

## The Guardian and Observer style guide

# Guardian and Observer style guide: L

'If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it.' **Elmore Leonard**

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**A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z**



## lying in state

📷 Illustration: Jakob Hinrichs

### laager

South African encampment; **lager** beer

### labour movement

### Labour party

### La Coruña

Spanish port

### Lady Gaga

remains Lady Gaga on second and subsequent mentions

### Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk

Shostakovich opera, usually misspelt in the Guardian as Mtensk, with occasional variations such as Mtsenk

### Lady Thatcher

(and other ladies) not Baroness

T

**lag**

pipes are lagged; other things lag behind

**LaGuardia**

New York airport

**Lai Ching-te**

president of Taiwan. You can mention that he is sometimes also known as William Lai

**laid-back**

He is laid-back, she is a laid-back boss

**Lailat al-Miraj**

Islamic holy day; **Lailat al-Qadr** Islamic holy day, time for study and prayer

**laissez-faire**

not laisser

**Lake District**

or **the Lakes** or **Lakeland**. Note that, with the exception of Bassenthwaite Lake, bodies of water in the Lake District do not have “lake” in their names (eg Buttermere, Derwent Water, Ullswater, Windermere)

**lakes**

capital L: Lake Baikal, Lake Erie, etc

**lamb's lettuce, lamb's wool****lamp-post****lance corporal****Land**

state of the Federal German Republic: we normally call them states, eg “the German state of Hesse”

**landmark**

overused as an adjective, randomly strewn through stories, perhaps as an alternative to flagship

**landmine****Land Registry**

government department that registers title to land in England and Wales; the Scottish equivalent is Registers of Scotland

**Land Rover****Land's End**

but the clothing firm is Lands' End

**kd lang**

Canadian singer

**Laos**

officially the Lao People's Democratic Republic; the language is Lao

**lapdancer, lapdancing****Lapland**

the northernmost province of Sweden. Finland has a county called Lapland. However, do not use the name to refer to the cultural region of the Indigenous Sami people, which extends across national boundaries and they call Sápmi. It is considered offensive. Please reserve the terms Lappland/Lapland to refer, where necessary, to those exact regions in Sweden and Finland and not to the wider area

**laptop****La Rambla**

preferable to Las Ramblas

**Large Hadron Collider**

Take great care over the spelling of Hadron

**largesse****larva**

(plural **larvae**) insects; **lava** volcanic magma, lamp; **laverbread** cooked seaweed

**La's, the**

defunct Liverpool rock band; keep apostrophe (abbreviation for Lads)

**lasagne****laser**

word dating from 1960 formed from the phrase "light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation", and an example of why not all acronyms need to be capped up

**lasso**

noun (plural **lassos**) and verb: you lasso a horse with a lasso

**last or past?**

interchangeable in such phrases as "six times in the last week", "twice in the past year".

But last means "most recent" in this sentence:

"United have beaten Wednesday five times in their last six meetings"

whereas past refers to the past as a whole in this sentence:

"United have beaten Wednesday five times in their past six meetings" (suggesting they have only ever played each other six times)

## **Last Night of the Proms**

### **last post**

### **last rites**

are given, not “read” (although someone might read you your rights if you were being arrested)

### **later**

often redundant as context will inform the reader: “They will meet this month” rather than “They will meet later this month”

### **late-term abortion**

is a medically inaccurate term. Use **later abortion** or **second- or third-trimester abortion** instead, or put it in quote marks if quoting someone.

### **Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum**

if writing out in full, or Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed al-Maktoum. Princess Latifa is sufficient in furniture and on first mention, followed by Latifa on subsequent mentions

### **Latin**

“Away with him! Away with him! He speaks Latin” (Shakespeare, Henry VI Part 2)

Some people object to, say, the use of “decimate” to mean destroy on the grounds that in ancient Rome it meant to kill every 10th man; some of them are also likely to complain about so-called split infinitives, a prejudice that goes back to 19th-century Latin teachers who argued that as you can’t split infinitives in Latin (they are one word) you shouldn’t separate “to” from the verb in English. Others might even get upset about our alleged misuse of grammatical “case” (including cases such as dative and genitive that no longer exist in English).

As our publications are written in English, rather than Latin, do not worry about any of this even slightly

### **Latino/Latina**

someone from Latin America. Latinx, a gender-neutral alternative, is not widely accepted and we should only use it if an individual or organisation prefers to identify themselves that way

### **latitude**

like this: 21 deg 14 min S

### **latter**

Use only in contrast with former. Saying an item is “the latter” of more than two things is not only annoying but wrong. In such cases, it should be “the last”

### **laundrette**

but Stephen Frears’ 1985 film was *My Beautiful Laundrette*

**Sergei Lavrov**

not Sergey Lavrov is the Russian foreign minister

**law lords**

formerly “lords of appeal in ordinary”, they became justices of the supreme court when it was established in 2009.

They are referred to as Lord Sumption, Lady Hale etc (and not “Lord Justice” or “Lady Justice”, titles applied to court of appeal judges).

Note that the former Lord Justice Leveson is now Sir Brian Leveson. He is president of the Queen’s Bench division of the high court

**lawsuit****lay bare**

(revealed) past tense laid, not lay: so “almost a decade after the genome project lay bare ...” should have read “laid bare”

**layby**

plural **laybys**

**layperson**

avoid layman

**lay off**

does not mean to sack or make redundant, but to send workers home on part pay because of a temporary lack of demand for their product

**lay waste**

a hurricane can lay waste an island, or lay an island waste, but it does not lay it to waste or lay waste to it (the word comes from the same root as devastate)

**lbw**

leg before wicket

**lc**

abbreviation for lowercase

**Lea or Lee?**

the river Lea flows to the Thames; the Lee Navigation canal incorporates part of it; the Lee Valley park is the site for much of the 2012 Olympic development

**leach or leech?**

leach (verb): percolate, remove with a percolating liquid

leech (noun): a bloodsucking worm, or used figuratively to describe, say, bankers

**Lead Belly**

(1888-1949) US musician, real name Huddie Ledbetter

**leader of the house**

or leader of the Commons

**Learjet****learned**

not learnt, unless you are writing old-fashioned poetry (he learned his tables, a message well learned, etc)

**learning disabilities**

rather than learning difficulties, unless referring to education

**least bad**

is the least bad option, rather than “least worst”

**leave, leaver, leave campaign**

for those in favour of the UK leaving the EU, note lower case; see remain

**Lebanon**

no definite article

**le Carré, John**

retain the lower case l on subsequent mentions

**Le Corbusier**

Swiss-French architect (1887-1955), real name Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris

**led or lead?**

In all but the present tense, the verb form is led. This does not stop otherwise normal, sensible people writing things like “he was lead to the slaughter” or “the singing will be lead by Cliff Richard”. If this is just a slip of the keyboard, it’s a frequent slip

**the left, left wing, leftwinger, lefty, lefties, hard left, soft left, old left**

nouns; **leftwing** adjective

**left field, left-field**

two words as a noun: “this idea comes out of left field”

hyphenated as an adjective: “a left-field idea”

**legal highs**

are now illegal in the UK, which makes them **novel psychoactive substances (NPSs)**, or for variation you could call them formerly legal highs

**Legal Services Commission**

responsible for legal aid in England and Wales; in Scotland it is the Scottish Legal Aid Board

**legal terms**

In England and Wales, in camera is now known as in secret and in chambers in

private; a writ is a claim form and a plaintiff a claimant; leave to appeal is permission to appeal. Since the Children Act 1989, access has been known as contact and custody is known as residence; do not use the older terms

### **legend, legendary**

Johnny Cash, say, may be a country music legend, but he is not legendary; the adjective is better reserved for mythical figures or events that have perhaps grown exaggerated in the telling: King Arthur was a legendary figure, Oliver Reed's alcohol consumption was legendary, etc

### **Légion d'honneur**

### **legionnaires' disease**

named after an outbreak at a conference of American Legionnaires

### **Leibovitz, Annie**

US photographer

### **lent**

past tense of lend; we sometimes misspell it as "leant" as in "a gritty drama, leant added authenticity by Jean Tournier's monochrome photography ... "

### **Leonardo da Vinci**

Leonardo on second mention; "da Vinci" refers to the Vinci district near Florence - it is not his surname

### **lepers**

a term now regarded as inappropriate and stigmatising; say people with leprosy or, if they are being treated, leprosy patients

### **Lesbos**

not Lesvos

### **lese-majesty**

### **less or fewer?**

less means smaller in quantity, eg less money; fewer means smaller in number, eg fewer coins.

This is not just about supermarket signs that say "7 items or less": it can make a real difference in meaning. These statements all say something different:

For less bad things to happen, fewer bad people need to be involved.

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Note also the difference between "do you have less able children in your class?" (children who are less able) and "do you have fewer able children in your class?" (not so many able ones)

**letdown, letup**

nouns

**let down, let up**

verbs

**level crossing****levelling up**

no need for quotation marks, or for a hyphen in phrases such as the levelling up secretary, levelling up policies

**Leveson, Sir Brian**

president of the Queen's Bench Division; no longer Lord Justice Leveson (and he never was "Lord Leveson")

**Levi's**

jeans; the company is **Levi Strauss**

**Lévi-Strauss, Claude**

(1908-2009) French anthropologist

**Lévy, Bernard-Henri**

French philosopher

**LGBTQ+**

preferred abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other identities; it is not normally necessary to spell it out

**liaise, liaison****Lib Dems**

for Liberal Democrats after first mention and in headlines

**libra**

lower case for the proposed currency, which is overseen by the **Libra Association**

**libretto**

plural librettos

**licence or license?**

In British English, licence is the noun and license the verb. So you need a licence to run a licensed bar, or you may need to visit the off-licence

**Liechtenstein****lie**

(tell an untruth), past tense lied.

lie (down), past tense lay: he lay there for an hour.

lay (a table, an egg, put something down), past tense laid



**lied**

German musical setting for a poem, plural *lieder*

**Liège**

but the adjective is *Liégeois*

**lifeguard, lifejacket, lifelong, lifesize****lift**

Do not use as a verb to mean increase; the headline “Bank should lift interest rate next month” suggests that the Bank is going to remove interest rates altogether

**lightbulb****lightening or lightning?**

Your hair may be lightening in colour, but that electrical stuff in the sky is lightning

**lighthearted****lightsaber**

as in the official Jedi spelling

**light year**

a measure of distance, not time; **Buzz Lightyear**

**likable**

not likeable

**like or as if?**

Using *like* as a preposition (“ride like the wind”) is uncontroversial. Using it as a conjunction, introducing a clause that contains a verb (“ride like you’re riding a motorbike”, “he behaved like he was drunk”) will annoy many readers.

The simple way to keep everyone happy is to use *like* when the verb is followed by a noun (“he ran like a gazelle”) and *as if* when the verb is followed by a clause (“he ran as if he had seen a ghost”).

Ogden Nash pointed out that it’s *As You Like It*, not *Like You Like It*, although Shakespeare in fact did use *like* as a conjunction

**like or such as?**

“Cities like Manchester are wonderful” suggests the writer has in mind, say, Sheffield or Birmingham; it’s clearer to say “cities such as Manchester” if that is what she means.

Do not, however, automatically change “like” to “such as” - the following appeared in the paper: “He is not a celebrity, such as Jesse Ventura, the former wrestler ... “

**likely**

In the UK, if not the US, using *likely* in such contexts as “they will likely win the game” sounds unnatural at best; there is no good reason to use it instead of

probably. If you really must do so, however, just put very, quite or most in front of it and all will, very likely, be well.

## **lilliputian**

### **lilo**

something you take to the beach to lie or float on; **LiLo** Lindsay Lohan

### **Limited**

Ltd is preferable

### **limpid**

means clear or transparent, not limp

### **linchpin**

not lynchpin

### **lineup, lineout**

(as nouns)

### **link**

(noun) takes the reader to a related reference on the Guardian or the web; (verb) to insert such a reference into an article or blog

### **LinkedIn**

social networking site aimed at business people

### **lip-sync, lip-syncing**

### **liquefy**

not liquify

### **liquorice**

not licorice

### **listed buildings**

In England and Wales, Grade I-listed (note cap G, roman numeral I) buildings are of exceptional interest; Grade II\* are particularly important buildings of more than special interest; Grade II are of special interest, warranting every effort to preserve them.

In Scotland and Northern Ireland these categories are replaced by the more logical Grade A, Grade B and Grade C

### **lists**

- 1 Similar to bullet points.
- 2 Like this.
- 3 With no full points after the number.

### **literally**

a term used, particularly by sports commentators, to denote an event that is not

literally true, as in “Manchester City literally came back from the dead”

See ironic, ironically

### **Liu Xiaobo**

Chinese winner of the 2010 Nobel peace prize

### **livable**

not liveable

### **live blog**

noun; **liveblog** verb

### **live stream**

noun; **livestream** verb

### **Liverpool John Lennon**

airport

### **Livingston**

is in West Lothian; **Livingstone**, in Zambia

### **living wage**

as advocated by the Living Wage Foundation and paid by some employers; it is important to differentiate this from the “**national living wage**” (in quotes at first mention), introduced by George Osborne in the 2015 budget to replace the minimum wage for workers over 24

### **Lloret de Mar**

not del Mar

### **Lloyd’s of London**

Lloyd’s names are lc; **Lloyds TSB** bank

### **Lloyd Webber or Lloyd-Webber?**

Andrew Lloyd Webber at first mention, Lord Lloyd-Webber (with hyphen) at second mention, thereafter Lloyd Webber

### **llywydd**

the speaker of the Senedd in Wales

### **loan**

noun; the verb is lend

### **loathe**

(rhymes with clothe) detest; **loth** (rhymes with oath) reluctant: “I’m loth to do anything he says because I loathe him so much.”

You sometimes see loth spelt as loath, which is not incorrect, but only adds to the confusion with loathe

**lobby**

requires great care: unless you are writing about, say, the parliamentary lobby or US lobby system, it will at best sound vague and patronising, and at worst pejorative or offensive (“the Jewish lobby”). If you are talking about specific pressure groups, say who they are

**local**

a pub, not a person: talk about local people rather than “locals”

**loch**

Scottish; **lough** Irish. In either case, capital L in the name: Loch Ness (but Loch Ness monster), Lough Neagh. In Scotland lake is only used for one natural body of water, the Lake of Menteith, and a few artificial lakes

**Lockerbie bombing**

in December 1988 killed 270 people; the two Libyans eventually put on trial for murder were Abdelbaset al-Megrahi and Al-Amin Khalifah Fhimah. Megrahi was convicted in 2001 and jailed for 27 years, but was released in 2009; his co-accused was acquitted

**lock-in, lockout**

nouns; **lock in**, **lock out** verbs

**logbook, logjam****log in, log on, log out, log off**

verbs

**login, logon**

nouns (“I’ve forgotten my login/logon”)

**London**

Surprising as it may be to some London-based journalists, most of our readers do not work or live in the capital (or, indeed, the UK). So give location, not just name: ie King’s Cross, north London, not just King’s Cross; there is a Victoria station in Manchester as well as in London, so make clear which one you mean

**London assembly**

elected body of 25 members whose role is to hold the mayor of London to account. Together, assembly and mayor constitute the Greater London authority (GLA); note there is no such organisation as the “Greater London assembly”

**London boroughs and counties**

Parts of the traditional counties of Essex, Middlesex, Kent and Surrey that are close to London retain the county link in their postal address (eg Bromley, Kent), even when they are administratively part of a London borough (eg the London borough of Bromley), and represented in the London assembly. This leads to inconsistencies, as when we refer to “Chingford, Essex” in one story and “Chingford, east London” in another.

It is hard to be totally consistent - the preferences even of people who live in such places may vary (according to how long they have lived there, for example).

In general, use London rather than the traditional counties - Ilford, east London; Bexley, south-east London, etc - unless a group or organisation specifically includes a county designation in its title

**Londonderry**

use Derry and County Derry (first mention, thereafter Co Derry)

**London Eye**

official name of the millennium wheel

**London School of Economics**

abbreviated to LSE after first mention

**London Stock Exchange**

is also abbreviated to LSE, and there is no real way round this (especially for headlines); the context should make clear which we are talking about

**London Transport Users Committee****Long-Bailey, Rebecca****Long Island iced tea****longitude**

like this: 149 deg 18 min E

**longlist, shortlist****longsighted, shortsighted****longstanding, longsuffering****longtime**

adjective, as in longtime companion

**look to**

is used too often in place of hope to or expect to

**looking-glass****loophole**

An unintended ambiguity or inadequacy in a set of rules that is later exploited. Do not use to describe provisions that were intentionally put into legislation

**lord advocate**

the most senior law officer in Scotland

**lord chancellor**

post was abolished in 2003, then reprieved; but the Lord Chancellor's Department was replaced by the Department for Constitutional Affairs, which in 2007 was

absorbed into the new Ministry of Justice, at which point the lord chancellor also became secretary of state for justice

### **lord chief justice**

### **Lord Haw-Haw**

Nazi radio propagandist, real name William Joyce, hanged for treason in 1946

### **lord lieutenant**

plural **lord lieutenants**: they are lieutenants, not lords (just as lord mayors are mayors, not lords). They are the representatives of the Crown in regional areas of the UK

### **Lords, House of Lords**

but **the house**, not the House; **their lordships**

### **Lord's**

cricket ground

### **lottery, national lottery**

but Lotto and National Lottery Commission

### **Lothario**

cap up, whether you're referring to the literary character, or those in real life who resemble him

### **Louis CK**

is a stage name so he should not be referred to as CK on second mention. Either refer to him as Louis CK throughout, or say somewhere "Louis CK, real name Louis Székely" and then refer to him as Székely on second mention.

### **lovable**

not loveable

### **Love's Labour's Lost**

### **lowlife**

plural **lowlives**, not lowlives (for an eloquent explanation, see [Steven Pinker's Words and Rules](#))

### **loyalists**

(Northern Ireland)

### **Ltd**

preferable to Limited

### **luddite**

### **Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva**

president of Brazil 2003-10; normally known simply as Lula

**lumpenproletariat****lunar new year**

avoid Chinese new year

**lunchtime****Lundy**

not Lundy Island

**luvvies**

a silly cliché, best avoided

**Luxembourgers**

live in Luxembourg

**luxuriant**

lush; **luxurious** expensive

“He had his luxuriant moustache waxed at the most luxurious salon in Bootle”

**LVMH**

the luxury goods firm is, in full, Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton

**Lycra**

TM; the briefly fashionable term “lycra louts” led to complaints from the Lycra lawyers

**lying in state**

no hyphens

**Lynyrd Skynyrd**

late US rock band (named after a man called Leonard Skinner)

**Lyon**

not Lyons

**lyrics**

As with poetry, run song lyrics line by line if space permits:

Do you really want to hurt me?

Do you really want to make me cry?

If you don’t have room to do this, separate the lines with spaces and a slash:

Sex and drugs and rock’n’roll / Is all my brain and body need. / Sex and drugs and rock’n’roll / Are very good indeed.

Italics are acceptable, though not essential

**A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z**

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## Most viewed

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