

A content editor's glossary

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Introduction

The LGSS commitment

We are committed to making information we provide or share online as accessible as possible, regardless of the type of device someone prefers to use.

The information in this guide incorporates best practice guidance and is designed to help achieve a good standard of usability.

Guidance should be adopted across all digital presences that the council has, including all websites, microsites, the intranet and social media.

Who should use this guide

This guide is for anyone creating information to be published online. It details our house style for the terms listed in the glossary.

When using this guide alongside other advice, house style should be used over the style described in other guidance, regardless of the source.

If you think something is missing from the guidance notes, email communications@lgss.co.uk with your suggestion.

Promoting best practice

Government Digital Service (GDS) style guide

GDS has produced style guidance which is used on the Gov.UK website and adopted by many local government organisations.

GDS undertakes significant research as part of developing its guidance, and is a trusted source of best practice.

Relevant guidance from GDS should always be followed.

[Gov.UK website – A-Z of style](#)

Plain English

The Plain English Campaign is an independent group that campaigns for plain English in public communication.

It provides a number of free guides to help you avoid jargon, and some alternative words and phrases to make things clearer.

Before undertaking any communications activity, you should familiarise yourself with their guidance.

[Plain English Campaign website](#)

Glossary

Abbreviations

Not everyone will understand abbreviations, especially if they are not familiar with the subject or if there are a lot of them on one page so it's best to avoid them.

Titles

Only use abbreviations for people's titles, for example Cllr Smith, or Dr Jones. You don't need to include any punctuation after abbreviated titles.

Partner organisations

Refer to partners using their full name, for example: Cambridgeshire County Council. If you are only referencing one partner on the page, you can refer to 'the county council' as the context will be clear.

If you are referencing multiple partners, you can abbreviate but you must include the abbreviation in brackets after the full name, the first time it is mentioned. For example: Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC).

If you are referencing multiple partners in a list where this is not possible, you must include a key.

Acronyms

Avoid using acronyms. Many people struggle to understand them, information with lots of acronyms can be more difficult to read.

Rather than writing out *service improvement plan (SIP)* and then continually referring to the *SIP*, refer instead to *the plan*.

People may access a webpage through a search engine so it's important that information is easily understood. The context should be made clear on the page so it doesn't confuse readers.

Alignment of text

People with sight problems find text that is left aligned easier to read. It's clear where each new line begins and the spacing between words is even, making it easier to follow. Always left align text and don't alter pre-set formatting on LGSS platforms.

Ampersand

Although commonly used, not everyone knows what the & symbol means. Always use *and* instead of &.

Bold text

Use bold sparingly. If your text is well written points shouldn't need to be emphasised in bold.

Capital letters

Using too many capital letters makes text difficult to read, especially on a screen. People who write formal documents tend to use more capital letters than necessary. If in doubt, use a lowercase letter.

People

Use a capital letter for people's names, but not their profession. Use capital letters for their job title only if it follows their name, for example: *John Brown, Website Designer*. If you are just referring to John as a website designer, capital letters are not needed.

Places

Use a capital letter for place names. Only use a capital letter when naming a specific building, not describing a building in general. For example, you wouldn't need a capital letter for *library* but you would for *Wolverton Library*.

Recognised subjects

Use capital letters to refer to common subjects like Council Tax or Universal Credit. Although technically unnecessary, they are commonly referred to in this way so it helps if we are consistent.

Team or service names

Team and service names should have capital letters. Remember you would normally refer to 'us' as LGSS rather than name specific services, unless you need the user to be clear which service is taking action or being accessed.

Contact details

Rather than including contact details, include links to e-forms where possible.

Where you do have to include contact details, put a team inbox and one phone number that will always be answered during office hours.

Dates

Write dates in full where possible but don't include 'th', 'st' or 'nd'. Only add the year if it won't be immediately clear, for example when information relating to an application process for two separate calendar years is displayed on the same page.

If space is tight, perhaps in a table, you can shorten them in this order:

- Monday 5 October
- Mon 5 Oct
- 5 Oct

Double spacing

Some authors or report writers will leave a double space at the end of a sentence. There's no need to do this.

Duplicate content and existing information

Information should be published in one place on a website, but can be connected to another section to make it accessible from two places. There should only ever be one true version of it in existence.

There's no need to reproduce information that is already published on another website. Just link directly to that website to make sure the user will always find the most recent information.

Hyperlinks

It's important to tell a user where a hyperlink will take them, otherwise they may be unsure if they are in the right place and be less likely to use a form or download.

Linking to documents

Try to provide the information as text on a page where possible. If a download is the best option, make it available as a PDF where possible. Links to documents should open in the same window.

Linking to pages on the same site

Be descriptive and consistent when inserting links to other pages on the same website. These links should open in the same window.

Use terms like 'tell us your details have changed' that are calls to action and not wordy terms like 'To tell us your details have changed, see our contact page'.

Be aware of the title of the page you're linking to and avoid littering your text with hyperlinks. If you refer to something regularly, you

don't need to hyperlink it each time, just make sure it is easily identifiable on the page.

Linking to other websites

Make it clear that the user will be taken to another site in the link.

For example, if you're linking to a job description on Public Sector Jobs East, hyperlink 'Public Sector Jobs East website' and not 'job description'.

Links to other sites should open in a new window.

Click here

Never use this term to describe a hyperlink. It's very clumsy and doesn't help people who rely on assistive equipment to browse the internet. Always follow naming conventions to properly describe a hyperlink.

Hyphens and dashes

Many applications will automatically format dashes for you, but always check for consistency. Notice the subtle difference between [-] which should be used to hyphenate words, and [–] which should be used to break up sentences.

Images

Images are subject to copyright restrictions and under no circumstances should an image be downloaded or copied from a search engine and used without the owner's permission. Email communications@lgss.co.uk for advice on sourcing images.

Italic text

Italics are often used in print for emphasis or for names of publications. Italic text isn't as easy to read on screen as it is on paper so avoid using it.

Lists

Lists with bullet points can help to break up large blocks of text.

Be concise when introducing a list and don't use the term 'the following...' because readers know that the information will follow. For example, say: 'These events will take place' instead of 'The following events will take place'.

Only use an initial capital if the line starts with a name, and avoid putting commas at the end of each line. A full stop is not needed at the end of the last line. A colon [:] can be used to introduce the list.

Naming conventions

Naming conventions exist to help users understand the type of content they're accessing, like a document or another website, and make it easier to manage different website content.

Effects of ignoring naming conventions

Imagine you can't see very well. You're using a screen reader which can read out all the links on the page to you, but they all say 'click here.'

How do you know which link is for an application form and which link is to a contact form if they all say 'click here'? Labelling links clearly as 'contact form' leaves no doubt.

Naming documents properly

To make it easier to manage media files, don't put dates or versions in the document name. If a document is supplied called 'Application Process Guidance 2017 v2' rename it 'guidance on the application process'. Versions and dates don't need to be in the title.

LGSS and its partners

Remember that people already know they are on the LGSS website.

Refer to LGSS as 'we' and 'us' and the customer as 'you'. For example, say 'Completing the form will submit your application to us' rather than 'Completing the form will submit your application to the LGSS HR team'.

Page headings

These headings help define sections on a page. Descriptive headings can help screen reader users skip quickly to the content they need. The main page title is classed as H1, with secondary headings labelled H2, H3 etc.

Per cent and %

Use % rather than writing out 'per cent'.

Speech marks

Be consistent. When pasting text from somewhere else, check that the formatting hasn't been lost, leaving speech marks angled incorrectly. For example ' instead of '. Double quotation " " marks should be used when quoting a person. Single quotation marks should be used when quoting a document.

Tables and boxes

Avoid putting text in tables unless absolutely necessary. Tables sometimes don't resize properly when a website is viewed on a small screen. Don't be tempted to put a box around text to emphasise your point – it actually makes it more difficult to read.

Telephone numbers

Avoid including individual phone numbers where possible. If you do need to write them, format them like this: 03001 261 111. There's no need for brackets around the area code and the number should be split into two groups of three to make it easier to read.

Times

The 24 hour clock can be difficult for some people to understand, so always use the 12 hour clock and include 'am' or 'pm' in this format. Use the least amount of numbers possible, for example 09.00am is simply 9am.

- 9-10am
- 9am-1.30pm

Never mix the 12 and 24 hour clock up – 21:00pm – it is completely wrong.

Underlining text

Avoid underlining text because users may confuse it for a hyperlink.

Structuring content

Put the important points first

People scan information on websites. If they have to scroll – remember some people will use a smartphone with a smaller screen – to find the most important information, it's likely they'll give up quickly and pick up the phone instead.

Write for your audience

Our information mainly falls into two categories.

Marketing information

This type of content promotes LGSS services and encourages prospective clients to contact us for more information. It should be written in an open and engaging way.

Transactional information

This is information which people need to access to carry out a task. It should be functional and free from jargon and unnecessary detail. Users will have a purpose when they access this information.

For help in writing effective copy, email communications@lgss.co.uk.

Include calls to action

Most users have a purpose in mind when they visit our site. Some will be looking to complete a task, while others may be wanting to find out about our services.

Either way, it's important to include calls to action which guide a user into doing something. That could be making a call to enquire about buying an LGSS service or completing a form to provide information we have asked for.

Use active terms like 'call 03001 261 111 today to discuss a bespoke quote' or 'give us feedback on the service you've received' that encourage people to get involved.

There is a place for information about the history of our organisation and the accomplishments of our services, but information pages shouldn't be used for this.

Filler words

Remember that people using smaller screens can't see as much text. The less there is to read, the easier it is to find information.

Sentences should be properly constructed, but contain as few words as possible to make sense and be grammatically correct. See how filler words have been taken out of this sentence, but it still makes sense:

~~Please note that~~ The office is closed on ~~the following days:~~ Monday, Friday and Saturday.

Google writing guide

Google has published recommendations on all elements of website design, including writing. Their guidance provides some useful working examples to think about when creating content.

[Google website – writing guide](#)