

The Guardian and Observer style guide

Guardian and Observer style guide: W

‘Substitute “damn” every time you’re inclined to write “very”. Your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be.’ **William Allen White**

Fri 17 Jun 2022 16.45 BST

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



walking stick

📷 Illustration: Jakob Hinrichs

wacky

not whacky

wagon

not waggon

Wags

wives and girlfriends (generally of footballers: the term was popularised during the 2006 World Cup, although Fabio Capello initially banned them from joining the 2010 team in South Africa); the singular is Wag. Regarded by many as sexist, although variations include Habs (husbands and boyfriends)

Wagner group

Wahhabism

branch of Islam practised by followers of the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab (1703-92)

wah-wah pedal

Wailing Wall

Refer to the ancient wall in the Old City of Jerusalem as the Western Wall instead

waiver or waver?

To waive is to relinquish a claim or right, as in the much used headline “Britannia waives the rules”. The associated noun is waiver, which can lead to confusion with waver, meaning to hesitate (or a person waving).

Adding to the fun, waver is sometimes mixed up with haver, which in Scotland means to talk nonsense

wake

“in the wake of” is overused; nothing wrong with “as a result of” or simply “after”

Wales

avoid the word “principality”, and do not use as a unit of measurement (“50 times the size of Wales”)

Wales Office

not Welsh Office

walking stick**Walkman**

TM; plural Walkmans not Walkmen

Wallpaper*

magazine (note asterisk)

Wall's

ice-cream, sausages

Walmart

US multinational retail corporation (previously Wal-Mart)

Wap

(wireless application protocol) phones

war crime, war dance, war game, war zone but **warhead, warhorse, warlord, warpath, warship, wartime**

ward, wards

Used as an adjective words such as backward, forward, downward, upward, outward should not end in s, but used as an adverb they should, so downward slope, forward planning, outward looking; but peer downwards, move forwards, spread outwards

“war on drugs”, “war on terror”

always in quotes

warn

“Warns” implies that a genuine warning is being made, but is inappropriate, say,

when it is just political point-scoring or making a threat eg “The RBS chief warned that a yes vote would wreck Scotland’s economy” implies a degree of disinterest that is misplaced. If in doubt, “said” is always a safe alternative

wars

civil war (England), American civil war, Spanish civil war

Boer war, Crimean war, Korean war, Vietnam war

first world war, second world war (do not say “before the war” or “after the war” when you mean the second world war)

Gulf war (1991), Iraq war (2003)

hundred years war

It actually lasted 116 years, from 1337 to 1453

six-day war (1967)

thirty years’ war (1618-48)

ended by the peace of Westphalia

war of Jenkins’ Ear (1739-48)

Wars of the Roses (1455-85)

Lancaster won

Washington DC

no comma or full stops

Washington Commanders

the name for the NFL team formerly known as the Redskins

washing-up liquid**washout**

noun; **wash out** verb

Was (Not Was)

US rock band fronted by Don Was and David Was (no relation)

The Waste Land

poem by TS Eliot (not The Wasteland)

wastewater, rainwater

but flood water, flood waters

Wastwater in the Lake District, not **Wast Water** and definitely not, as we had it, “Wastewater”

watchdog, watchmaker, watchword

watercolour, watercourse, watermark, waterproof, waterskiing, waterworks

Waterford Wedgwood

glass and china (not Wedgewood)

water polo

Waterstones

bookseller

Watford Gap

service area on the M1 in Northamptonshire, near the village of Watford, 80 miles north of London; nothing to do with the Hertfordshire town of Watford, 60 miles away, with which it is sometimes confused by lazy writers who think such phrases as “anyone north of the Watford Gap” a witty way to depict the unwashed northern hordes

wayzgoose

traditional term for a printer’s works outing

weave (fabric)

past tense wove, past participle woven. This also applies when used metaphorically, as in “Obama’s speech was woven throughout with the language of the US constitution” (we actually printed “weaved”, which was wrong)

weave (from side to side)

past tense weaved, past participle weaved, as in “Cameron dodged and weaved”

web, webpage, website, world wide web

weblog

normally abbreviated to blog

web log

a record of what someone does on the internet

web 2.0, web 3.0

websites

addresses can be broken at a sensible point within the name if you need to turn a line

Weee directive

(note three Es) EU scheme to encourage recycling of waste electrical and electronic equipment

weight

in kilograms with imperial conversion, eg 65kg (10st 2lb)

Weight Watchers

TM

welch

is considered derogatory of Welsh people so avoid using it to describe someone failing to honour an obligation; use an alternative such as renege instead

Welch Regiment, Royal Welch Fusiliers**welfare state****well**

“He gave a well-prepared speech” but “his speech was well prepared”;
“She liked a well-done steak” but “she liked her steak well done”;
“A well-known song” but “the song was well known” (but note that, as with famous, if something is well known it is not normally necessary to say so)

wellbeing**wellnigh****welly, wellies****welsh**

is considered derogatory of Welsh people when used to describe someone failing to honour an obligation; use an alternative such as renege instead

welsh dresser**Welsh government**

led by the first minister

Welsh, Irvine

Scottish author

Welsh parliament

is no longer referred to as the Welsh assembly, or National Assembly for Wales; it is now called Senedd Cymru, or the Welsh parliament (see full entry under [Senedd Cymru](#))

welsh rarebit or “posh cheese on toast”, as the Hairy Bikers describe it

Welsh spellings

(eg F for the V sound in English): prefer Welsh spellings such as Caernarfon and Conwy to old-fashioned anglicised versions (Caernarvon, Conway) - although there are exceptions, such as Cardiff not Caerdydd

wendy house**Wen Jiabao**

Chinese premier (prime minister) from 2002-12, having succeeded Zhu Rongji

west, western, the west, western Europe**western** (cowboy film)

West Bank

West Bank barrier

should always be called a barrier when referred to in its totality, as it is in places a steel and barbed-wire fence and in others an eight-metre-high concrete wall; if referring to a particular section of it then calling it a fence or a wall may be appropriate. It can also be described as a “separation barrier/fence/wall” or “security barrier/fence/wall”, according to the nature of the article

west coast mainline

runs from London Euston to Glasgow. The official name of the franchise is InterCity West Coast, currently operated by Virgin Trains

West Country

West End

of London, rather than the tabloid “London’s West End”; Glasgow also has a West End

Western Isles

use when referring to the islands in a political, official or social sense. The name of the council is *Comhairle nan Eilean Siar* so use this at first mention, with the translation in brackets ie *Comhairle nan Eilean Siar* (Western Isles council), and simply refer to it as the council thereafter. Outer Hebrides is better used when referring to the islands in a broader geographical or physical context

West Lothian question

asks why MPs from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are able to vote on policies that will apply in England but, because of devolution, will not apply in their own constituencies

West Midlands

Westminster Abbey

West Nile virus

JD Wetherspoon

the company, but **Wetherspoon’s** when referring to the pubs

Weyerhaeuser

US pulp and paper company

what is

a phrase that, while occasionally helpful to add emphasis, has become overused to the point of tedium; examples from the paper include:

“Beckham repaid the committed public support with what was a man-of-the-match performance ...”

T

“Principal among Schofield’s 19 recommendations in what is a wide-ranging report ...”

What is clear is that these would be improved by what would be the simple step of removing the offending phrase

wheelchair

Say (if relevant) that someone uses a wheelchair, not that they are “in a wheelchair” or “wheelchair-bound” - stigmatising and offensive, as well as inaccurate

whence

means “where from”, so don’t write “from whence”

whereabouts

singular: her whereabouts is not known

which or that?

This is quite easy, really: “that” defines, “which” gives extra information (often in a clause enclosed by commas):

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 the sunflowers); I am very proud of the sunflowers, which I grew from seed (all the sunflowers).

Note that in such examples the sentence remains grammatical without “that” (the house Jack built, the paper I admire, the sunflowers I grew), but not without “which”

Which?

the magazine, and the organisation that publishes it (formerly the Consumers’ Association)

while

not whilst

whisky, whiskey

scotch whisky, or simply scotch, as well as Canadian and Japanese whisky, plural whiskies

Irish and American whiskey, plural whiskeys

whistleblower

white

lc in racial context

white paper

white-van man

Whitsuntide, Whit Sunday

not Whitsun

whiz, whiz-kid

not whizz or wiz

whodunnit**whole-life sentence or order**

with one hyphen

who or whom?

This is how to do it: “When it comes to sci-fi villains, few have endured as well as the Martians, whom HG Wells depicted wielding a weapon called the Heat-Ray in *The War of the Worlds*, back in 1898.”

And this is how not to do it: “A nation’s weeping turned to tears of joy with the news that Louie – for who media commentators had to commission new words for camp ... – is to star in his own 10-part series.”

Only those with a tin ear for language could be unaware that “who” sounds wrong in the second example, but it is not always so obvious.

If in doubt, ask yourself how the clause beginning who/whom would read in the form of a sentence giving he, him, she, her, they or them instead: if the who/whom person turns into he/she/they, then “who” is right; if it becomes him/her/them, then it should be “whom”.

In this example: “Straw was criticised for attacking Clegg, whom he despised” – “whom” is correct because he despised “him”.

But in “Straw attacked Clegg, who he thought was wrong” – “who” is correct, because it is “he” not “him” who is considered wrong.

Use of “whom” has all but disappeared from spoken English, and seems to be going the same way in most forms of written English too. If you are not sure, it is much better to use “who” when “whom” would traditionally have been required than to use “whom” incorrectly for “who”, something even great writers have been guilty of: “There was a big man whom I think was an hôtelier from Phnom Penh and a French girl I’d never seen before ...” (*The Quiet American*, Graham Greene – who as a former subeditor should have known better).

wicketkeeper**Widdecombe, Ann**

former Tory cabinet minister who, briefly, became a Guardian agony aunt

wide awake

Wiesel, Elie

Holocaust survivor and author; he was awarded the Nobel peace prize in 1986, and female status in a particularly crass Guardian error

wifi

not Wi-Fi

Wii

Nintendo games machine

wiki

website that allows multiple users to edit its content, hence WikiLeaks, Wikipedia

wild west**wildlife**

preferable to **biodiversity**

the Wildlife Trusts

a federation of 46 individual trusts. Treat as a plural, for example: “The Wildlife Trusts have said they have raised £25m.”

Willans, Geoffrey

(not Williams or Willians, as have appeared in the paper) author of the Molesworth books, illustrated by Ronald Searle, as any fule kno

will.i.am

real name William James Adams, Jr

Wimpey houses; Wimpy burgers**Windermere**

not Lake Windermere; note that Windermere is also the name of the town

windfarm

one word

Windows Phone 7

not Windows 7 Phone

wines

normally lc, whether taking their name from a region (eg beaujolais, bordeaux, burgundy, chablis, champagne) or a grape variety (eg cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay, merlot, muscadet).

The regions themselves are capped up - so one might drink a burgundy from Burgundy, or a muscadet from the Loire valley - as are wines of individual chateaux, eg I enjoyed a glass of Cos d’Estournel 1970

wing commander

in leading articles, abbreviate on second mention to Wing Co; Wing Commander

Barry Johnson, subsequently Wing Co Johnson; otherwise just Johnson

Winnie-the-Pooh

in the original AA Milne books, although the “bear of little brain” has lost the hyphens in his Disney incarnation

winter, wintry**winter of discontent**

overused

wipeout noun; **wipe out** verb

Wirral

not “the Wirral”, unless referring specifically to the Wirral peninsula

wishlist**wisteria**

not wistaria

witchcraft

but **witch-doctor, witch-hunt**

with

not “together with”

withdrawal agreement bill

“the bill” on second and subsequent mentions, unless quoting someone using the acronym, in which case it is Wab

withhold**witness**

not eyewitness, except for the Eyewitness picture spread in the Guardian

wits' end**WMDs**

abbreviation for weapons of mass destruction (or, as they are known in the UK, “Britain’s independent nuclear deterrent”)

woeful**Wolfram Alpha**

“computational knowledge engine”

Wollstonecraft, Mary

wrote Vindication of the Rights of Woman (not “Women”, a frequent error)

woman, women

are nouns, not adjectives, so say female president, female MPs etc rather than “woman president”, “women MPs”. An easy way to check is to try using man

instead of woman eg “man president”, “men MPs” – if it doesn’t work for men, it doesn’t work for women.

womenswear

but the magazine is **Women’s Wear Daily**

wood burner

not woodburner or wood-burner. But wood-burning stove

woodwork**Wookiee**

Note two Es; a species in Star Wars of which **Chewbacca** is a member

Woolies

the defunct shopping chain more formally known as **Woolworths**

woollies

jumpers

Worcestershire sauce

not Worcester

word salad

the term for a jumble of usually spoken words which may often be a symptom of mental illness so take care when considering using it to describe the speech of any particular individual outside a clinical context

Work Programme

the coalition government scheme that, it was revealed in November 2012, found long-term jobs for 3.5% of the unemployed people it was designed to help

working class

noun; working-class adjective

working tax credit

replaced the working families tax credit

World Bank

the bank or the World Bank at second and subsequent mentions

world championship**World Cup, World Cup final**

football, cricket or rugby

World Food Programme

may be abbreviated to WFP after first mention

World Health Organization

the WHO on second mention

world heritage site**world music**

Avoid using this term to describe music made outside the west. Instead use an appropriate genre descriptor, such as pop, jazz, metal, rap, dance music, etc

World Series

It is a myth that this baseball event got its name from the New York World: originally known as the World's Championship Series, it had nothing to do with the newspaper.

It has become tedious every time the World Series comes round to see its name cited as an example of American arrogance

World Trade Center, Ground Zero

but the twin towers

World Trade Organization**world war three**

not world war 3 or world war III

worldview**worldwide**

often redundant, eg “it has automotive plants in 30 countries worldwide” (as opposed to galaxy-wide?)

world wide web**wounds**

combatants in battle are wounded, not injured

wrack

seaweed; racked with guilt and shame, not wracked; rack and ruin

wreaked

is the past tense of wreak (eg wreaked havoc); wrought is not – it's an archaic past tense form of work, and is used as an adjective, eg wrought iron, finely wrought embroidery

wrest

as in wresting back, rather than wrestling back, your title

wrinklies

patronising, unfunny way to refer to elderly people; do not use

wrongdoing**wrongfoot**

(verb) as in I was wrongfooted by the question

wryly

not wrily

wuss

WWE

World Wrestling Entertainment, formerly the World Wrestling Federation

WWF

formerly the World Wide Fund for Nature (or, in the US, World Wildlife Fund)

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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