and summarise everything the chart says in the title, but prioritise the main message

Take care not to use language in a title that you would not use in your analysis. Exaggerated language such as “greatest rise ever” may be more eye-catching, but use sparingly as it may appear sensationalist or could potentially be misinterpreted.

It can be useful to draw attention to a record level being recorded in the most recent data, but if a new record continues to be set every month, using the same title will lose its impact. Use sparingly and find another message to concentrate on instead.
Examples

Figure 1: The gender pay gap fell to 8.6% among full-time
employees in 2018

Gender pay gap for median gross hourly earnings (excluding
overtime), UK, April 1997 to 2019

![Graph showing gender pay gap](image)

Plotted lines represent discontinuities in
2004, 2006, 2011 ASHE.

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) - Office for National
Statistics

Figure 6: Motor trades continued a decline seen over the
past two years

Growth, three-months on three-months a year earlier,
November 2014 to January 2015 until July to September 2018

![Graph showing motor trade growth](image)

Source: Office for National Statistics, GDP monthly estimate
Your title can refer to a shorter period than shown on the graph. You can highlight an important short-term trend and give broader context by using a longer timeframe in your chart and analysis.
If your chart has more than one message

If a chart has more than one narrative, choose the one that will be most relevant to users for the main title. Use annotations to draw attention to secondary messages, but do not try and explain every nuance in the chart when your analysis can provide more detail.

Figure 10: The number of police recorded offences involving firearms has decreased in the latest year

England and Wales, year ending March 2003 to year ending June 2018

In the most recent data, there has been a decrease.

The number of offences involving firearms have had a long downward trend, but have been increasing since 2014.

Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office
**Titles for other visual elements**

Other types of visual content can communicate information. If you are using a flow chart or a map, the same titling principles apply. Use a descriptive title to tell the user what the story behind the image is, and use a statistical subtitle if appropriate.

**Figure 3: Disposable incomes tend to be highest in the South East**

Gross disposable household income (GDHI) per head for NUTS3 local areas, UK, 1997 to 2017

Source: Office for National Statistics

Sometimes a graphic may genuinely be one you wish your user to explore – there is no immediate story or message on display. For example, some of the interactive graphics coming from the Data Visualisation team may be in this space. In these rare cases, it is acceptable to use a title that encourages the reader to explore the graphic.
Figure 2: Explore how well-being ratings have changed in your area

Personal well-being explorer, UK, year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2019

Start typing some area names, or click the lines to select up to 6 areas

out of ten
Chart labels

Chart text must be horizontal. If the labels won’t fit into the required space, transpose the chart or convert the units.

Do

Unemployed adults age 16 to 64 by region
England, 1993
Don’t

Unemployed adults age 16 to 64 by region
England, 1993

Right align y-axis values.

Example

Pets by nation
UK, 2012
Labelling values in a chart

Bar charts shouldn’t need data value labels. If you need data value labels, create a chart–table combination.

Do

If you can’t create a chart–table combination, make sure the data value labels are placed at the base of each bar and right-aligned.

Example
Don't
Annotation and footnotes

Chart annotations can be very useful to highlight key messages in your data. They must be concise and relevant. Place annotations on the chart as close as possible to the data points of interest.

Avoid chart footnotes where possible. If extra information is needed:

- annotate the chart
- include the information in the statistical commentary accompanying the chart
- add a footnote to the chart title

Example

Number of divorces
England and Wales, 1910 to 2011

Tables

Tables should be used to:

- allow comparison of individual data values
- present a very precise level of detail
- show multiple units of measure (for example, measurements and percentages)
- present only a small number of data values
- show values and their sums

Data order in tables

Group the data into meaningful subsets and make it clear in what order it should be read. Hierarchy and grouping can be shown by using white space and indenting column headings.
Example

UK total

England

North East
Darlington
Durham
Gateshead

- (other Local Authorities in the North East)

North West
Blackburn with Darwen
Blackpool
Bolton

- (other Local Authorities in the North West)

- (other regions and breakdown by Local Authorities)

Wales
Blaenau Gwent
Bridgend

- (other Unitary Authorities in Wales)

Scotland
City of Aberdeen
Aberdeenshire

- (other Council Areas in Scotland)

Northern Ireland
Antrim
Ards

- (other District Council Areas in Northern Ireland)

A table is made up of classification variables and data values, either of these can be used to order your table depending on the context.

If the table is not ranked by data value and the classification variables have a natural order, like age or geography, keep this order in the table.

Additional guidance is available on the recommended standard presentation order of statistics.

Put the variables that are most likely to be compared in columns, with the units, tens or hundreds beneath one another.
Example – where data are most likely to be compared between years

Example – where data are most likely to be compared between ages

Time should run from left to right or top to bottom.

**Hierarchy and grouping**

Show hierarchy and grouping using white space and by indenting column headings.

**Do**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registered deaths by sex</th>
<th>All persons</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England and Wales</td>
<td>505,690</td>
<td>244,934</td>
<td>260,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>473,552</td>
<td>229,291</td>
<td>244,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>26,465</td>
<td>12,589</td>
<td>13,876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>69,045</td>
<td>33,385</td>
<td>35,660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and The Humber</td>
<td>50,342</td>
<td>24,237</td>
<td>26,105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>42,277</td>
<td>20,739</td>
<td>21,538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>52,260</td>
<td>25,742</td>
<td>26,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>53,269</td>
<td>25,694</td>
<td>27,575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>47,580</td>
<td>23,609</td>
<td>23,971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>77,778</td>
<td>37,213</td>
<td>40,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>54,536</td>
<td>26,083</td>
<td>28,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>32,138</td>
<td>15,643</td>
<td>16,495</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Column spacing

It’s easier to read columns of numbers if they are tightly spaced. Columns should use equal spacing, unless there is a specific reason for altering it. Split column headings over lines to save using wide columns, but choose a sensible place to put the line break.

Fonts

The font type and size should match the font used in your publication. The font should be mono-spaced, with the same width for each character or digit, so that all the units align.

Bold text in tables

Don’t put numbers in bold as they will move from their correct alignment.

Example

46,363

Not

46,363
**Number alignment**

Always right-align headings and data in columns so that units, tens, hundreds and thousands are aligned and numbers of equal value are easily comparable.

**Example**

```
524,623
  12
22,354
  7,356
    457
     3
```

**Not**

```
524,623
  12
22,354
  7,356
    457
     3
```

**Or**

```
524,623
  12
22,354
  7,356
    457
     3
```
**Number rounding**

Always use a consistent level of precision, but use the lowest level possible for the intended user.

**Example**

For the “inquiring citizen”, that is, a broader, less statistical audience:

260,000

**Example**

For the “information forager”, for example, a local politician making decisions about future council tax charges:

264,300

**Example**

For the “expert analyst”, for example, in a statistical journal discussing the detailed methodology behind the estimation, or in a situation where reproducibility is important:

264,337

**Effective rounding**

Effective rounding can be used to communicate and present numbers so that they can be understood quickly and easily. Remove any unimportant or irrelevant information, but keep the detail in the data.

Look at whether there is a difference between the first numbers, second numbers, third numbers and so on. You should round the numbers for comparison to two effective digits.

**Example**

\[
\begin{align*}
£25,289.37 \\
£28,306.24 \\
£25,289.37 \\
£28,306.24 \\
\color{red}£25,300 \\
\color{red}£28,300 \\
\end{align*}
\]

When using effective rounding you may need an extra level of rounding when a value is small enough that the detail is removed when using two effective digits. If the value is not important it could be removed from the table. If it is important the level of effective rounding should be adjusted to an appropriate level.
Example (three levels of effective rounding)

15.9 million
21.9 million
17.3 million
11.2 million
0.4 million

Not (no effective rounding)

21,912,963
17,271,420
11,243,817
436,254

Not (two levels of effective rounding)

16 million
21 million
17 million
11 million
0 million

Totals

Totals can go at the top or the bottom of a table, depending on their relevance and importance.

If your data are hierarchical, positioning the totals at the top can help emphasise that the total is broken down.

Measures

Use the same measure across all variables where possible.

Make it clear if different measures, for example measurements and percentages, are being used in the same table.

Charts, tables and colours

This guide will advise on best practice and house style for three areas of data visualisation:

- tables
- charts
- colour

Use this guidance to decide when and where to use these to produce quality content, tailored to your audience.
This guidance covers the basics of chart and table design. Additional considerations may be needed in some situations, for example, responsive design.

**Shading, gridlines and other lines**

Use lines and shading sparingly. Use subtle colours or greyscale. Make sure the shading doesn’t distract from the data.

Shading can be used to track data across rows but also to highlight specific values.

**Units**

Put the units as a header in the top right corner of the chart. Use subheadings if the units change within a chart.

**Captions, titles and subtitles**

Captions can be very useful to highlight key messages within a table. Captions are optional and should only be used where there is an appropriate story.

Titles should be clear and concise, noting the main axes of the table, unless one of the categories is included in the subtitle. Don’t use capital letters for table titles or headings in tables.

Subtitles should include the geography and a time period, either a single year or the range of years covered in the data.

The heading should be slightly larger than the table font and in bold.

**Example**

**The gap between male and female life expectancy has narrowed**

*Life expectancy at birth by sex*

UK, 1980 to 2014

**Annotations**

Use letters to annotate numbers and numbers to annotate words or letters.

**Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>24.7</th>
<th>Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Position the explanation of the annotations underneath the table.

Annotations should be slightly smaller than the table font.
Source

If the data within your publication are from multiple sources list the individual data source(s) beneath each table.

If all data within your publication are from the same data source reference it in the main body text.

Colour

Colour is an important consideration in design. Use colour carefully, it should reinforce the main messages in your data.

Don’t rely on colour alone to communicate the stories in your data. The important messages communicated by the data must be clear if the graphic is viewed in black and white or if the user is colour-blind.

When considering your colour choices look at the relationships present in the data. It should be used to group related items and command attention. Contrasting colours can be used to focus attention on differences, or interesting areas, within the data.

A safe starting point is to use subdued, pastel colours or greyscale to communicate the majority of your information.

Using colour in bar charts

Categorical data in bar charts

For categorical data that can’t be organised into broad groups use the same colour and shade.

Do
If the categorical data can be grouped use colour to help highlight this relationship.
Do – colour by broad category

Use colour when sub-categories are not shared across broad categories to show hierarchy in the data.

Do – colour by year

Use colour when sub-categories are common across broad categories to show secondary relationships in the data.
Using colour in line charts

Use colour to distinguish between lines on a line chart. If the data has an implied order, for example age ranges, use different shades of one colour, or colours with different luminance values, but the same hue and saturation.

Example

If the data has no implied order, for example male and female, different colours (hues) can be used.

Example

Lines have a smaller area than bars, which means fewer colours can be distinguished. Try to avoid using more than four shades of one colour on a line chart without using another mechanism to differentiate between them. Using colour and texture can be particularly powerful.
Where data categories can be ordered

Do

Where data categories have no order

Do
Using colour in pie charts

Different shades of one colour, or colours with different luminance values, or different colours (hues) can be used in pie charts.

Example
Using colour to connect information

You can also use colour to connect information and charts on a page or within an article.

Example
Choosing the right colours

Always ensure that people who can't perceive colour or see it in a different way can still understand the information.

If you need to use colour to convey information make sure that colour-blind safe colours are used. Use a colour-blind simulator, such as Vischeck, to test your colours to see whether they are colour-blind safe.

Colour palettes should be chosen to maximise the difference in perception between the colours and also appear distinct to people with varying types of colour blindness.

A good starting point is to choose colours that are distinct from the background and each other.

When choosing a colour palette tools like Colorbrewer can provide a good starting point. Palettes for use in ONS will be added here in the future.

Tools

Use these tools to help ensure your colours are accessible:

- **Colorbrewer** is a useful basic tool that allows you to choose 3 to 12 colours according to specified requirements, for example colour-blind safe or diverging colours
- **Colorhexa** allows greater control over choosing optimally distinct colours, a colour-blind simulator shows how colours appear to people with different types of colour blindness
- **Adobe Illustrator** allows you to simulate different kinds of colour blindness

Colour association

Certain colours have different meaning associated with them, which will vary dependent on context.

For example:

- red: caution, anger, love, negative (in finance), hot
- orange: warm, autumn
- yellow: happy, fun, young
- green: nature, calm, good luck
- blue: stability, professional, cold, trust, intelligence
- purple: wealth, mystical, decadent
- brown: rustic, practical, warm, vintage
- white: sterile, innocence, peace, truth, cleanliness
- black: sophistication, death, night, contemporary
- multicolour: international, all inclusive, multicultural
Where appropriate use colours that are naturally associated with the categories they are representing.

**Example**

Don't

However, you need to be aware of colour association with potentially sensitive topics, for example, political parties. The use of a particular colour can change the context of what you are presenting.
Branding with colour

Colour can be used to show the data are part of a particular brand or collection. For example, the 2011 Census used a purple colour scheme and this was used in the design of their charts.

Example

But…

Don’t be constrained to only using your corporate or brand colours. Use the colours that are most appropriate to highlight patterns in the data and can be perceived the most clearly by all users.
Accessibility and colours

Approximately 1 in 12 men (8%) and 1 in 200 women suffer from colour blindness. There are many different forms of colour blindness:

**Normal vision**

![Normal vision spectrum]

**Deuteranomaly**

![Deuteranomaly spectrum]

**Protanomaly**

![Protanomaly spectrum]

**Protanopia**

![Protanopia spectrum]

**Deuteranopia**

![Deuteranopia spectrum]

**Tritanopia**

![Tritanopia spectrum]

**Tritanomaly**

![Tritanomaly spectrum]

**Achromatopsia**

![Achromatopsia spectrum]
Use these three helpful rules when choosing your colours

“Get it right in black and white”

Make sure your design works in greyscale (black and white) before adding in colour. Don’t assume colours will signal meaning when used on their own.

“The safest hue is blue”

The richest colour across all types of colour blindness is blue, therefore blue is often a good colour choice.

“Red and green should never be seen”

Avoid using red and green together as they are difficult to distinguish from one another in the more common types of colour blindness.
Colour combinations

Avoid colour combinations that are especially hard for colour-blind people to see.

Don’t
Use various shades of a single colour, instead of multiple colours to help avoid colour blindness issues. This can be done by varying the luminance or saturation and holding the hue constant.

Example

![Diagram showing variation in luminance and saturation](image)

Colour-blind people can still perceive contrast, as well as differences in hue, saturation and brightness. Use bright colours which are easier to distinguish rather than dim ones, which tend to blur into one another.

Some mildly colour-blind people are able to see a colour, but only if there’s a sufficient “mass” of it. Use larger areas and thicker lines if possible.
Using red and green

If you’re using red to signal “warning,” or “caution,” and green to signal “approval” or “correctness” consider adding a symbol to make sure colour-blind users can still understand the message.

Do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>contact number</th>
<th>01234 567890</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>email</td>
<td>john.smith@<a href="mailto:ons@gov.uk">ons@gov.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>last name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Don’t

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>contact number</th>
<th>01234 567890</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>email</td>
<td>john.smith@<a href="mailto:ons@gov.uk">ons@gov.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>last name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Traffic lights use red and green, but the position of the lights communicates “stop” or “go”, even if the colours can’t be seen.

Example—normal vision
Example - appearance for someone with red-green colour-blindness

When the use of red and green is unavoidable, for example RAG (red, amber, green) ratings make sure that colour isn’t the only method of communication.

Consider representing RAG ratings in the same way:

Example

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>904</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>!</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔</td>
<td>904</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further information about colour theory

Colour theory is complex and is based on colour models and colour spaces.

Colours are defined in many ways, three of the more common ways are:

- RGB (red, green, blue) – which describes the type of light emitted to produce a colour
- HSL (hue, saturation, luminance) – commonly used by artists
• CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, black) – used in printing to describe the inks required to produce a given colour

Example

This colour can be defined in the following ways:

RGB(35, 165, 142), HTML traditionally uses hexadecimal conversions of the RGB value to define colour. For example #23A58E

HSL(169.38°, 78.79%, 64.71%)

CMYK(77.75%, 11.45%, 54.28%, 0.34%)

You can use at least one of these methods to define colour in most software packages.
Social Media

Our posts on social media should use plain English. This guide has been created to improve writing for social media.

All social media posts must be self-contained and read correctly out of the context of the release or bulletin. This includes text and images shared on all social media accounts.

We publish three main types of content on social media:

- **Headline** – this should include the subject, number and a link.

- **Nuggets** – this is posting a fact or interesting point without asking a question.
• Hook – this is sharing information relating to issues of public interest.

We have various followers on social media (have you seen our user personas?) so we often share content we think a specific group of people would be interested in. Regardless of the targeted audience, all content should be easily understood by everyone. This means we use plain English and write content as simply as possible so that our content is usable and accessible. Anyone should be able to understand our content; this isn’t “dumbing down”, this is opening up information to all. The reading age tools in Microsoft Word may help when drafting content for social media.

**Personality**

Our personality as an organisation is an expression of how we behave and what we believe, so:

• be friendly and use warm and welcoming language
• be helpful, respectful and give good advice
• always be honest and only share information that is reliable, we are a source that you can trust
• use the active voice (“John did this”), not the passive voice (“this was done”); a passive voice can sound defensive
• address the user and refer to them as “you” where appropriate so they feel we’re talking to them personally
• refer to ourselves as “we” and “us”

**Variations from Style.ONS for social media**

• Ages in years: When a tweet needs to be shortened, use the abbreviation “yrs” for “years”
• Age ranges: Use a hyphen, such as “10-12 yrs”
• Ages: Use the plus sign (+) when characters are limited on social media, such as “aged 12 and over” as “ages 12+”
• Fractions: Show these as a number over a number (one-quarter can be 1/4)
• Writing numbers: Use numerals such as 1st, 2nd, 3rd etc
• Abbreviations and acronyms: Avoid these as social media content should be self-contained and informative to everyone
• Ampersand: Use these to replace the word “and” but only when characters are limited

Top tips for writing a Tweet or social media post

When writing a Tweet or social media post:

• have a point and get to it
• write self-contained short copy
• cut out the puns/acronyms/jargon
• include strong links/hashtags
• frontload with the most important information
• have a call to action

Images for Social Media

All charts and graphs should have a title and source. See the chart guidance for more information.

Colour

Please see the colour guide when choosing colours.

All colours used should meet the WCAG 2.0 accessibility guidelines and have a colour contrast ratio of 4.5: 1. This ensures that the background colour and foreground colour of graphs and text is a high enough contrast to meet the AA standard.