

The Guardian and Observer style guide

Guardian and Observer style guide: C

'Fashion fades. Only style remains the same.' **Coco Chanel**

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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



caesarean section

📷 Illustration: Jakob Hinrichs

cabby

not cabbie, but the plural is **cabbies**

cabin attendant, crew, staff

not air hostesses

cabinet, shadow cabinet

but **Cabinet Office**

cack-handed

remember this has also been used as an offensive term for left-handed. You could just say “clumsy”

caddie

tee; **caddy** tea

Cádiz

Caernarfon

place; **Lord Carnarvon** person (he lives at Highclere Castle in West Berkshire)

caesarean section

Julius Caesar is not thought to have been born by C-section (because his mother survived his birth)

caesar salad

attributed to the restaurateur Caesar Cardini

Caesars Palace

hotel and casino in Las Vegas; this one really is named after Julius Caesar

Cafcass

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

cafe

no accent

Calais refugee camp

instead of the “Jungle”. While the “Jungle” is recognised as the camp’s name, it is a derogatory term so its use should be limited

Calcutta

now **Kolkata**

calf leather

but **calf’s liver**

Californian

a person; the adjective is California, which is why Brian Wilson did not write a song called Californian Girls; the same rule applies to other US states, so a “Texan drilling for Texas tea” is an oilman

call girl

like “vice girl”, an old-fashioned term encountered only in the tabloids, where it is always the 1950s

callous

adjective, meaning hardened, metaphorically or literally; **callus** (plural calluses)
noun, meaning hard area of skin.

The correct word to use to mean “covered in calluses” is in fact calloused, from the medical verb, to callous; although callused is often seen

Calor

TM

Cambodian names

Normally, family name is followed by given name, eg Lim Samnang on first mention; thereafter Lim

Cambridge Union Society, Durham Union Society, Oxford Union

are debating societies, not to be confused with Cambridge University students’

union, Durham students' union, or Oxford University student union

cameraphone

Camilla

Queen Camilla or the queen, or Camilla on subsequent mentions

Campaign for Better Transport

formerly Transport 2000

Campari

TM

can not, cannot

are not the same: note the difference between “you can not eat if you don't want to” and “you cannot eat porridge with a knife”

Canal+

French TV channel, formerly Canal Plus

canal boats

A narrowboat is the popular type of British canal boat, 7ft wide and up to 72ft long - do not call it a barge; a wider version (typically 10-14ft wide) is a broadbeam narrowboat. A barge is a broader (10-14ft wide) cargo-carrying boat - normally towed but sometimes self-powered. The version with accommodation is usually a Dutch barge. A cruiser is the white-hulled GRP (glass-reinforced plastic) style of boat, more commonly seen on rivers; smaller versions are cabin cruisers.

The difference between narrowboat and barge is important, particularly if you don't want to get stuck in a narrow lock somewhere outside Birmingham

Canary Wharf

the whole development, not the main tower, which is 1 Canada Square

Cancún

city in Mexico

cannabis

people smoke cannabis rather than “experiment” with it, despite what politicians and young members of the royal family might claim

canon

cleric, decree, principle, body of writings, type of music; **cannon** something you fire (plural: cannon, not cannons)

Canute

(c994-1035) Danish king of England, Denmark and Norway who commanded the tide to turn back, so the legend says - not in a vain attempt to exercise power over nature, but to prove to his toadying courtiers that he was not all-powerful



canvas

tent, painting

canvass

solicit votes

CAP

common agricultural policy

capitals

“I am a poet: I distrust anything that starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop” (Antjie Krog)

Times have changed since the days of medieval manuscripts with elaborate hand-illuminated capital letters, or Victorian documents in which not just proper names, but virtually all nouns, were given initial caps (a Tradition valiantly maintained to this day by Estate Agents).

A look through newspaper archives would show greater use of capitals the further back you went. The tendency towards lowercase, which in part reflects a less formal, less deferential society, has been accelerated by the explosion of the internet: some web companies, and many email users, have dispensed with capitals altogether.

Our style reflects these developments. We aim for coherence and consistency, but not at the expense of clarity. As with any aspect of style, it is impossible to be wholly consistent – there are almost always exceptions, so if you are unsure check for an individual entry in this guide. But here are the main principles:

jobs all lc, eg prime minister, US secretary of state, chief rabbi, editor of the Guardian.

titles cap up titles, but not job description, eg President Barack Obama (but the US president, Barack Obama, and Obama on subsequent mention); the Duke of Westminster (the duke at second mention); Pope Francis but the pope.

government departments in English-speaking countries

Initial capitals when full name is used, eg Home Office, Foreign Office, Ministry of Justice (UK), Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security (US), Department of Immigration and Border Protection (Australia), Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Irish Republic), Ministry of Railways (India). Lowercase when abbreviated or paraphrased, eg justice ministry, defense department, Australia’s immigration department, Canadian fisheries ministry, Indian railway ministry, etc. Lowercase for translations of government departments in non-English-speaking countries, eg French foreign ministry, Russian ministry of emergency situations, etc.

[See departments of state](#) for a full list of British ones

government agencies, public bodies, quangos initial caps, eg Crown Prosecution Service, Equality and Human Rights Commission, Heritage Lottery Fund, Parole Board, Revenue and Customs.

acts of parliament initial caps (but bills lc), eg Official Secrets Act, Child Poverty Act 2010, local government bill.

airports cap the name but lc the generic part (if necessary at all), eg Heathrow, Gatwick (no need for “airport”), Liverpool John Lennon airport.

artistic and cultural names of institutions, etc, get initial caps, eg British Museum, National Gallery, Royal Albert Hall, Tate Modern. Books, films, music, works of art, etc have initial caps except a, an, and, at, for, from, in, of, on, the, to (except in initial positions or after a colon), eg There Is a Light That Never Goes Out.

bridges initial caps, eg Brooklyn Bridge, Sydney Harbour Bridge, Waterloo Bridge.

churches, hospitals and schools cap up the proper or placename, lc the rest, eg St Nicolas church, Newbury; Great Ormond Street children’s hospital; Ripon grammar school, Vernon county primary school.

geographical features lc, eg Sydney harbour, Monterey peninsula, Bondi beach, Solsbury hill (but Mount Everest).

geological epochs and archaeological periods initial caps, eg Anthropocene, Mesolithic, Palaeolithic.

parliamentary committees, reports and inquiries all lc, eg trade and industry select committee, royal commission on long-term care for the elderly, Jenkins report.

proposed party policies lc, but in quote marks at first mention if they could cause confusion, eg national education service, “green new deal” etc

stadiums initial caps when it is in the name of the venue eg London Stadium, Etihad Stadium, but leave out whenever possible eg at Wembley, at Old Trafford.

universities and colleges of further and higher education caps for institution, lc for departments, eg Sheffield University department of medieval and modern history, Oregon State University, Free University of Berlin, University of Queensland school of journalism, London College of Communication.

words and phrases based on proper names that have lost connection with their origins (alsatian dog, cardigan, cheddar cheese, french windows, swiss roll, wellington boots, yorkshire pudding and many others) are lc.

Those that retain a strong link, which may be legally recognised, include Cornish pasty, Melton Mowbray pork pies, Parma ham, Jersey Royal potatoes and Worcestershire sauce, and take initial cap.

Although champagne and scotch are legally required to come from Champagne and Scotland, they are almost universally regarded as lc

cappuccino

captions

Captions are an opportunity to give readers further information, rather than insulting their intelligence by stating the obvious.

A photograph illustrating an election in Croatia, say, may show a woman pushing a pram past a hoarding covered with candidates' posters. The caption tells us: 'A woman pushes a pram past a hoarding covered with election posters in Zagreb,' whereas it might say: 'Polls indicate that women's votes will be a deciding factor in the Croatian election.'

Please avoid cliches such as 'sharing a joke' and 'in happier times'.

There is no need to put (left) after one of the names in a caption showing, say, Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa or William Hague and Angelina Jolie.

(Alt text, in contrast to a caption, should be a simple written description of what can be seen in a photo, illustration or graphic, so it can be read by screen readers.)

car bomb, car park

but carmaker

carcass

plural carcasses

cardiac arrest

when the heart stops beating unexpectedly, as opposed to a heart attack, when blood flow to the heart is blocked

cards

scratchcard, smartcard, swipecard but **credit card, debit card, sim card**

careen

to sway or keel over to one side; often confused with **career**, to rush along

career girl, career woman

We don't use these sexist labels

care home

rather than "old people's home"

carer

an unpaid family member, partner or friend who helps a disabled or frail person with daily living activities; do not use this term to describe a care worker, homecare worker or someone in a caring profession

Caribbean

Carlos the Jackal

real name Ilich Ramírez Sánchez

carmaker**cartel**

It is dangerous to call a group of companies a cartel unless you want to hear from ...

Carter-Ruck

You might think that, given this law firm's close relationship with newspapers, everyone would know that it's hyphenated. You would, sadly, be wrong

Casanova

cap up, whether you are talking about the original (Giacomo Girolamo Casanova de Seingalt, 1725-98), or any latterday womaniser ("he is the Casanova of the Observer")

casbah

rather than kasbah

cashflow**cash for honours**

noun but cash-for-honours should, like similar phrases, be hyphenated when used adjectivally (the cash-for-honours scandal)

cashmere

fabric

caster

sugar, wheels on a sofa; **castor** oil; **Caster Semenya** South African runner

casting director

sometimes mistakenly referred to as a "casting agent"

castoff

one word (noun, adjective); **cast off** two words (verb)

Castro, Raúl

casual (workers) freelance is often preferable

casualties

includes dead and injured, so not a synonym for deaths; **casualty** lc, as in she's been taken to casualty (though normally called A&E)

Cat scan

or **CT scan**; it stands for computerised (axial) tomography

Catalonia

adjective **Catalan**

catch-22

lc unless specifically referring to Joseph Heller's 1961 novel **Catch-22**, which explained the dilemma thus: "Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he

didn't, but if he were sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to"

catchphrase

catchup TV

not catch-up or catch up

cathedrals

cap up, eg Béziers Cathedral (its full name is Cathédrale Saint-Nazaire-et-Saint-Celse de Béziers)

catherine wheel

Catholic church

but if you mean Roman Catholic, say so

caviar

not caviare

Cayman Islands

British overseas territory in the western Caribbean Sea comprising the three islands of Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

Do not abbreviate to "Caymans"

CBeebies

CD, CDs, CD-Rom

a CD is a disc, not a disk

CE, BCE

some people prefer CE (common era, current era or Christian era) and BCE (before common era, etc) to AD and BC, which, however, remain our style

ceasefire

ceilidh

Scottish; **céilí** Irish

celibate, celibacy

strictly refer to being unmarried (especially for religious reasons), but it is now acceptable to use them to mean abstaining from sexual intercourse

cellphone

mobile phone in British English

celsius

without degree symbol and with fahrenheit equivalent in brackets: 23C (73F), -30C (-22F), etc; to convert celsius to fahrenheit, multiply by 9, divide by 5, then add 32; to convert fahrenheit to celsius, subtract 32, divide the answer by 9, then multiply by 5 (or use one of the many online calculators)

Celtic

not Glasgow Celtic

cement or concrete?

not interchangeable terms: cement is an ingredient of concrete, which is a mix of aggregates (sand and gravel or crushed stone) and paste (water and portland cement); so a “cement mixer” should always be referred to as a **concrete mixer**

cenotaph

“empty tomb” in Greek; there are many, all over the world, but the Cenotaph in Whitehall takes a capital C

censer

container in which incense is burned; **censor** prevent publication; **censure** criticise severely

census

In ancient Rome the censors, as well as censoring, also counted people in a census

Center Parcs**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention****centimetres**

abbreviation **cm**, not cms

Central African Republic

no “the”; CAR after first mention

Central America

comprises Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama

central belt

the swath across Scotland, containing Glasgow and Edinburgh, where population density is highest. It is in the south, not the centre of the country

Central line, central London**centre on**

or centre in, but revolve around

Centre Court

Wimbledon

century

sixth century, 21st century, etc; but sixth-century remains, 21st-century boy, etc

Cephalonia

eschew the variations

Cern

the Geneva-based European laboratory for particle physics

Cézanne. Paul(1839-1906) French artist

CFC

chlorofluorocarbon

chablis

wines from Chablis

cha-cha-cha

the dance, not cha-cha

chair

not chairman or chairwoman

Chakrabarti, Shami

Labour peer and former director of Liberty

champ at the bit

not chomp

champagne**Champions League****Champs Élysées**

chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster, chancellor of the exchequer

changeable**Channel, the**

not the English Channel

Channel 4, Channel 5**Channel Islands**

British crown dependencies grouped for administrative purposes into two bailiwicks, each with its own bailiff (chief justice): Jersey (comprising the island of Jersey) and Guernsey (comprising the islands of Guernsey, Alderney, Sark, Herm, Jethou and Brecqhou).

The other crown dependency is the Isle of Man.

People live in (not on) Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

Channel tunnel

not Chunnel

chaos theory

is not a synonym for chaos. It describes the behaviour of dynamic systems that are sensitively dependent on their initial conditions. An example is the weather: under the “butterfly effect”, the flap of a butterfly’s wing in Brazil can in principle result in a tornado in Texas

chapters

like this: chapter 6, chapter 16, etc, whether of books or the UN charter

chardonnay

lc, like other wines, whether named after a grape (as in this case) or a region

chargé, chargée d’affaires**Charity Commission****Charli xcX****Charter of the United Nations**

but UN charter is normally sufficient; chapter 1, etc (not roman numerals)

Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

Cipfa or the institute after first mention

chassis

singular and plural

chateau, chateaux

no accent

Chatham House rule

often mistakenly called “rules”. There is just one, namely: “When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.” Chatham House is more formally known as the Royal Institute of International Affairs, based at Chatham House in London

chatroom, chatshow**Chattogram**

not Chittagong, for the city in Bangladesh

Chávez, Hugo

elected president of Venezuela in 1998, and re-elected in 2000, 2006 and 2012; died in 2013

Chavismo, Chavistas**chavs**

a term best avoided

Chechnya

inhabited by Chechens

check-in, checkout

noun, adjective

check in, check out

verb: so you might check in at the check-in after checking out the checkout desk

check up verb; **checkup** noun**cheese**

normally lc, even if named after a place: brie, camembert, cheddar, cheshire, double gloucester, lancashire, parmesan, stilton, wensleydale, etc

Chekhov**Chek Lap Kok**

Hong Kong international airport, designed by Sir Norman Foster, opened in 1998

Chelsea flower show**Chennai**

formerly Madras

chequebook**cherrypick, cherrypicker****cherubim**

plural of **cherub**

Cheshire cat

but **cheshire cheese**

chickenpox

one word

chicken tikka masala

Britain's favourite dish until chicken jalfrezi displaced it (according to a 2011 poll); note that there is also an Italian dish called **chicken marsala**

chief

("planning chiefs", etc): try to use proper titles; officers or officials may be preferable

chief constable

a job, not a title - John Smith, the chief constable of Greater Manchester; Smith at second mention

chief rabbi

lc, a style consistent with that followed by Haaretz and the Jerusalem Post

chief secretary to the Treasury, chief whip

child benefit

a payment to parents or other people responsible for bringing up a child, with an allowance paid for the first child (£25.60 a week in 2024) and a lower amount (£16.95) for each subsequent child. Please don't confuse this with the controversial two-child limit, or cap, on wider benefits that restricts universal credit and child tax credit payments to the first two children in most households

childcare, childminder**childish or childlike?**

Laughing when someone breaks wind is childish; laughing when someone is flying a kite is childlike

Childline**child sexual abuse**

rather than “child sex”; so for example we would refer to a “child sexual abuse ring” rather than a “child sex ring”, but say “child sex offender” rather than “child sexual offender”.

Say **child sexual abuse images** or **child abuse images** rather than “child pornography”, “child porn” and especially the tabloid “kiddy porn”. The NSPCC says that such terms give “a misleading and potentially trivialising impression of what is a very serious crime”, and favours the term “child abuse images”.

Avoid using the term “historical” to describe sexual abuse crimes from the past. Survivors, particularly adults who were abused as children, feel the term undermines the long-lasting impact of the crimes. Try to date the crimes (year, decade etc) instead, or say they happened in the past eg “Detectives are investigating allegations of child sexual abuse from more than 30 years ago.” Exceptions may be necessary in court cases where specific wording is required. (See also **abuse**.)

A footnote with details about support services should be added to stories about child sexual abuse from a relevant selection of the following:

*The **NSPCC** offers support to children on 0800 1111, and adults concerned about a child on 0808 800 5000. The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (**Napac**) offers support for adult survivors on 0808 801 0331.*

chilli

with two Ls but note Red Hot Chili Peppers

Chinese names

Mainland China: in two parts, eg Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Jiang Zemin. Hong Kong, Taiwan: in two parts with hyphen, eg Tung Chee-hwa, Chiang Kai-shek (except **T** when a building, park or the like is named after a person it becomes three parts, eg Chiang Kai Shek Cultural Centre); note also that Korean names are written the same way, eg Kim Il-sung. Singapore, Malaysia: in three parts, eg Lee Kuan Yew.

For people with Chinese names elsewhere in the world, follow their preference - but make sure you know which is the surname

Chinese whispers

avoid except in direct quotes

chink

Please avoid this word, even in phrases such as “chink in the armour”

Chloé

(fashion) note accent

chock-a-block**chocoholic**

not chocaholic

chocolatey**Chomsky, Noam**

US linguist and political activist

choose

for some mysterious reason this often appears in the paper as “chose”, its past tense

chord

musical; strike a chord

Chornobyl

not Chernobyl, for the site of the nuclear disaster in Ukraine

Christ Church

Oxford (not Christ Church College)

christened, christening

only when referring to a Christian baptism: don't talk about a boat being christened or a football club christening a new stadium; named is fine

Christian, Christianity

but unchristian

Christian name

use first name, forename or given name (which in many cultures comes after the family name)

Christian Union

an evangelical Christian organisation

Christie's

the auction house; **Christies** the holding company has no apostrophe

Christmas Day, Christmas Eve

chronic

means lasting for a long time or constantly recurring, too often misused when acute (short but severe) is meant

Chumbawamba

(not Chumbawumba) band whose guitarist, Danbert Nobacon, threw a bucket of iced water over John Prescott, the then deputy prime minister, at the 1998 Brit awards

church

lc for the established church, eg “the church is no longer relevant today”; Anglican church, etc, but Church of England (abbreviation: C of E)

the Church in Wales

not the Church of Wales

cineaste

someone who enjoys films; but note that, in France, a cinéaste is someone who makes them

cinemagoer**cinéma vérité****cisgender, cis**

A person whose identity aligns with their sex observed at birth. From the Latin *cis*, meaning “on the same side”. Used when comparing the trans experience with that of the non-trans population, eg how trans men and cis men navigate the health service. Avoid talking about trans women v women, or trans men v men. As this is a relatively new term, talk to editors if you are planning to use it in furniture

Cites

convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora

Citizens Advice

what the organisation likes to be called, although it still runs bureaux

citizens’ assembly**Citroën****city**

in Britain a town that has been granted a charter by the crown; it usually has a cathedral; **City** capped when used as shorthand for the City of London

city hall

lowercase except in the official name of a building, for example City Hall in London, Sheffield City Hall

City of London Corporation

the corporation after first mention

City, University of London

Added comma after joining the University of London on 1 September 2016

civil servant, civil service**Civvy Street****CJD**

Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, not normally necessary to spell it out; it is acceptable to refer to variant CJD as the human form of BSE, but not “the human form of mad cow disease”

claim

“Claims” carries an implication of doubt over what has been said, but is inappropriate when the statement is uncontroversial

Claire’s

no longer Claire’s Accessories

Clapham Junction

and Clapham are two distinct, separate areas of south London.

Clapham Junction should be called just that: it is not only a railway station but an area in its own right with its own shopping street. It is part of Battersea and comes under Wandsworth council.

Clapham is about a mile and a half away, also has its own high street, and is part of Lambeth council

class A drugs**classic or classical?**

The latter is best reserved for ancient Greece or Rome or in the phrase “classical music”. The former is used to describe a notable example of a particular era or style.

The Goths sacked Rome in classical times; Temple of Love by the Sisters of Mercy is a goth classic

classical music

Mozart’s 41st Symphony (or Symphony No 41) in C, K551; Rachmaninov’s Piano Concerto No 2; Schubert’s Sonata in A minor for Piano, D845

clause IV

of the Labour constitution, rewritten in 1995; also by extension to “clause IV moment” as in “will the Tories experience their own clause IV moment?”

clearcut**clearing**

part of the Ucas admissions process matching students with unfilled places at universities and colleges

cliches

Overused words and phrases to be avoided, some of which merit their own ignominious entry in this guide, include: ahead of, back burner, boost (massive or otherwise), bouquets and brickbats, but hey ... , controversial, count 'em, drop-dead gorgeous, elephant in the room, famous, fit for purpose, flagship, landmark, key, major, massive, meanwhile, ongoing, politically correct, raft of measures, set to, special, stepchange, to die for, upcoming, upsurge; verbs overused or misused in headlines include: bid, boost, downplay, fuel, hike, insist, probe, quiz, ramp up, signal, spiral, target, unveil.

A survey by the Plain English Campaign found that the most irritating phrase in the language was “at the end of the day”, followed by (in order of annoyance): at this moment in time, like (as in, like, this), with all due respect, to be perfectly honest with you, touch base, I hear what you're saying, going forward, absolutely, and blue sky thinking; other words and phrases that upset people included 24/7, ballpark figure, bottom line, diamond geezer, it's not rocket science, ongoing, prioritise, pushing the envelope, singing from the same hymn sheet, and thinking outside the box

clickbait

one word

cliffhanger

one word

Climate Camp

disbanded in March 2011; its full name was Camp for Climate Action

climate change

is no longer considered to accurately reflect the seriousness of the overall situation; use **climate emergency** or **climate crisis** instead to describe the broader impact of climate change. However, use **climate breakdown** or **climate change** or **global heating** when describing it specifically in a scientific or geophysical sense eg “Scientists say climate breakdown has led to an increase in the intensity of hurricanes”

Climate Change Committee

the UK independent adviser on climate change. Previously known as the Committee on Climate Change

climate science denier or **climate denier**

The OED defines a sceptic as “a seeker of the truth; an inquirer who has not yet arrived at definite conclusions”.

Most “climate sceptics”, in the face of overwhelming scientific evidence, deny climate change is happening, or is caused by human activity, so denier is more accurate

climbdown

noun; climb down verb

clingfilm**clinically extremely vulnerable people**

can abbreviate to CEV people from second mention. Avoid using “extremely vulnerable” or “clinically vulnerable” as these both have different meanings, and avoid referring to “the vulnerable”

Close, Glenn

two Ns (as in bunny boiler)

closeup

as in “I’m ready for my closeup”

cloud cuckoo land**CO₂****coalfield, coalmine, coalminer****Coalite**

TM

coalition government

Con-Lib if you are being polite; **Lib-Con** if you are a sceptic; **Con-Dem** if you want to be rude

coarse fishing

we have been known to spell it “course”

coastguards

HM Coastguard (UK), but US Coast Guard

Cobra

government crisis response committee, so-called because it originally met in Cabinet Office Briefing Room A. The US equivalent is the White House Situation Room

Coca-Cola, Coke

TM; the generic term is cola; coke for smokeless fuel and cocaine

cockney**coconut****co-defendant****coexist**

cohabitant

not cohabitee

cold war**Cold War Steve****Coliseum**

London theatre; **Colosseum** Roman amphitheatre

collectible**collective nouns**

Nouns such as committee, family, government, jury, squad and team take a singular verb or pronoun when thought of as a single unit, but a plural verb or pronoun when thought of as a collection of individuals:

The committee gave its unanimous approval to the plans;

The committee enjoyed biscuits with their tea.

The family can trace its history back to the middle ages;

The family were sitting down, scratching their heads.

The squad is looking stronger than for several seasons;

The squad are all very confident that they will win promotion this season

collector's item**College of Arms****colleges**

take initial caps, eg West Kent College; but not when college forms part of the name of a school, eg Bash Street sixth-form college, Eton college

Colombia

South American country that we frequently misspell as “Columbia”

colon

Use between two sentences, or parts of sentences, where the first introduces a proposition that is resolved by the second, eg Fowler put it like this: to deliver the goods invoiced in the preceding words.

A colon, rather than a comma, should be used to introduce a quotation: “He was an expert on punctuation,” or to precede a list – “He was an expert on the following: the colon, the comma and the full stop.”

Use before quotes when the quote could stand on its own as a sentence. He said: “You’ll never take me alive.”

T

When a colon is used in a headline, the next word is usually lowercase, eg Osborne: there is no plan B. One exception to this rule is in web furniture where the colon comes after the title of a series, for example as in the headline “Digested week: Words mattered to Stephen Sondheim”. Similarly, in a standfirst after a descriptive tag such as “Exclusive” or “Analysis” the next word should take an initial cap. Another exception on the web is when the colon introduces a complete sentence in quotation marks, such as Maro Itoje: ‘Whenever England take the field we should win’

This 2010 example from the Guardian is an awful (but by no means isolated) example of the tendency to use a semicolon where only a colon will do (all the more unfortunate for distracting the reader from a funny sentence): “Here’s a task for the new coalition government; set up a Drumming Taskforce today, and appoint a Snare Tsar.”

We are in danger of losing the distinction between colon and semicolon; many writers seem to think they are interchangeable but to make it clear: they are not.

[See semicolon](#)

colonel

Colonel Napoleon Bogey, subsequently Bogey (Col Bogey in leading articles)

Columbia

as in District of Columbia (Washington DC) and Columbia University (New York), Columbus Day (12 October, marking the date Christopher Columbus landed in the West Indies in 1492); Columbus is also the state capital of Ohio

comedian

male and female; do not use comedienne

commando

plural commandos

commas

Use a comma to help the reader by inserting breathing space into a sentence: “When the Dutch reflect on their performance in the World Cup final, they will not find it hard to see why their aggressive tactics lost them many friends in 2010.”

“The editor, Katharine Viner, is a woman of great vision” - commas if there is only one editor.

“The subeditor Amelia Hodsdon is all style and no substance” - no commas if there is more than one subeditor.

A misplaced comma can sabotage a sentence, as in this example from the paper: “Neocon economists often claim a large, black economy turbo-powers growth ...” (the writer was talking about a big black economy, not a big and black one, which is not the same at all).

T

A comma is also crucial to avoid ambiguity in examples such as this: “Part of the report will heavily criticise a so-called power culture among the Dublin bishops who have been accused of not taking the allegations seriously.” We should have inserted a comma after “bishops” to make clear that all the Dublin bishops have been accused; as published, the sentence implies that only some of the bishops have.

[See Oxford comma](#)

commented

“said” is normally adequate

commingle

to mix or blend; the spelling “co-mingle”, used by Shakespeare in Hamlet, is obsolete

common agricultural policy

lc but the abbreviation is **CAP**

Commons, House of Commons

but **the house**, not the House

Commons committees

lc, home affairs select committee, public accounts committee, etc

common sense

noun; **commonsense** adjective: “William Hague’s ‘commonsense revolution’ showed little common sense”

Commonwealth

for the Commonwealth of Nations (formerly the British Commonwealth), which has 54 members, mostly former territories of the British empire

commonwealth

for the commonwealth of Australia

Commonwealth heads of government meeting (Chogm)

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

communicue

no accent

communism, communist

lc, except in name of party, eg Communist party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

community

the subediting community is encouraged to weed out examples of this shockingly overused word

community charge

what no one, apart from a handful of Conservative ministers, called the poll tax

company names

A difficult area, as so many companies have adopted unconventional typography and other devices that, in some cases, turn their names into logos. In general, we use the names that companies use themselves: c2c, Capgemini, easyJet, eBay, ebookers, iSoft Group, etc. Some of these look odd, particularly when used as the first word in a headline, although some are becoming more familiar with time.

Exceptions include Adidas (not adidas), ABN Amro (not ABN AMRO), BAE Systems (not BAE SYSTEMS), Toys R Us (do not attempt to turn the R backwards), Yahoo (no exclamation mark).

Company names are always singular

compare to or with?

The former means liken to, the latter means make a comparison: so unless you are specifically likening someone or something to someone or something else, use compare with.

A former lord chancellor compared himself to Cardinal Wolsey because he believed he was like Wolsey; I might compare him with Wolsey to assess their relative merits.

As so often, we are indebted to Prince for the grammatically immaculate Nothing Compares 2U

compass points

lc for regions: eg the north, the south of England, the south-west, north-east Scotland, south Wales.

The same applies to geopolitical areas: the west, western Europe, south-east Asia, etc.

Cap up, however, when part of the name of a county (eg West Sussex, East Riding of Yorkshire), local authority area (North Somerset, South Gloucestershire), or province (East Java, North Sulawesi, etc).

Note the following: East End, West End (London), Middle East, Central America, North America, South America, Latin America

Competition and Markets Authority

formerly the Competition Commission (and yes, there is still only one)

complement, compliment, complimentary

to complement is to make complete: “the two strikers complemented each other”; to compliment is to praise; a complimentary copy is free

complacent

self-satisfied

complainers

the Scottish legal term for complainants. Always include a brief explanation for

readers outside Scotland eg “... the complainers, the Scottish legal term for complainants, allege that ...”

complaisant

obliging

complicit

You can be complicit in a crime, for example, if you know about it but fail to report it

comprise, consist, compose or constitute?

Tricky, but to get these right, just remember that comprise or consist of mean “made up of” while compose and constitute mean “make up”.

So you might say a band comprises guitar, bass, drums and keyboards or that it consists of guitar, bass, drums and keyboards. You can also say the band is composed of those instruments. Alternatively, you could say guitar, bass, drums and keyboards compose or constitute the band.

The one thing to avoid, unless you want people who care about such things to give you a look composed of, consisting of and comprising mingled pity and contempt, is “comprised of”

computer game

video game is preferable

concentration/death camps in Poland

should be referred to as “Nazi concentration/death camps in German-occupied Poland” (see entry on “Polish death camps”)

Concord

town in Massachusetts; **Concorde** plane

confidant

male; **confidante** female

congestion charge**the Republic of the Congo**

also known as Congo-Brazzaville, it was the colony of French Congo until independence in 1960. Not to be confused with its neighbour, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Both countries border the Congo river

Congregational

uc when referring to the Congregational Union of England and Wales, formed in 1832, which joined the Presbyterian Church of England in 1972 to form the United Reformed Church (please, not “Reform”)

Congress

comprises the House of Representatives (the House) and Senate; but lc congressman, congresswoman, congressional

conjoined twins

not Siamese twins

conman**connection**

not connexion

conservationist

A person who works to preserve and manage the natural environment, as opposed to a conservator, who works to repair and preserve cultural objects

Conservative central office, Conservative party**conservator**

A person who works to repair and preserve cultural objects, as opposed to a conservationist, who works to preserve and manage the natural environment

consortium

plural **consortiums** not consortia

constitution

lc as in the US constitution

Consuelo

not Consuela; from a reader: “I really have had enough of show-off ignoramuses messing up my name. Consuelo is a Spanish abstract noun, masculine, invariable. Pilar and Mercedes are also Spanish female names derived, like Consuelo, from titles of the Virgin Mary”

consult

not consult with

consumer price index (Australia)**consumer prices index (UK)**

forms the basis for the government’s inflation target and other inflation-linked tools; CPI after first mention. But note, **consumer price inflation** (no ‘s’ on price).

Consumers’ Association

now known as Which?, after its magazine

contagious

generally refers to a disease that is spread via contact. If you’re not sure how a disease is spread, or if it is spread via several means, use infectious or transmissible instead

container ship

not a synonym for cargo ship. Container ships are usually easy to spot because of the containers above deck. Other kinds of cargo ship include bulk carriers, which transport goods such as grain, iron ore and coal in their holds

contemporary

of the same period, though often wrongly used to mean modern; a performance of Shakespeare in contemporary dress would involve Elizabethan costume, not 21st-century clothes

contemptible

deserving contempt

contemptuous

displaying contempt

continent, the

but **mainland Europe** is preferable

continual or continuous?

the former refers to things that recur repeatedly but not constantly; the latter indicates an uninterrupted sequence: “My car continually breaks down because the radiator leaks continuously”

contractions

Do not overuse contractions such as aren’t, can’t, couldn’t, hasn’t, don’t, I’m, it’s, there’s and what’s (even the horrific “there’ve” has appeared); while they might make a piece more colloquial or easier to read, they can be an irritant and a distraction, and make a serious article sound frivolous. They also look horrible

controversial

overused, typically to show that the writer disapproves of something (“the government’s controversial free schools scheme”); like “famous”, it can normally be safely removed from copy to allow readers to make up their own minds

convener

not convenor

conversion practices

preferable to the term conversion “therapy” when referring to organisations’ efforts to try to change a person’s sexuality or gender identity

conversions

We give metric measures and convert on first mention only to imperial in brackets (exceptions: miles and pints); if a rough figure is given in metric, do not convert it into an exact figure in imperial, and vice versa, eg if someone says the towns are about 50km apart, convert to 30 miles, not “31.07 miles”; the same goes for rough amounts of currencies, though don’t round up £3.6bn to £4bn

convertible

not -able

convince or persuade?

Having convinced someone of the facts, you might persuade them to do something,

although you can be persuaded to do something without necessarily being convinced that it's the right thing

Co-operative Bank (abbreviation: **Co-op bank**), **Co-operative Group**, **Co-operative party**

Co-op

as in “I still shop at the Co-op”

co-operative movement

when talking about Robert Owen, the Rochdale Pioneers, etc

co-operative

(abbreviation: **co-op**) as in a housing co-operative

cooperative, cooperate, cooperation

when used in a general sense, as in “they were surprisingly cooperative when asked to work longer hours for less money”

co-opt

coordinate

co-pilot

captain and first officer are preferable to pilot and co-pilot (they are both pilots)

cop-out

Cop26

avoid COP26, Cop 26 or any other variation

copy editor

what subeditors are known as in the United States and Canada, where they copy-edit

copyright

but **copywriter**

Corbusier, Le

(1887-1965) Swiss architect and city planner, born Charles-Edouard Jeanneret

Córdoba

cords

vocal, spinal, umbilical, trousers; **chords** musical

cornflakes

in general but Kellogg's Corn Flakes

Cornish pasty

coronavirus outbreak 2019-20

The virus is officially called Sars-CoV-2 and this causes the disease Covid-19.

However, for ease of communication we are following the same practice as the WHO and using **Covid-19** to refer to both the virus and the disease in our general reporting. It can also continue to be referred to as the coronavirus.

coroner's court**corporation of London****corps de ballet****cortege**

no accent

cosmetic surgery

is not the same as plastic surgery, which should be reserved for people treated for deformity or illness

Council of Europe

not an EU institution so not to be confused with the European Council or the Council of the European Union, which are (see entry for [European Council](#))

councillor

use as a description, not a title, eg the councillor Jacqueline Weaver, followed by Weaver at subsequent mentions, not Cllr Weaver

councillor or counsellor?

A councillor serves on a local council; a counsellor offers advice. Just to confuse everyone, a member of the privy council is a privy counsellor

councils

Only the placename takes a capital: Lancaster city council, London borough of Southwark, Kent county council, etc; it is normally sufficient to say Lancaster council, Southwark council, etc

count 'em

cliche often seen in parenthesis after a number is mentioned. For example, an article referred to "the seminal Andrex puppy advent calendar with 25 - count 'em - puppy pictures ..."

counteract, counterattack, countermeasures, counteroffensive

but **counter-terrorism**

County

not Co, when referring to counties eg County Armagh

coupe

no accent

courts

all lc, eg court of appeal, court of session, high court, magistrates court (no

apostrophe), supreme court, European court of human rights, international criminal court

court martial

plural **courts martial**

court of St James's**couscous****cover up**

verb; **cover-up** noun

co-worker

colleague (but not “work colleague”) is generally preferable, but if you do use it, include the hyphen to stop it looking like someone who orks cows

cows

are female. Cattle are male and female

CPAC

Conservative Political Action Conference

CPRE

Campaign to Protect Rural England (formerly the Council for the Protection of Rural England)

CPS

Crown Prosecution Service

Craddock, Fanny (1909-94) TV chef, often misspelt as “Craddock”

crapulent, crapulous

drunk; hence **crapula**, hangover

crash or collision

both are more objective than, and therefore usually preferable to, the term accident when describing traffic incidents. Unless the full circumstances are known, say that vehicles collided, rather than that one vehicle crashed into another, but use common sense so as to avoid sentences such as: “The car and the pedestrian collided on the pavement”

creche

no accent

credible

believable, hence credibility; incredible means unbelievable

credulous

gullible, hence credulity; incredulous means amazed

creme brulee, creme fraiche, creme de la creme

crescendo

a gradual increase in loudness or intensity; musically or figuratively, it is the buildup to a climax, not the climax itself (we frequently get this wrong)

cretinism

a medical condition, not a term of abuse

cricket

leg-side, leg-spinner, off-spin, off-stump, silly mid-on, mid-off, etc, all hyphenated

Crimean Bridge

the official name for the bridge between Russia and Crimea, which you can refer to informally as the Kerch bridge. It crosses the Kerch strait

cripple, crippled

offensive and outdated when referring to people but can be used judiciously in a metaphorical context eg the crippled economy

Crispr-Cas9

followed by Crispr at subsequent mentions for the gene-editing tool

crisscross**criterion**

plural **criteria**

critique

a noun meaning review, rather than a verb meaning criticise

crocodile-infested

please avoid. You can say “crocodile-filled waters” instead

Crombie

TM; the company’s wool coats have been popular with, among others, the Confederate army in the 1860s and mods in the 1960s

CrossFit

TM; fitness ‘philosophy’ combining exercises from various disciplines

crowdfunding, crowdsourcing**Crowley, Aleister**

dead satanist

crown, the; crown estate, crown jewels**crown dependencies**

The Isle of Man and the bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey in the Channel Islands. They are self-governing possessions of the crown recognised internationally as “territories for which the United Kingdom is responsible”.

Each has a chief minister as head of government and a legislative assembly which can pass laws subject to royal assent through the privy council.

Do not confuse them with the 14 British overseas territories (BOTs)

crucifix

not synonymous with cross: a crucifix depicts the body of Christ on the cross

crucifixion, the**Crufts****cruise missile****Crusades, the****Cruz, Penélope****cryonics and cryogenics**

Cryonics is the broad term for the freezing of human or animal corpses in the hope of restoring them to life in future; cryogenics is the more specific scientific study of the production of very low temperatures and how materials behave at these temperatures. As an example, a person can announce they wish to be cryogenically frozen, but their decision may restart the debate about the ethics of cryonics

cubism, cubist**Cub scouts**

boys (and now girls) aged from eight to 10, organised in packs but no longer known as “Wolf Cubs”; avoid dated “Dyb Dyb Dyb, Dob Dob Dob” jokes but if relevant, it is spelt thus (it stands for “do your best” and we will “do our best”), and not “Dib”

cuckoo clock

originated in Germany, not Switzerland

cucumiform

cucumber-shaped

cull

means pick or choose as in “culled from the best authors”. It doesn’t mean killed, axed or massacred (though you cull sheep in order to kill them). So a jobs cull does not mean the same as mass sackings

Cultural Revolution

launched by Mao Zedong in China in 1966

CULV

consumer ultra-low voltage

cum

Latin for “with”, seen in such placenames as Chorlton-cum-Hardy, and phrases such

as cross-cum-shot (in football) and cookbook-cum-autobiography - unfortunately, we wrote “cookbook-come-autobiography”

Cumberland sausage

It now has protected status, and must be made in Cumbria; hence capital C

Cummings, EE

US poet (1894-1962) who, despite what many people think, used capitals in his signature - so don't call him “ee cummings”

Cup, FA

after first mention it is the Cup; but other cups are lc on second mention

cupful

The plural is cupfuls, as with spoonfuls, but it's three cups full, three spoons full

curate's egg

Used nowadays to mean good in parts (“this was a curate's egg of a match”), the expression originally, and more subtly, meant to deliberately gloss over the truth - the curate was trying to spare his bishop's feelings, or perhaps his own embarrassment, when served a bad egg, by saying: “Oh no, My Lord, I assure you! Parts of it are excellent!” (cartoon in Punch, 9 November 1895)

curb

restrain; **kerb** pavement

currencies

for most currencies - for example yen, yuan, afghani - we spell out the full name rather than use a symbol or abbreviation, eg 100 yuan, 100,000 yen. Exceptions are the pound, the euro and dollars. For currencies we habitually refer to with their nationality, such as Swiss francs, you don't need to keep repeating the nationality or, indeed, to state it at all if it is clear from the context whose currency you are referring to - just say 100 francs.

Whenever the whole word for a currency is used it is lc: euro, pound, sterling, dong, etc. Abbreviate dollars like this: \$50 (US dollars); A\$50 (Australian dollars); HK\$50 (Hong Kong dollars); C\$50 (Canadian dollars). In stories where there may be confusion between US dollars and the local dollar, say US\$ for clarity.

Convert all foreign amounts to sterling (or the local dollar if you are working in the US or Australia) in brackets at first mention, but use common sense - there is no need to put £500,000 in brackets after the phrase “I feel like a million dollars.”

You can add more than one currency conversion in brackets, where appropriate, for a global story with a wide online readership. For example: “Unilever is to cut 7,500 jobs globally and spin off its ice-cream division as part of an overhaul aimed at saving about €800m (£680m, \$850m) over the next three years.” But please try to avoid making this conversion in the introduction or furniture.

Take care when converting old money to new: some of our attempts have been meaningless, in that they have ignored the relative value of sums involved. We said in an obituary, for example, that Ronnie Barker was paid £1 9s (£1.45) a week for his first job in 1947 – a comparison of average earnings would convert that to around £113 today.

Similarly, in converting the price of a “four shilling dish of rice and vegetables” in 1967 to 20p in today’s money we forgot to allow for its relative value; taking into account changes in the retail price index it would now be worth £2.23.

There are some excellent websites to assist with such conversions

currently

“now” is usually preferable, if needed at all

cusp

a place where two points meet (eg “on the cusp of Manchester and Salford”, “on the cusp of Taurus and Gemini”), which may be extended metaphorically to a place or time where two things or groups of things come into contact, as in this elegant example from the Review: “It was a world caught on the cusp between postwar recession, stasis and a dying moral code, and the colour, mobility and licence of the 60s.”

Writers who use cusp under the impression that it is a clever way to say on the brink of or about to (“on the cusp of adolescence”, “on the cusp of the final”, “tanker drivers are on the cusp of striking over a coming supermarket-led cut in their wages”, “the garlic was on the cusp of bursting into a constellation of white stars”) are, sadly, mistaken

custody

no longer used in cases involving the care of children; use child arrangements or residence instead

Customs, Revenue & Customs

(singular) but customs officers

cutbacks

avoid; cuts will suffice

C-word

can be spelt out in full, but should be used only when relevant (for example in the trial of a footballer accused of calling a rival player a “black cunt”)

cyberbully, cybercafe, cybercrime, cyberlocker, cybernetics, cyberpunk, cybersecurity, cybersex, cyberspace, cyberterrorism, cyberwar

cyber-army, cyber-attack

Cyprus

Cyprus, properly known as the Republic of Cyprus, joined the EU in 2004, 30 years

after Turkey invaded the northern part of the island, which should be referred to as “Turkish-occupied northern Cyprus” (the self-styled “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” is recognised only by Turkey)

the Czech Republic

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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