

The Guardian and Observer style guide

Guardian and Observer style guide: T

'When you catch an adjective, kill it. No, I don't mean utterly, but kill most of them - then the rest will be valuable.' **Mark Twain**

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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



Illustration: Jakob Hinrichs

-t
ending for past participle: the cakes were burnt, the word was misspelt. But earned, not earnt

T
(not tee) as in it suited her to a T, he had it down to a T

tableau
plural **tableaux**

table d'hôte

tabloid
refers to longstanding redtops such as the Sun and Daily Mirror, rather than the more recent breed of shrunken broadsheets; they are sometimes accused of writing in tabloidese

tabloid journalists
defined by Charlie Brooker as "people who waste their lives actively making the

world worse”

tad

is a tad overused

Ta-dah!**tai chi****Taiwan**

can be referred to as an island, an economy or a democracy, but avoid referring to it as a country, nation or state. Where relevant, provide context on the status of Taiwan in relation to China. The democratically elected leader can be referred to as Taiwan’s president, and likewise Taiwan’s government

Taiwanese names

like Hong Kong and Korean names, these are in two parts with a hyphen, eg Lee Teng-hui (Lee after first mention)

Tajikistan

adjective Tajik

take-home pay refers to net (after tax), not gross, pay; we sometimes mistakenly use it as a synonym for salary

takeoff

noun; **take off** verb

take-up

noun; **take up** verb

Takeover Panel**Taliban**

plural (it means students); the singular is Talib

talisman

plural talismans, not “talismen”

talkshow

mainly American English; the British English version is chatshow

TalkSport

although the radio station’s brand is talkSPORT

TalkTV

not Talk TV

Tamiflu

trade name of oseltamivir, an antiviral drug that slows the spread of the influenza

virus between cells in the body. Do not call it a vaccine – it treats, but does not pre-empt

tam o'shanter

woollen cap

Tampax

TM; say tampon

T&Cs

terms and conditions

Tangier

not Tangiers

Tannoy

TM; say public address system or just PA

Tantrism

or Tantra is a religious movement within Buddhism and Hinduism that has become more widely known in the west through practices such as Tantric sex and Tantric yoga

taoiseach

the Irish prime minister

Taoism

rather than Daoism

Tardis

the Doctor's time machine in Doctor Who; the acronym stands for time and relative dimension in space

targeted, targeting**tariff****Tarmac**

a company; tarmac formerly used to make pavements, roads and runways (we now walk and drive on asphalt)

tarot cards**tar sands**

rather than oil sands

tart up

Please avoid this phrase

Taser

TM; the generic term is stun gun

taskforce**Tate**

the original London gallery in Millbank, now known as Tate Britain, houses British art from the 16th century to the present day; Tate Modern, at Southwark, south London, Tate Liverpool and Tate St Ives, in Cornwall, all house modern art

Tavener, Sir John

(1944-2013) English composer of such works as The Protecting Veil

Taverner, John

(c1490-1545) English composer of masses and other vocal works

tax avoidance

is legal; tax evasion is illegal

tax burden

a recognised term for tax revenue as a share of the overall economy, but overused in our articles in contexts where simpler, less politically loaded terms such as tax, taxation or tax bill would be better

taxi, taxiing

of aircraft

the taxman

avoid in favour of tax department, HMRC or tax collector

taxpayer

but **council tax payer**

TaxPayers' Alliance

“Britain’s independent grassroots campaign for lower taxes,” or as the Guardian’s Michael White puts it: “Tory front organisation and purveyor of dodgy statistics”

Tbilisi

capital of Georgia

T-cell**Tchaikovsky****teabag, teacup, teapot, teaspoon**

all one word

teaching excellence framework (Tef)

likewise, research excellence framework (Ref)

teammate**teams**

Sports teams take plural verbs: Wednesday were relegated again, Australia have won

by an innings, etc; but note that in a business context, they are singular like other companies, eg Manchester United reported its biggest loss to date

Tea Party movement

named after the Boston Tea Party protest of 1773

teargas**Teasmade**

TM; say teamaker

Technicolor

TM

Ted Talks

the abbreviation stands for technology, entertainment, design

teddy boys

(1950s) took their name from their Edwardian style of clothing

Teesside**teetotaller****Teflon**

TM; say non-stick pan

telephone numbers

should be hyphenated after three- or four-figure, but not five-figure, area codes: 020-3353 2000, 0161-832 7200; 01892 456789, 01635 123456.

Treat mobile phone numbers as having five-figure area codes: 07911 654321 .

US numbers like this, with the area code in parentheses: (508) 362-8652

Teletubbies

Tinky Winky (purple); Laa-Laa (yellow); Dipsy (green); and Po (red)

television shows

chatshow, gameshow, quizshow, talkshow

temazepam**temperatures**

thus: 30C (85F) - ie celsius, with fahrenheit in brackets on first mention; but be extremely wary (or don't bother) converting temperature changes, eg an average temperature change of 2C was wrongly converted to 36F in an article about a heatwave (although a temperature of 2C is about the same as 36F, a temperature change of 2C corresponds to a change of about 4F)

Ten Commandments

not 10 Commandments

tending

one's flock, etc (not "tending to")

tendinitis

not tendonitis

tenpin bowling**tenses**

We've Only Just **Begun** was playing on the radio. He **began** to drink; in fact he **drank** so much, he was **drunk** in no time at all. He **sank** into depression, knowing that all his hopes had been **sunk**. Finally, he **sneaked** away. Or perhaps **snuck** (according to Steven Pinker, the most recent irregular verb to enter the language).

See **burned**, **dreamed**, **learned**, **spelled**, **spoiled**

Terfel, Bryn

Welsh opera singer; for some reason we often describe him as a tenor, but he is a bass baritone

Terminal 5

at Heathrow may be abbreviated to T5 after first mention

terrace houses

not terraced

terracotta**terra firma****Terrence Higgins Trust****terrorism, terrorists**

A terrorist act is directed against victims chosen either randomly or as symbols of what is being opposed (eg workers in the World Trade Center, tourists in Bali, Spanish commuters). It is designed to create a state of terror in the minds of a particular group of people or the public as a whole for political or social ends. Although most terrorist acts are violent, you can be a terrorist without being overtly violent (eg poisoning a water supply or gassing people on the underground).

Does having a good cause make a difference? The UN says no: "Criminal acts calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public are in any circumstances unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them."

Whatever one's political sympathies, suicide bombers, the 9/11 attackers and most paramilitary groups can all reasonably be regarded as terrorists (or at least groups some of whose members perpetrate terrorist acts).

Nonetheless we need to be very careful about using the term: it is still a subjective judgment - one person's terrorist may be another person's freedom fighter, and

T

there are former “terrorists” holding elected office in many parts of the world. Some critics suggest that, for the Guardian, all terrorists are militants – unless their victims are British. Others may point to what they regard as “state terrorism”. Often, alternatives such as militants, radicals, separatists, etc, may be more appropriate and less controversial, but this is a difficult area: references to the “resistance”, for example, imply more sympathy to a cause than calling such fighters “insurgents”. The most important thing is that, in news reporting, we are not seen – because of the language we use – to be taking sides.

Note that the phrase “war on terror” should always appear in quotes, whether used by us or (more likely) quoting someone else

Tesco

not Tesco’s

Tessa

tax-exempt special savings account, replaced by Isas

Test

(cricket and rugby) the third Test, etc

Tetra Pak

TM

Texan

a person; the adjective is **Texas**: Texas Ranger, Texas oilwells, Texas tea etc

textbook

Thaksin Shinawatra

former prime minister of Thailand; Thaksin on second mention

thalidomide

that

Do not use automatically after the word “said”, but it can be useful: you tend to read a sentence such as “he said nothing by way of an explanation would be forthcoming” as “he said nothing by way of an explanation” and then realise that it does not say that at all; “he said that nothing by way of an explanation would be forthcoming” is much clearer. A similar problem arises with verbs such as argue and warn. “He argued the case for war had not been made” and “he warned the case for war had not been made” both become much clearer if you insert “that” after the verb

that or which?

The traditional definition is that “that” defines and “which” informs (gives extra information), as in:

“This is the house that Jack built; but this house, which John built, is falling down.”

“The Guardian, which I read every day, is the paper that I admire above all others.”

“I am very proud of the sunflowers that I grew from seed” (some of them); “I am very proud of the sunflowers, which I grew from seed” (all of them).

Note that in such examples the sentence remains grammatical without “that” (“this is the house Jack built,” “The Guardian is the paper I admire above all others,” “I am very proud of the sunflowers I grew”) but not without “which” (“this house, John built, is falling down”).

A word about relative clauses: restrictive relative clauses (also known as defining, best thought of as giving essential information by narrowing it down) are not enclosed by commas, whereas non-restrictive relative clauses (non-defining, giving non-essential information) are.

In the three examples, “which John built”, “which I read every day” and “which I grew from seed” are all non-restrictive. They give extra information, they are preceded by a comma, and they use “which” rather than “that”. If you try them with “that” they sound odd (“the Guardian, that I read every day”). It’s not the same the other way round: although “that” is more common in restrictive clauses, you can use “which”: “the Guardian is the paper which I read every day”.

A formula that may help simplify things:

Restrictive clauses - “that” (desirable), no comma (essential).

Non-restrictive clauses - “which”, comma (both essential).

So a BBC radio interviewer who asked the question “should advertising, which targets children, be banned?” was suggesting that all advertising targets children. She meant “should advertising that targets children be banned?”

the

Leaving “the” out often reads like official jargon: say the conference agreed to do something, not “conference agreed”; the government has to do, not “government has to”; the Super League (rugby), not “Super League”.

Avoid the “prime minister Keir Starmer” syndrome: do not use constructions such as “prime minister Keir Starmer said”. Prominent figures can just be named, with their function at second mention: “Keir Starmer said last night” (first mention); “the prime minister said” (subsequent mentions).

If it is thought necessary to explain who someone is, write “Chris Wilder, the Sheffield United manager, said” or “the Sheffield United manager, Chris Wilder, said”. In such cases the commas around the name indicate there is only one person in the position, so write “the Tory prime minister, Rishi Sunak, said” (only one person in the job), but “the former Tory prime minister David Cameron said” (there have been many).

Use the for newspapers (the Guardian), magazines (the New Statesman), pubs (the Coal and Horses), bands (the Black Eyed Peas, the Not Sensibles, the The), nicknames (the Hulk, the Red Baron), and sports grounds (the Oval).

uc for books (The Lord of the Rings), films (The Matrix), poems (The Waste Land), television shows (The West Wing), and works of art (The Adoration of the Magi).

Names of trains take the definite article (the Flying Scotsman); names of locomotives do not (Mallard)

‘the’ in name of a country

include “the”:

the Bahamas, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, the Czech Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, no “the”, on second mention), the Dominican Republic, the Gambia, the Marshall Islands, the Netherlands (but The Hague), the Northern Mariana Islands, the Philippines, the United Arab Emirates (the UAE on second mention), the UK, the US.

no “the”:

Central African Republic (CAR on second mention), Ivory Coast, Lebanon, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Sudan, Ukraine, Vatican City (but the Vatican), Yemen

the3million

Brexit campaign group for EU citizens living in the UK

theatre

the Royal National Theatre, commonly known as the National, comprises three auditoriums: the Olivier, the Lyttelton, and the Dorfman (formerly Cottesloe) - no need to add “theatre” to these, but if you do, it’s lowercase - and the Temporary theatre (formerly the Shed). Other theatres: lowercase for “theatre”, eg Adelphi theatre, Crucible theatre (but normally just Adelphi, Crucible). Initial cap only if “Theatre” comes first, eg Theatre Royal, Stratford East

theatregoer

theirs

no apostrophe

then

no hyphen in such phrases as “the then prime minister”

Theresienstadt

Nazi concentration camp at Terezín, in what is now the Czech Republic

thermonuclear

one word

Thermos

TM; say vacuum flask

Thessaloniki

not Salonica or Salonika

thing or think?

If you think the expression is “you’ve got another thing coming”, then you have misheard the expression “you’ve got another think coming”

thinktank

one word

Third Reich**third way****third world**

meaning not the west (first) or the Soviet Union (second), so today an outdated (as well as objectionable) term; use developing countries or developing nations

this and that

that was then, but this is now; this looks forward, that looks back: so the man showing his son and heir the lands lying in front of them says: “One day, son, all this will be yours.” Then he points behind him to the house and says: “But that remains mine”

thoroughbred, thoroughgoing**3D****threefold, threescore****three-line whip****throuple**

a polyamorous relationship of three people

throw, throes

You might make a last throw of the dice, but if you are in your last throes, your situation is considerably more serious

thumbs up

massive or otherwise

thunderstorm

one word

Tiananmen Square

Beijing

Tianjin

not Tientsin

tic

an idiosyncratic habitual behaviour or spasm - not to be confused with tick

tick

a bloodsucking bug, correction mark or sound a clock makes - not to be confused with tic

tikka masala**TikToker**

not TikTokker

till

Not an abbreviation of until, but the older word. Until sounds more natural as the first word of a sentence and before a verb (“Until you come back to me”); till works well in less formal contexts and before a noun (“till lunchtime”). Do not use til or ’til, despite such precedents as the Beach Boys’ sublime Til I Die

timebomb, timescale, timeshare**times**

1am, 6.30pm, etc; 10 o’clock last night but 10pm yesterday; half past two, a quarter to three, 10 to 11, etc; 2hr 5min 6sec, etc; for 24-hour clock, 00.47, 23.59; noon, midnight (not 12 noon, 12 midnight or 12am, 12pm).

The week starts on Mondays, but stories published on Sunday refer to the following week as “this week” and the six days preceding that Sunday as “last week”.

Writers must put the date in brackets when there might be ambiguity

Timor-Leste

formerly East Timor

tin foil**Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy**

John le Carré novel adapted for television by the BBC in 1979 (starring Alec Guinness as George Smiley) and, in September 2011, released as a feature film with Gary Oldman as Smiley

tipi

closer to the original Lakota (a variety of Sioux) word *thí pi*, and therefore preferable to tepee

tipoff

one word as a noun

Tipp-Ex

TM; use correction fluid (not that many people do any more)

tipping point

another example of jargon that has quickly become hackneyed through overuse

Tirol

not Tyrol

titbit

not tidbit

titillate

mildly excite; **titivate** tidy up.

Use “tidy up” rather than titivate or readers will probably think you mean titillate

titles

Do not italicise or put in quotes titles of books, films, TV programmes, paintings, songs, albums or anything else.

Words in titles take initial caps except for a, an, and, at, for, from, in, of, on, the, to (except in initial position or after a colon): A Tale of Two Cities, Happy End of the World, Shakespeare in Love, Superman: The Early Years, I’m in Love With the Girl on a Certain Manchester Megastore Checkout Desk, etc.

Exception: the Observer, which still italicises titles

T-junction**toby jug**

inexplicably capped up in the paper at least twice

to-do

as in “what a to-do!”

to-ing and fro-ing

You need the hyphens to stop it looking like “toyng and froyng”

told the Guardian

is used far too often: it should normally be replaced by “said” and reserved for occasions when it genuinely adds interest or authority to a story (if someone got an exclusive interview with, say, Lord Lucan)

Tolkien, JRR

(1892-1973) British author and philologist, notable for writing The Lord of the Rings and not spelling his name “Tolkein”

tomato

plural tomatoes

tomb of the Unknown Warrior

not soldier

tonnage

is measured in tons (units of volume), not tonnes (units of mass) – derived from the

number of tuns (large barrels) a vessel could hold; registered tonnage is the total internal capacity of a vessel.

Displacement tonnage is its actual weight, equal to the weight of water it displaces, and is measured in tonnes

tonne

not ton (but note the above): the (metric) tonne is 1,000kg (2,204.62lb), the British ton is 2,240lb, and the US ton is 2,000lb; usually there is no need to convert.

For figurative use, write tons (I've had tons of birthday cards, etc)

Top 10, Top 40, etc

in reference to pop charts, but cap it down more generally if talking about, say, the top five chippies in Whitby

Topman, Topshop

Torah, the

tornado

plural tornadoes (storm); **Tornado** plural Tornados (aircraft)

torpid, turbid or turgid?

There's plenty of opportunity to get these wrong, and plenty of people do: torpid means apathetic or sluggish; turbid is muddy, thick or cloudy; turgid means congested or swollen, and therefore can be handy if you want to accuse someone of using bombastic or pompous language

tortuous or torturous?

A long and winding road is tortuous.

An experience involving pain or suffering might be described as torturous

Tory party

total

Avoid starting court stories with variations on the formula "three men were jailed for a total of 19 years", a statistic that conveys no meaningful information (in this case, they had been given sentences of nine, six and four years).

The only time this might be justified is when one person is given a series of life sentences, and "he was jailed for a total of 650 years" at least conveys how serious the crimes were

totalled

two Ls

tote, the

Tourette syndrome

Toussaint, Allen

US blues musician

Toussaint, Jean

US jazz musician

Toussaint L'Ouverture, Pierre Dominique

(1743-1803) leader of Haiti's slave revolt of 1791 and subsequent fight for independence, which was granted in 1801

town councillor, town hall**townhouse****townie**

not townee

Townshend, Pete

one of the two members of the Who who didn't die before he got old (the other is Roger Daltrey)

Tpims

rather than TPIMs is the abbreviation for terrorism prevention and investigation measures; use sparingly, however: "measures" and similar terms are generally preferable

track record

record should normally be sufficient

trademarks (TM)

Take care: use a generic alternative unless there is a very good reason not to, eg ballpoint pen, not biro (unless it really is a Biro, in which case it takes a cap B); say photocopy rather than Xerox, etc; you will save our lawyers, and those of Portakabin and various other companies, a lot of time and trouble

trade union

but **Trades Union Congress (TUC)**

tragic

People do not need to be told that an accident is "tragic"

train

a number of things in a string, such as animals, railway carriages or wagons. In railway terms a train is hauled by an engine or locomotive, with which it is not synonymous

tranquillisers

not tranquilisers

transatlantic

transgender, trans

Where relevant, use transgender at first mention, thereafter trans, and only as an adjective: transgender person, trans person, trans woman, trans man; never “transgendered person” or “a transgender”. Avoid using the term **transsexual** unless someone specifically identifies as such.

The use of the birth name of a trans person should be avoided unless it is specifically relevant to the story and has been discussed with editors

translator

works with the written word; often confused with **interpreter**, who works with the spoken word

Transnistria

separatist region that declared its independence from Moldova in 1990, but has not been recognised by the international community; also known as Trans-Dniester

transpire

to emit vapour through the skin, so by analogy to become apparent, come to be known, not just a synonym for “occur” or “happen”; “it transpired that” usually sounds artificial and pompous in any case

Transport for London

TfL on second mention

Trans-Siberian railway**Travellers**

with a capital T to refer to the ethnic group, but new age travellers (l/c)

traybake**Treasury, the**

(officially HM Treasury)

treaties

lc, eg peace of Westphalia (1648), treaty of Versailles (1919)

Trekkers

how to refer to Star Trek fans unless you want to make fun of them, in which case they are Trekkies

trenchcoat**T rex**

dinosaur; full name Tyrannosaurus rex

T Rex

band

tricolour

French and Irish

trickle-down economics

but no hyphen needed in constructions such as: “The prime minister believes wealth will trickle down”

trillion

a thousand billion (1 followed by 12 noughts), abbreviate like this: \$25tn

Trinity College, Cambridge

not to be confused with **Trinity Hall, Cambridge**

Trinity College Dublin**trip-hop****Trips**

trade-related intellectual property rights

triumphant or triumphal?

You might put up a triumphal arch because you are triumphant in battle

Trojan horse**trolley**

plural trolleys, not trollies

trooper

soldier in a cavalry regiment (so you might “swear like a trooper”); **trouper** member of a troupe, or dependable worker (“the night team are real troupers”)

trooping the colour

(no “of”)

tropic of cancer, tropic of capricorn**the Troubles**

(Northern Ireland)

troubleshooter, troubleshooting**trove**

derived from “treasure trove” but commonly used on its own to mean a hoard or a valuable find

Trump Organization**try to**

never “try and”. As Bart Simpson put it: “I can’t promise I’ll try, but I’ll try to try”

Ts

as in dotting the Is and crossing the Ts

tsar

not czar; try to avoid when referring to someone appointed to a government role

tsetse

fly

T-shirt

not tee-shirt

tsunami

wave caused by an undersea earthquake; not the same thing as a tidal wave

Tuareg

the Berber people of Saharan north Africa, and their language

tube, the

lc (London Underground is the name of the company); individual lines thus: Jubilee line, Northern line, etc; the underground

TUC

Trades Union Congress, so TUC Congress is tautological: the reference should be to the TUC conference

Tupperware

TM; say **plastic container** unless you are sure it is Tupperware (uc)

turkish delight**Turkmenistan**

adjective Turkmen; its citizens are Turkmen, singular Turkman

Turkomans

(singular noun and adjective is Turkoman) are a formerly nomadic central Asian people who now form a minority in Iraq; they speak Turkmen

turned

the subeditor turned stylebook guru Amelia Hodsdon said ... (no hyphens)

turnover

in business

turn over

in bed

Tutankhamun**21st century**

but hyphenate if adjectival: newspapers of the 21st century, 21st-century newspapers

Twenty20

cricket, abbreviated to T20 or t20

twitchers

birdwatchers or birders are preferable terms

Twitter/X

Elon Musk’s social media platform is now called X, not Twitter, but it is still OK to refer to posts on the platform as tweets or retweets.

When quoting tweets, where the aim is normally to capture the flavour and convey the immediate impact of an event, do not correct the grammar, spelling or style

twofold

tying

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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