

The Guardian and Observer style guide

Guardian and Observer style guide: D

'But far too numerous was the Herd of such
Who think too little and who talk too much.' **John Dryden**

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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



Dad or dad?

📷 Illustration: Jakob Hinrichs

dachshund

Dad or dad?

capital D if it's just Dad, eg "I'll have to ask Dad"; otherwise lowercase, eg "my dad was a dustman, what does your dad do?" etc

dadaism, dadaist

Dagalo, Mohamed Hamdan

Sudanese military leader, also known as Hemedti

Dáil Éireann

lower house of parliament in the Republic of Ireland, normally just the Dáil

DaimlerChrysler

Dakar

capital of Senegal; **Dhaka** capital of Bangladesh

T

dal

not dhal

Dalai Lama

no abbreviation: he is always the Dalai Lama

Dalek

takes initial cap, whether used literally (as in referring to Doctor Who), or figuratively (as in describing, say, your boss)

Dalí, Salvador

(1904-89) Spanish surrealist

dancefloor

one word (thanks to Arctic Monkeys for this one)

dangling participles

(also known as hanging participles)

Avoid constructions such as “having died, they buried him”; the pitfalls are nicely highlighted in Mark Lawson’s novel *Going Out Live*, in which a TV critic writes: “Dreary, repetitive and well past the sell-by date, I switched off the new series of *Fleming Faces*.”

Another example, from a leading article: “Due out in January as a white paper, Ms Kelly may be unable to overcome Mr Blair’s apparent determination to stick with A-levels.”

And this particularly exotic dangling participle somehow found its way into the paper: “Though long-legged and possessing a lovely smile, gentleman journalists aren’t looking up her skirt and wouldn’t even if she weren’t gay”

danish pastry**Dar es Salaam****dark ages****darknet****dashcam****dashes**

A single dash can add a touch of drama - like this. But use sparingly.

A pair of dashes are an alternative to commas or brackets for parenthesis when you want to draw the reader’s attention to something surprising or unusual. An example from the paper of how not to do it: “Many neighbours in the block - which sits close to the banks of the Thames - were visibly shaken.” The block’s innocuous location does not need underlining with dashes. Commas would suffice.

Beware sentences – such as this one – that dash about all over the place – commas (or even, very occasionally, brackets) are often better; semicolons also have their uses.

Dashes should be en dashes rather than em dashes or hyphens

data

takes a singular verb (like agenda), though strictly a plural; you come across datum, the singular of data, about as often as you hear about an agendum

datacentre, dataset

dates

Our style is: 21 July 2016 (day month year; no commas).

21 July-6 August, 6-10 August, etc.

In the 21st century but 21st-century boy; fourth century BC; AD2007, 2500BC, 10,000BC.

Use figures for decades: the 1960s, the swinging 60s, etc.

Should you have occasion to say 2016 out loud, for example in a podcast, pronounce it “twenty sixteen”, not “two thousand and sixteen”

daughter of, son of

Think twice before referring to people in these terms. Often only the person’s father is described and such descriptions can smack of snobbery as well as sexism.

Simplistic labels may also be misleading: we published a clarification after calling Captain James Cook the son of a Scottish farm labourer. True enough, but Cook’s mother was a Yorkshire woman and he is a famous son of Yorkshire

Davison, Emily

suffragette who died four days after stepping in front of George V’s horse at the 1913 Derby

daybreak, daydream

DayGlo

TM; but note the X-Ray Spex hit The Day the World Turned Day-Glo

Day Kundi

province in Afghanistan

daylong, daytime

but **month-long, year-long, night-time**

day trip

two words, eg Day Trip to Bangor by (trivia question) ... Fiddler’s Dram

“day zero”

not Day Zero, in relation to water crises in Cape Town and elsewhere

D-day

6 June 1944, or used figuratively (“Monday is D-day for the Blades’ promotion hopes”)

Dbeibah, Abdul Hamid

prime minister of Libya’s Tripoli-based government

deaf ears

Avoid or say “closed ears”; the phrase is not just a rather lazy cliché but offensive to many deaf people. For the same reason, do not use “dialogue of the deaf”: most deaf people are perfectly capable of conducting a dialogue using BSL and other sign languages. The term “deaf mute” is also outdated and offensive; “deaf”, where relevant, will suffice.

Note that a hearing aid is not a “deaf aid” (although we contrived to use the phrase in a crossword in August 2012)

deathbed

but **death row**

debacle

no accents; like farce and fiasco, to be used sparingly in news reporting

debatable**debate**

In British English, if you debate Boris Johnson he is the subject of the discussion; you would debate *with* Boris Johnson if he were your opponent

Deben, Lord

Deben at second mention. If you are referring to things he did in the years before his peerage, for example while environment secretary, it is helpful to also point out his name is John Gummer

decades

1950s, etc; use figures if you abbreviate: roaring 20s, swinging 60s, a woman in her 70s, the first reader’s email of the 00s (pronounced, unfortunately, “noughties”)

deceptively

ambiguous (in one survey, half the respondents thought “deceptively easy” meant easy, and half thought it meant hard), and therefore best avoided – advice unlikely to be heeded, sadly, by estate agents

decimate

nowadays used to mean destroy (yes, we know it originally meant to kill one in 10)

[See Latin](#)

declarations

lc, eg Laeken declaration on the future of Europe

decorations

no need normally to put OBE, KCMG, etc after people's names

decry

condemn; **descry** discover

You only ever see descry when someone uses it wrongly to mean decry

deep south

of the US

deepfake**defensible****definite, definitely, definitive, definitively**

"For me, this is definitely the definitive style guide"

defriend

or **unfriend** (Facebook)

defuse

render harmless; **diffuse** spread about

Degas, Edgar

(1834-1917) French artist

de Gaulle, Charles

(1890-1970) French military leader and statesman; De Gaulle on second mention

degrees

like this: my sons all got firsts, but I only got a second - although it was a 2:1 - and I did go on to a master's

deja vu

defined as the phenomenon of having the strong sensation that an event or experience currently being experienced has already been experienced in the past (whether it has actually happened or not). So watching England underperforming and being knocked out of a major football tournament at an early stage, for example, might be said to induce a sense of deja vu

Deleavingne, Cara**Delhi**

unless specifically referring to the small area of the city that is New Delhi

delivery

the arrival of a baby, letter or parcel; also widely found in such gruesome examples of marketing-speak as "delivering care" or "delivering quality and value"

Deloitte

not Deloittes, Deloitte Consulting, or Deloitte & Touche

delphic**Delta Air Lines or Delta**

not Delta Airlines

deltas

are, like other geographical features, lc: Nile delta, Okavango delta, etc

delusion or illusion?

“That the sun moves round the Earth was once a delusion, and is still an illusion”
(Fowler)

dementia

not “senile dementia”.

We should take care to refer to a person or people with dementia, or living with dementia, not as a “dementia sufferer” or “victims of dementia”.

Dementia is an umbrella term that refers to various conditions. Some of the more common types of dementia include Alzheimer’s disease, vascular dementia, Lewy Body dementia, and fronto-temporal dementia (eg Pick’s disease). Respect people’s choices about how they identify themselves, for example as someone with Alzheimer’s disease rather than dementia

DeMille, Cecil B

(1881-1959) Hollywood producer and director; the B stood for Blount

Democrat, Democratic

In American politics, Democrat is a noun, Democratic an adjective: Kamala Harris is a Democrat, and a member of the Democratic party.

The distinction is important because the Republicans use “Democrat” as an adjective, eg “Democrat party”, in a pejorative way

the Democratic Republic of the Congo

DRC on second mention; not to be confused with its smaller neighbour Congo-Brazzaville (which is also known as the Republic of the Congo); both countries border the Congo river. DRC, formerly the colony of Belgian Congo and then Zaire, is the second largest country in Africa by area and the fourth most populated

denazify, denazification**Dench, Dame Judi**

not Judy

Deng Xiaoping**denier**

one who denies, as in “Holocaust denier”; there is no such word as “denialist”.

The OED defines a sceptic as “a seeker of the truth; an inquirer who has not yet arrived at definite conclusions”, which is highly flattering to “climate change sceptics” who are literally in denial about the overwhelming scientific evidence and deny that climate change is happening or is caused by human activity, so denier is the more accurate, and our preferred, term.

denier is also a unit of weight for fibre, eg 10-denier tights

De Niro, Robert

denouement

no accent

departments of state

British government ministries (but not ministers) take initial caps, as follows:

Cabinet Office (but the cabinet)

Department for Business and Trade (DBT)

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)

Department for Education (DfE)

Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ)

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

Department for International Development (DfID) - no longer exists after merging with the Foreign Office in 2020

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)

Department for Transport (DfT)

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, or Foreign Office (FCDO)

Home Office

Ministry of Defence (MoD)

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

Northern Ireland Office

Office of the Leader of the House of Commons

Scotland Office, not Scottish Office

Treasury

Wales Office, not Welsh Office

Use the abbreviations in brackets sparingly, especially the clumsy ones: business department, culture and sport department, and so on are fine, or just the department, the ministry, etc.

Departments and ministries of other English-speaking countries also take an initial capital, eg US Department of State, Indian Ministry of Railways.

Departments and ministries of non-English-speaking countries are lc, eg French ministry of the interior, Iraqi foreign ministry

dependant

noun; **dependent** adjective; **dependence**

His dependants were dependent on him for everything

depository

person; **depository** place

deprecate

express disapproval; **depreciate** reduce in value.

Hence self-deprecating humour or remark, not “self-depreciating”

Deraa

Syrian city, 60 miles from Damascus, not to be confused with **Darayya**, a suburb of Damascus, also sometimes described as a city

derby

as in Everton v Liverpool or Newbury FC v Thatcham Town; it is not normally necessary to include the word “local”

de rigueur

the two Us are de rigueur

derisive or derisory?

The former means contemptuous, as in a yell of derision; the latter means unworthy of serious discussion, as in a derisory offer

derring-do

not daring-do

Derry, Co Derry

(County Derry at first mention) not Londonderry, Co Londonderry

descendants

come after ancestors; you wouldn't think we would get this simple thing wrong as often as we do

deselect**desiccated**

not dessicated

despoil

but **despoliation**

dessert

pudding, but **just deserts**

detente

Dettol

TM

developing countries

rather than third world

devil, the**de Villepin, Dominique**

Villepin on second mention

DeVito, Danny**devolution in the UK**

This has proved to be a hazardous area for headline writers, copy editors and writers. Remember that many of the decisions taken by the UK government apply only in England. This is particularly true in areas such as health and education. So please take great care before adding the words British or UK to headlines and copy and make sure that what is being reported applies to the whole of the UK and not just England.

In terms of job titles, however, it is not strictly correct to refer to, for example, the health secretary in the UK government as the English health secretary. The most accurate formulation is to say they are the UK government health secretary. But also spell out, if it is relevant, where their responsibilities are confined to England. It is not incorrect to refer to the UK health secretary, but this can be misleading and should particularly be avoided if what is being discussed applies only to England. All this also applies to the UK government's education secretary

diabetes

a lifelong condition that causes a person's blood sugar (glucose) level to become too high. The hormone insulin, produced by the pancreas, is responsible for controlling the amount of glucose in the blood.

There are two types of diabetes, type 1 and type 2, and it is important to distinguish between the two.

Type 1 diabetes, where the pancreas does not produce any insulin, comprises about 10% of cases but is the most common type of childhood diabetes. Type 1 is an autoimmune disease, cause unknown (although genetics is believed to play a part).

Weight is not a factor

Type 2 diabetes, where the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or the body's cells don't react to insulin, comprises about 90% of adult cases. Obesity, lack of exercise and an unhealthy diet have contributed to an increase in the number of adults developing type 2 diabetes.

Refer to "people with diabetes" rather than calling them diabetics

T

Diabetes UK

formerly known as the British Diabetic Association

Diaghilev, Sergei

(1872-1929) Russian impresario; founder of the Ballets Russes

dialects

cockney, estuary English, geordie, scouse

diamond jubilee**Diana, Princess of Wales**

at first mention, followed by Diana. Princess Diana is incorrect

diaspora**DiCaprio, Leonardo****Dictaphone**

TM

die

is what people do in Guardian articles (people have not “passed away”, “shuffled off this mortal coil” or any other euphemism)

diehard

although the film series is Die Hard

dietitian

must be trained and qualified in dietetics, and registered with the Health Professionals Council; not the same as a nutritionist, a less precise term (although some nutritionists are also registered dietitians)

different from

is traditionally the correct form; different to is widely accepted nowadays, but note the difference between:

She looked very different to those who came before (to the people who came before, she looked very different).

She looked very different from those who came before (she did not look like the people who came before).

Different than is frowned on, at least in British English; and it's always differs from, not differs to

digital rights management

can be abbreviated to DRM after first mention

digitalise

administer digitoxin (extracted from foxglove leaves) to treat heart conditions;

digitise transcribe data into digital format

dignitary, dignitaries

dijon mustard

dilapidated

dilemma

Not just a posh word for decision. It suggests a choice between two difficult choices of action. Perhaps the best known dilemma is “to be or not to be”

dilettante

dim sum

Dinky Toys

TM

dinner ladies

are generally known as school meals supervisors these days

diphtheria

diplomatic service

director general

direct speech

People we write about are allowed to speak in their own, not necessarily our, style, but be sensitive: do not, for example, expose someone to ridicule for dialect or grammatical errors.

Do not attempt facetious phonetic renditions such as “oop north”, “fooking” and “booger” when interviewing someone from the north, or “dahn sarf” when writing about south London

dire straits

not straights

disabled people

not “the disabled”

We aim to use positive language about disability, avoiding outdated terms that stereotype or stigmatise.

Terms to avoid in reference to disability, with acceptable alternatives in brackets, include victim of, suffering from, afflicted by, crippled by (prefer person who has, person with); wheelchair-bound, in a wheelchair (uses a wheelchair); person who is less able, invalid (disabled person); mentally handicapped, backward, retarded, slow (person with learning difficulties or disabilities); the disabled, the handicapped, the blind, the deaf (disabled people, blind people, deaf people, people with hearing

loss); deaf and dumb (deaf and speech-impaired); the vulnerable, vulnerable people (disabled people)

Note that in the UK there is no central register of disabled people so avoid using terms such as “registered disabled”.

disassemble

take apart; **dissemble** conceal

disburse

give out money; **disperse** scatter a crowd

disc

rotating optical disc: CD, CD-Rom, DVD, etc; **disk** rotating magnetic disc: disk drive, floppy disk

discernible

not discernable

discharged

a patient is discharged, not released, from hospital; a prisoner is released from jail

discolour

but **discoloration**

discomfit

(verb) to make uncomfortable or uneasy (its older meaning, to thwart or frustrate, has largely fallen into disuse); **discomfort** (noun) inconvenience, distress or mild pain

discreet

circumspect; **discrete** separate

disfigured, disfigurement

rather than deformed, deformity

disinterested

means free from bias, objective (the negative form of interested as in “interested party”); often used incorrectly instead of **uninterested**, not taking an interest (the negative form of interested as in “interested in football”). So disinterest is impartiality, not a lack of interest.

The distinction is one we should strive to maintain because it is not helpful to readers if we use disinterested and uninterested to mean the same thing

Disney+

streaming service

Disneyland

(California)

Disneyland Paris

(formerly Euro Disney)

Disney World

(Florida)

disoriented

not disorientated

dispatch, dispatch box

(Commons), **dispatched**; not despatch, despatched

Disprin

TM; call it aspirin

dissociate, dissociation

not disassociate, disassociation

distinct or distinctive?

There's a distinct possibility that he will insist on showing you the distinctive birthmark on his left buttock

distributor

not distributer

ditching

not a synonym for crashing: if you ditch a helicopter, you make a controlled landing on the water after an emergency - we have got this wrong several times

divorcee

a divorced person, male or female

divvy up, divvying up

The BBC used the grotesque "divi'ing up"

D notices

see [DSMA notices](#)

Dnipro River

what is historically known as the left bank of the Dnipro River, perhaps confusingly, lies mainly to the east, while the right bank lies mainly to the west and south. If you can, clarify that for the reader, by saying, for example, the "left bank of the Dnipro, to the east", but do check the location on a map as the orientation varies along the course of the river. The left and right refer to how the banks appear looking downstream, just like the left (rive gauche) and right banks of the Seine in Paris

Doctor Who

the title of the series - do not abbreviate to Dr Who; the character is the Doctor, who is a Time Lord

docudrama, docusoap

dogs

normally lc, eg alsatian, doberman, jack russell, labrador, rottweiler, yorkshire terrier; but note German shepherd, Irish setter, old English sheepdog, French bulldog, Afghan hound.

The names of crossbreeds should also normally be lowercase, even when they are formed partly from the name of a country or nationality, such as maltipoo

D'oh!

as Homer Simpson would say (note the apostrophe)

Dolby

TM

Dolittle, Dr

character who talked to the animals, created by Hugh Lofting; **Doolittle, Eliza** character created by George Bernard Shaw in *Pygmalion*; also a British singer-songwriter (born 1988)

doll's house**dome, the**

Millennium Dome at first mention, thereafter the dome; now the O2

Domesday Book**domestic abuse/family abuse** (see also **abuse**)

Both terms are acceptable, and a mention, where relevant, that a story involves domestic/family abuse is helpful for clarity. (It is also preferred by some advocacy groups.) The term abuse is preferable to violence as it more widely encompasses the different forms of abuse that can occur, ie not just physical but emotional, psychological, financial and sexual. Always include helpline numbers:

In the UK, call the [national domestic abuse helpline](#) on 0808 2000 247, or visit [Women's Aid](#). In Australia, the [national family violence counselling service](#) is on 1800 737 732. In the US, the [domestic violence hotline](#) is 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). Other international helplines may be found via www.befrienders.org

Use the following endnote if a story is about a murder/suicide:

In the UK, [Samaritans](#) can be contacted on 116 123 and the [domestic abuse helpline](#) is 0808 2000 247. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is on 13 11 14 and the [national family violence counselling service](#) is on 1800 737 732. In the US, the [suicide prevention lifeline](#) is 1-800-273-8255 and the [domestic violence hotline](#) is 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). Other international helplines can be found via www.befrienders.org

domestic violence victims/survivors

The term victim is used for those in a violent situation or at risk of violence. The

term survivor is used for people who have experienced domestic violence in the past. Give priority to the preferences of the person we are writing about

Dominica

former British colony in the Windward Islands, south-east of Dominican Republic

Dominican Republic

independent Spanish-speaking country that shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti

Donbas

not Donbass for the region of Ukraine

doner

kebab

[See kebabs](#)

donor

gives money

doomsday

as in doomsday scenario, but **Doomsday Clock**

doppelganger

no accent

dos and don'ts**Dostoevsky, Fyodor Mikhailovich**

(1821-81) Russian novelist, author of Crime and Punishment and The Idiot

dotcom**Double, the**

as in Chelsea won the Double in 2010 (FA Cup and Premier League)

doubledecker

bus; **Double Decker** chocolate bar

double down

to commit more strongly to a position

doughnuts

despite Dunkin' Donuts

dove

a bird, not the past tense of dive, which is dived

dover sole**Dow Jones industrial average**

downmarket**downplay**

play down is preferable

downriver, downstream**Down's syndrome**

or Down syndrome in the US, Australia and increasingly in the UK. Say (if relevant) a baby with Down's syndrome, not "a Down's syndrome baby" - we wouldn't say "a cerebral palsy baby". The diagnosis is not the person

downtown**down under**

a term Australians themselves rarely use, and best avoided

dox, doxed, doxing

term for publishing someone's private information online without their consent

doyen, doyenne

the senior member of a group, eg "she was the doyenne of ballet critics." It once meant a leader or commander of 10 men

dozen

precisely, not approximately, 12

Dr

at first mention for people practising as a doctor in the field in which they gained that qualification, including medical and academic doctors and doctors of divinity (but not surgeons or holders of juris doctor law degrees and not, for example, a politician who happens to have a PhD in history or a medical qualification); thereafter, just use surname except in leading articles

draconian**draft**

document; **draught** current of air

draftsman, draftswoman

of documents; **draughtsman, draughtswoman** of drawings

dreamed

not dreamt

DreamWorks**dressroom**

two words

drier, dryer

this shirt will only get drier after an hour in the tumble dryer (while I use the hairdryer)

drily

not dryly

drink

past tense **drank**, past participle **drunk**: he drinks too much - last night he drank 10 pints, the least he has drunk on any night this week

drink-driver, drink-driving, drunk-driving

The limits in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are breath: 35 micrograms per 100 millilitres; blood: 80 milligrams per 100 millilitres; urine: 107 milligrams per 100 millilitres. The limits in Scotland are breath: 22 micrograms per 100 millilitres; blood: 50 milligrams per 100 millilitres; urine: 67 milligrams per 100 millilitres

driving licence

not driver's licence in British English; most Australian states issue "driver licences" but **driver's licence** is common usage

drone

honeybee whose function is to mate with the queen, and by extension therefore someone who lives off the work of others (the worker bees); however, it seems to be used increasingly to mean something like an obedient, unimaginative worker ("office drone")

drug companies, drug dealer, drug raid, drug squad, drug tsar

not drugs raid, etc

drug use

a more accurate and less judgmental term than "drug abuse" or "misuse" (often all three terms have been scattered randomly through the same reports)

druid**drum'n'bass****drunkenness****DSG International**

the former Dixons; owns Currys and PC World. DSG stands for Dixons Store Group, but in June 2010 the company, belatedly realising that no one in the world was aware of this, decided to change back to Dixons

DSMA notices

issued by the Defence and Security Media Advisory Committee, "advising" that the media do not publish sensitive information; formerly known as D notices and then DA notices

dub

Avoid such tabloidese as “he has been dubbed the nation’s leading expert on style” (even if true)

duct tape

not duck tape

Duchess of Sussex

at second mention Meghan or the duchess. Meghan is OK in headlines.

“Meghan, Duchess of Sussex” should not be used in copy, but is acceptable shorthand for headlines

due to or owing to?

traditionalists argue that “due to” should only be used when it is the complement of the verb “to be”, and could be replaced by “caused by”; otherwise, use “owing to” or “because of”:

The train’s late arrival was due to [caused by] leaves on the line; the train was late owing to [because of] leaves on the line.

The distinction, once routinely taught in primary schools but now assailed on all sides, especially by train and tube announcers, is being lost.

There is no such controversy about “due to” in other contexts – rent is due to the landlord, we are due to arrive in 10 minutes, etc

duffel bag, duffel coat

The fabric was named after Duffel, a town in Belgium

dugout**Duke of Edinburgh**

or Prince Philip at first mention; thereafter the duke or Philip

Duke of Sussex

or Prince Harry at first mention, thereafter Harry or the prince

Duke of York

or Prince Andrew at first mention; thereafter the prince or Andrew

dumb

do not use when you mean speech-impaired

du Pré, Jacqueline

(1945-87) English cellist, Du Pré at second mention

Dupré, Marcel

(1886-1971) French organist and composer

Dürer, Albrecht

(1471-1528) German painter

dutch auction, dutch courage, dutch treat
but **double Dutch**

DVD

stands for digital versatile disc

dwarves

plural of dwarf (not dwarfs); but the verb is to dwarf, eg the Shard dwarfs the surrounding buildings

dyke

not dike

dynamo

plural dynamos

Dynamo

football teams from the former Soviet Union are Dynamo; teams from Romania are

Dinamo**dyslexia**

write “Paul has dyslexia” rather than labelling him “a dyslexic” or saying he “suffers from” dyslexia

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

Most viewed
