

## The Guardian and Observer style guide

# Guardian and Observer style guide: M

'When I see my name spelt with one word, I want to slap and choke people. If you do that, you got to be a moron ... It's on every poster, every album and every ticket as two words. If you spell it as one, you're an idiot.' **Meat Loaf**

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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**



**martial law**

📷 Illustration: Jakob Hinrichs

## Maasai

people and language; the Maasai Mara is a game reserve in Kenya

## Mac or Mc?

Andie MacDowell (actor), Sue MacGregor (broadcaster), Kelvin MacKenzie (ex-editor), Shirley MacLaine (actor), Murdo MacLeod (photographer).

Sir Cameron Mackintosh (impresario), Elle Macpherson (model).

Sir Paul McCartney (composed song about frogs), Steve McClaren (football manager), Sir Trevor McDonald (ex-newsreader), Ian McEwan (novelist), Ewan McGregor, Sir Ian McKellen (actors), Malcolm McLaren (late impresario)

## Macau

## MacDonald, James Ramsay (1866-1937)

first Labour prime minister, known as Ramsay MacDonald

T

**mace, the**

parliament; **Mace** riot control spray

**MacGuffin**

an object or event in a book or a film that serves as the impetus for the plot

**machiavellian**

after Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527)

**machine gun**

noun; **machine-gun** verb; **submachine gun**

**Machu Picchu**

Peruvian “lost city of the Incas”

**mackem**

refers both to a person from Sunderland and their accent

**Macmillan, Harold**

(1894-1986) Tory prime minister

**MacMillan, Kenneth**

(1929-92) choreographer

**MacNeice, Louis**

(1907-63) Belfast-born poet

**Macquarie University**

in New South Wales

**Madagascar**

the adjective to describe the people and everything else from the country is

**Malagasy**, which is also a language

**Madama Butterfly**

is the correct title of Puccini’s 1904 opera; Madame Butterfly and Madam Butterfly are the French and English versions

**Madame Tussauds**

no apostrophe, even though there was a Mme (Marie) Tussaud

**madeira**

wine and cake

**Madejski Stadium**

home of Reading FC

**Madison Square Garden**

(not Gardens) in New York City

**Madras**

now known as Chennai

**madrasa**

normally used to mean Islamic school, although in both Arabic and Urdu the word is used to refer to any kind of school

**mafia****Maga**

for Make America Great Again

**Magdalen College, Oxford****Magdalene College, Cambridge****magic bullet**

easy solution; **silver bullet** as used to kill a werewolf, and by the Lone Ranger.

We should normally stick to magic bullet for metaphorical use, at least when talking about a simple or ready solution.

By all means say silver bullet, however, when actually referring to werewolves or, metaphorically, if you are talking about getting rid of something. So:

Labour will need magic bullet to win the next election;

Labour will need silver bullet to remove Cameron from No 10

**magistrates court**

no apostrophe

**maglev**

high-speed trains (it is short for magnetic levitation)

**Magna Carta**

not “the Magna Carta”; note that it was sealed, not signed

**Magnum**

a .44 Magnum is a cartridge, not a gun (although Dirty Harry used a .44 Magnum revolver)

**maharajah****Mahathir Mohamad**

prime minister of Malaysia from 1981 to 2003, and from 2018 to 2020; Mahathir on second mention (except in leading articles, where he is Mr, not Dr, Mahathir)

**Mahikeng**

city in South Africa, formerly known as Mafikeng, and Mafeking when it was famously relieved in 1900

**maiden name**

sounds outdated in an age of marriage equality; preferable alternatives include b. name, original name, previous name, or a construction such as “Jane Smith (born Jane Jones)”

**mailbag, mailvan****MailOnline****mail train****mainland**

should not be used to refer to Great Britain in reports about Northern Ireland

**mainmast, mainsail****mai tai**

cocktail; **muay thai** contact sport

**major**

a major case of overuse; avoid except in a military context: big, main and leading are among the alternatives

**majority**

Unless you are specifically talking about the larger part of a measurable number, “most of” normally sounds more natural: “a clear majority had voted Conservative, so he resolved to spend most of the next five years in the pub”

**makeover, makeup**

(nouns) one word; (verbs) two words: making up is hard to do

**makrut lime**

not “kaffir lime”; note that it is makrut and not, as Wikipedia has it, makrud. Used in south-east Asian cooking and to flavour drinks

**Málaga****Malaysian names**

generally the given name comes first, and Muslim Malays tend not to use surnames, so Mahathir Mohamad (Mahathir the son of Mohamad) becomes Mahathir on second reference. Chinese Malaysian names, like Singaporean names, are in three parts: eg Ling Liong Sik (Ling after first mention)

**Mall, the**

in London

**Malloch-Brown, Lord**

a former deputy secretary general of the UN, Mark Malloch Brown acquired a peerage and a hyphen when he became a Labour minister

**Mallorca**

not Majorca

**Malmö****Mamma Mia!**

musical show and film featuring Abba songs

**mammon****man/manned**

use a gender-neutral term instead whenever possible eg crew, staffed

**Man Booker prize**

no longer the name of the prize, it is now just the Booker prize

**mañana****manchild**

plural manchildren

**mangetout**

one word

**manhole**

maintenance hole is a non-gendered alternative

**manifesto**

plural **manifestos**

**mankind**

humankind or humanity are preferable

**man-made**

use human-made, artificial or synthetic instead

**manner or manor?**

“To the manner born” is a phrase from Hamlet. To the Manor Born was a sitcom

**manoeuvre, manoeuvring****mantis**

plural mantids

**Māori**

the people and their language. The plural form is also Māori

**Mao Zedong**

Mao on second mention

**margarita**

cocktail

**margherita**

pizza

**Mariinsky theatre**

St Petersburg home of the Mariinsky Ballet, formerly known as the Kirov Ballet

**Royal Marines, US Marine Corps, US marines**

**Marks & Spencer**

at first mention, then M&S

**marquis**

not marquess, except where it is the correct formal title, eg Marquess of Blandford

**Marrakech****Mars bar****Marseille**

not Marseilles

**marshal**

(military rank) not marshall, a very frequent error; a reader sent in this mnemonic: “Air Chief Marshal Marshall presided at the court martial of the martial arts instructor”

**Marshall plan**

US aid to help rebuild Europe after the second world war

**marshmallow**

not marshmellow, munchmallow, munchmellow

**Martí, José**

(1853-95) writer and leader of Cuba’s war of independence against Spain

**martial**

arts, law

**martini**

cocktail made with gin or vodka and vermouth; note that Martini & Rossi makes Martini, a brand of vermouth - so you might make a martini with Martini

**Marxism, Marxist****Mary Celeste**

not Marie Celeste

**Mas, Artur**

(not Arturo) former president of Catalonia

**mass**

lc; mass is celebrated or said, not read or given

**massacre**

the savage killing of large numbers of people, not Macclesfield Town beating Stockport County 6-0 in the big Cheshire derby

**massive**

massively overused

## Mastercard

### masterful or masterly?

the former means wilful or domineering; the latter means highly competent: “He gave a masterly demonstration of good grammar”

### master’s

as in “I did my master’s at UCL”

### mat

floor covering; **matt** non-shiny, as in matt finish; **matte** used to combine images in films

### match-fixing

### matchplay

(golf) but World Match Play Championship

### mate

no accent, for the South American drink

### Mathews, Meg

former model and ex-wife of Noel Gallagher; they have a daughter, Anais

### matinee

no accent

### matins

### maxidress

### may or might?

The subtle distinctions between these (and between other so-called modal verbs) are gradually disappearing, but they still matter to many of our readers and can be useful.

**may** implies that the possibility remains open: “The Mies van der Rohe tower may have changed the face of British architecture for ever” (it has been built); **might** suggests that the possibility remains open no longer: “The Mies tower might have changed the face of architecture for ever” (if only they had built it). Similarly, “they may have played tennis, or they may have gone boating” suggests I don’t know what they did; “they might have played tennis if the weather had been dry” means they didn’t, because it wasn’t.

Our headline “Capello has stayed aloof but personal touch may have kept Bridge onside” says the opposite of what is meant – it suggests that Capello’s personal touch means there is still a possibility of Bridge staying onside; it should have read “Capello has stayed aloof but personal touch might have kept Bridge onside” (but it didn’t).

**may** also has the meaning of “having permission”, so be careful: does “Megawatt Corp may bid for TransElectric Inc” mean that it is considering a bid, or that the competition authorities have allowed it to bid?

## **May Day**

1 May

## **May, Theresa**

with an H; **Mother Teresa** with no H

## **Maya**

not Mayan, to refer to the civilisation, people and most things related to them. Say the Maya civilisation and the Maya people. You can, however, refer to Mayan languages

## **mayday**

distress signal (from the French “m’aidez!”)

## **mayor of London**

or anywhere else: lowercase

## **Mazar-i-Sharif**

not Mazar-e-Sharif

## **MB**

megabytes (storage capacity)

## **Mbps**

megabits per second (communication speed); take care to get such terms right: we referred to a “2mbps internet connection” which, at two millibits a second, is about the speed of smoke signals

## **McAlpine**

note the “Sir” in the building and civil engineering company **Sir Robert McAlpine** (named after the baronet who founded it); not to be confused with **Alfred McAlpine** construction and support services

## **MCC, the**

founded in 1787 as Marylebone Cricket Club

## **McDonald’s**

hamburgers; the possessive is the same word, eg “McDonald’s new vegan-friendly image”

## **McJob**

defined by the OED as “an unstimulating, low-paid job with few prospects, esp one created by the expansion of the service sector”

## **McLuhan, Marshall**

(1911-80) Canadian author who coined the phrase “the medium is the message”



**mean or median?**

To calculate the mean, commonly known as the average, you add up everyone's wages (for example) and divide them by the number of wage earners. The median is the wage earned by the middle person when everyone's wages are lined up from smallest to largest. The median is often a more useful guide than the mean, which can be distorted by figures at one extreme or the other

**meanwhile**

usually means "here's a slight change of subject"

**measurements**

[see metric system](#)

**Meat Loaf**

sings

**meatloaf**

doesn't sing.

To quote "the Loaf" himself:

"When I see my name spelt with one word, I want to slap and choke people. If you do that, you got to be a moron. It's on every poster, every album and every ticket as two words. If you spell it as one, you're an idiot. Bottom line"

**Mecca**

holy city in Saudi Arabia; **mecca** as in "Ashton-under-Lyne is a mecca for tripe-eaters"

**medal**

a noun not a verb. She won a medal in Sydney, she did not medal in Sydney

**medals**

British Empire Medal, George Cross, Medal of Honor, Victoria Cross, Congressional Gold Medal etc; but Fields medal (official name: International Medal for Outstanding Discoveries in Mathematics)

**Médecins Sans Frontières**

international (not French) medical aid charity; no need to translate it

**Medellín**

Colombia's second-largest city

**media**

The media, including social media, are plural, so television might be your favourite medium of all the media. A convention of spiritualists, however, would be attended by mediums

**Medicaid, Medicare**

are both US federal health insurance programmes, but Medicare primarily covers

people over 65 and has no financial requirements for eligibility; Medicaid is targeted at those on low incomes

**medieval**

not mediaeval. While the term can be used to refer broadly to old-fashioned or primitive behaviour that might have been found in the middle ages, if using the term to refer specifically to that time period please ensure it falls roughly between 500 and 1455 AD.

**Medvedev, Dmitry**

(not Dmitri) became president of Russia in 2008, then swapped jobs with Vladimir Putin in 2012 to become prime minister

**meet, met**

You might meet with triumph and disaster, or meet with a bad end, but “meet” should normally suffice if you are just going to meet someone

**mega**

fine for megabits, megabytes and megawatts, not as an adjective meaning big

**Mekelle**

capital of Tigray province in Ethiopia

**Meloni, Giorgia****Melinda French Gates**

French Gates at subsequent mentions

**memento**

plural mementoes

**memorandum**

plural memorandums, not memoranda

**menage**

no accent

**menopause**

the definite article is not needed. Say someone is going through menopause, not going through the menopause. Maintain the distinction between perimenopause and menopause, where possible. Perimenopause is when you have symptoms of menopause but your periods have not stopped. It ends and you reach menopause when you have not had a period for 12 months

**Menorca**

not Minorca

**menswear****mental handicap, mentally handicapped, mentally retarded**

do not use: say a person with learning disabilities

## **mental health**

Take care using language about mental health issues. In addition to such clearly offensive and unacceptable expressions as loony, maniac, nutter, psycho and schizo, terms to avoid – because they stereotype and stigmatise – include victim of, suffering from, and afflicted by; “a person with” is clear, accurate and preferable to “a person suffering from”.

Terms such as schizophrenic and psychotic should be used only in a medical context: for example never use schizophrenic to mean “in two minds”. Also, they should only be used as adjectives, not nouns.

Avoid writing “the mentally ill” – say mentally ill people, mental health patients or people with mental health problems

If relevant, include helpline information at the end of articles or other content:

*In the UK, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org). You can contact the mental health charity Mind by calling 0300 123 3393 or visiting [mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)*

## **merchant navy**

## **meretricious or meritorious?**

Derived from the Latin for prostitute, meretricious means flashy but without substance; meritorious means worthy of merit

## **Meridian**

ITV region; **Meridien** hotels

## **Mesolithic**

## **Messiaen, Olivier**

(1908-92) French composer

## **metalwork**

## **metaphor**

traditionally defined as the application to one thing of a name belonging to another, eg bowling blitz, economic meltdown, “every language is a temple in which the soul of those who speak it is enshrined” (Oliver Wendell Holmes)

## **metaverse**

## **meteor**

a piece of space rock, usually from a comet or asteroid, that enters the Earth’s atmosphere; if it hits the ground before it burns up, it is a meteorite

## **method acting**

techniques associated with the Russian Constantin Stanislavski (1865-1938) and the American Lee Strasberg (1901-82)

## Met Office

### #MeToo

#### metres

should be written out in full, to avoid confusion with million (an obvious exception would be athletics, eg she won the 400m)

#### metric system

We use the metric system for weights and measures; exceptions are the mile and the pint. As understanding of the two systems is a matter of generations, conversions (in brackets) to imperial units should be provided wherever this seems useful, though usually one conversion - the first - will suffice. Imperial units in quoted matter should be retained, and converted to metric [in square brackets] if it doesn't ruin the flow of the quote.

It is not necessary to convert moderate distances between metres and yards, which are close enough for rough and ready purposes (though it is preferable to use metres), or small domestic quantities: 2 litres of wine, a kilogram of sugar, a couple of pounds of apples, a few inches of string.

Small units should be converted when precision is required: 44mm (1.7in) of rain fell in two hours. But be sensible: don't convert a metric estimate into a precise imperial figure (round the conversion up or down). Tons and tonnes are close enough for most purposes to do without conversion; use tonnes (except in shipping tonnage).

Body weights and heights should always be converted in brackets: metres to feet and inches, kilograms to stones/pounds. Geographical heights and depths, of people, buildings, monuments, etc, should be converted, metres to feet. In square measurement, land is given in sq metres, hectares and sq km, with sq yards, acres or sq miles in brackets where there is space to provide a conversion. The floor areas of buildings are conventionally expressed in sq metres (or sq ft). Take great care in conversions of square and cubic measures: 2 metres is about 6.5ft, but 2 sq metres is about 21.5 sq ft

How to write units for precise measurements (examples):

10mm

10cm

10 metres (but, eg 400m in athletics)

10 sq metres

10km

10kg

10 tonnes

10 litres

10in

10ft

10 sq ft

10 yards

10 miles

10lbs

10 pints

Please note that although our style for numbers is that one to nine should usually be written out as words, we usually use figures when they come alongside a unit of measurement, for example 5 miles, 3kg.

## **Métro**

in Paris; **Metro** is its Tyne and Wear equivalent

## **Metropolitan police**

the Met at second mention; commissioner of the Metropolitan police, Met commissioner is acceptable; but note Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA).

The Metropolitan police are plural, like other forces, but the Met is singular, so: the Metropolitan police are investigating, but the Met is investigating, etc

## **Mexican wave**

## **meze**

not mezze

## **Miami Beach**

US city

## **miaow**

noise made by cats

## **mic**

abbreviation for microphone, but you are **miked up**

## **microblogging**

is what people do on X

## **microbrewery, micropub**

“A micropub is a small freehouse which listens to its customers, mainly serves cask ales, promotes conversation, shuns all forms of electronic entertainment and dabbles in traditional pub snacks,” according to the Micropub Association

## **mid-60s, mid-90s, etc**

## **mid-Atlantic**

but **transatlantic**

## **midday**

## **middle ages**

## **middle America, middle England**

**Middle-earth**

(Tolkien) not Middle Earth

**Middle East**

never Mid, even in headlines

**Middlesbrough, Teesside**

not Middlesborough, Teeside

**midget**

considered by some to be offensive, certainly more so than dwarf; best to ask the people you are writing about how they prefer to describe themselves

**Midlands**

**East Midlands, West Midlands**

**midnight**

not 12 midnight, 12am or 12pm. Midnight on Sunday means the end of Sunday, not the beginning

**Midsummer Day**

24 June

**midterm, midweek, midwest**

no hyphens

**migration, refugees and asylum seekers**

**Migrant** should be a neutral term, but is widely used in a pejorative way that dehumanises people and presents them as a threat. It is not banned, but we should use only when necessary; the alternatives are often preferable.

**Migration crisis** is a better term than “migrant crisis” because it suggests that the crisis is a complex global issue, not something that can be blamed on those doing the migrating. An alternative is **refugee crisis**.

Where possible, we should use the word **people** rather than “migrants”. It’s an accurate description, rather than a dehumanising label. Say “100 people drowned” or “2,000 people were rescued”, rather than “100 migrants” or “2,000 migrants”. Of course we need to give as much information as possible about these people - where they come from, where they are trying to get to, and why.

The 1951 refugee convention’s definition of a refugee is a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country”. However, it’s neither possible nor desirable to establish that every single person we are calling a refugee meets such criteria. If people are fleeing civil war or violence in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria, Yemen or Sudan, they are refugees.

**Asylum seekers** are people who have left their country of origin and are seeking asylum in another country but whose applications have not concluded. The term is not interchangeable with “refugees” and is best reserved for people we know are seeking asylum in a particular country. Someone who is refused asylum should be referred to as a refused asylum seeker, not a “failed asylum seeker”.

**Smuggling or trafficking?** Generally speaking, people pay smugglers willingly to take them across borders, but are coerced and exploited by traffickers. So most people being driven across Europe at the moment, however shocking their plight, are being smuggled, not trafficked. See entry on “smuggling or trafficking?”

An “**economic migrant**” is how rightwing newspapers and politicians describe someone who immigrates to the UK to do what emigrants from the UK do when they migrate to other countries.

**Terms to avoid:** “genuine refugees”, “illegal asylum seeker”, “bogus asylum seeker”, “failed asylum seeker”.

### **Migration Watch UK**

also sometimes styling itself Migrationwatch (randomly using both spellings in the same document); calls itself “an independent think tank” but is a rightwing anti-immigration pressure group and should be described as such

### **MiG-21**

Soviet Union-built fighter plane, still in use in some countries

### **Milad al-Nabi**

Islamic festival celebrating the birth of the prophet; many Muslims disapprove of celebrating this event

### **mileage**

### **Militant tendency**

### **military ranks**

Use as abbreviated below on first mention, then just surname, eg Col Tommy Smith, thereafter Smith.

Army: Gen, Lt Gen, Maj Gen, Brig, Col, Lt Col, Maj, Capt, Lt, 2Lt, OCdt, WOI, WOII, SSgt, CSgt, Sgt, CoH, L/CoH, Cpl, Bdr, L/Cpl, L/Bdr, Pte, Rfn

Navy: Adm, V Adm, R Adm, Capt, Cdr, Lt Cdr, Lt, SLt, Mid, OCdt, WOI, WOII, CPO, PO, LH, AB, Mne

RAF: Gp Capt, Wg Cmdr, Sqn Ldr, Flt Lt, Fg Off, Plt Off, MAcr, WO, Ft Sgt, Ch Tech, Sgt, Cpl, Jr Tech, L/Cpl, SAC, LAC, AC

Do not abbreviate: Field Marshal, Admiral of the Fleet, Commodore, Marshal of the RAF, Air Chief Marshal, Air Marshal, Air Vice-Marshal, Air Commodore

Where a rank is part of a nickname, honorary or refers to a fictional character, there is no need to abbreviate: eg Captain Sir Tom Moore, Colonel Sanders, Major Major

### **militate or mitigate?**

To militate against something is to influence it (his record militated against his early release); to mitigate means to lessen an offence (in mitigation, her counsel argued that she came from a broken home)

### **millefeuille**

### **millenary**

but **millennium**, plural millennia

### **millennials**

This term is generally applied to people born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s. They can also be referred to as generation Y.

Generation Z applies to people born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s.

Generation X applies to people born between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s.

### **millennium development goals**

abbreviation MDGs

### **Millennium Dome**

(now historical) at first mention, then just the dome; reopened in 2007 as the O2

### **million**

in copy use m for sums of money, units or inanimate objects: £10m, 45m tonnes of coal, 30m doses of vaccine; but million for people or animals: 1 million people, 23 million rabbits, etc; use m in headlines

### **millisieverts**

measure of radiation dose; abbreviation **mSv**

### **milquetoast**

not milktoast. Named after Caspar Milquetoast, a character in the 1920s US cartoon strip The Timid Soul. Modern meaning: wuss

### **mimic, mimicked, mimicking**

### **min**

contraction of minute/minutes

### **mindset**

### **minibus, minicab, miniskirt, minivan**

### **MiniDisc**

TM

### **ministers**

are all lc: prime minister, etc



**Minnelli, Liza**

“Liza with a Zee, not Lisa with an Ess”, and Minnelli with two Ns; her father was the film director Vincente Minnelli (1903-86)

**minority ethnic**

(adjective) rather than ethnic minority

**minuscule**

not miniscule

**misanthropist**

hates everyone; **misogynist** hates women

**mis-hit, mis-sell**

but **misspeak, misspell, misspent**

**mishmash****Mississippi Delta**

cap up the D in the name of this US region known for its culture and music, as it is not simply the delta of the Mississippi River. In subsequent mentions you can call it the Delta. Not to be confused with the Mississippi River delta further south, which like other conventional deltas, such as the Nile delta, takes a lowercase d

**mistakable, unmistakable****mistress**

best reserved for historical contexts; girlfriend or lover is less judgmental and sexist

**misuse, misused****MLA**

member of the Northern Ireland assembly (it stands for member of the legislative assembly)

**MLitt**

master of letters, not master of literature

**Mobo awards**

it stands for Music of Black Origin

**Moby-Dick**

The title of Herman Melville’s classic is hyphenated, although the name of the whale is Moby Dick

**Modern**

in the sense of Modern British, to distinguish it from modern art

**Moët & Chandon**

champagne

**molotov cocktail****mom or mum?**

It's "mom" in the US, "mum" in the UK. In a father's account about his son who went on a shooting rampage in a California high school, we referred to the boy's "mum", which as a reader pointed out was "noticeably at odds with the American tone of his remarks"

**moment magnitude scale**

measures earthquakes; superseded the Richter scale in 1979

**Mönchengladbach****money-grubbing**

not money-grabbing

**money laundering**

noun; **money-laundering** adjective

**moneyed**

eg moneyed classes; **moneys** not monies

**Mongol**

one of the peoples of Mongolia

**mongooses**

(not mongeese) plural of mongoose

**moniker**

not monicker

**Monk, Thelonious**

(1917-82) American jazz pianist and composer, generally but erroneously referred to in the Guardian and elsewhere as "Thelonius"; a pleasing mnemonic is that he made a melodious thunk

**monkeypox**

now known as mpox (see entry on mpox below)

**Montenegro**

inhabited by Montenegrins

**Mooc**

massive open online course

**moon**

lc for the Earth's moon

**moon walk**

what Neil Armstrong did; **moonwalk** what Michael Jackson did

**Moors murders**

committed in the 1960s by Ian Brady and Myra Hindley

**moot**

a moot point, in British English, is debatable, open to discussion; in American English, it is irrelevant

**moped**

technically this term refers to a low-powered motor scooter of less than 50cc, but it is sometimes acceptable to use it in headlines as shorthand for motor scooters generally

**“morality police”**

enforcers working for repressive regimes in countries such as Iran and Afghanistan. Please use quote marks

**morbidity**

can mean the state of being morbid (taking an unusual interest in death or unpleasant events); but morbidity, also known as the morbidity rate, also means the relative incidence of a disease in a specific locality

***More details soon ...***

Please use this wording at the bottom of a web article if you wish to indicate it is a breaking news story that will be updated and extended shortly

**more than**

generally preferable to over: there were more than 20,000 people at the game, it will cost more than £100 to get it fixed; but she is over 18

**More Than**

not MORE THAN, which is how the insurance company styles itself

**Morissette, Alanis****Mormons**

or Latter-day Saints, are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which should be used once (unabbreviated) and thereafter can be referred to as “the church” or “the Mormon church”

**morning-after pill****morris dancing**

often seen with a capital M, for no apparent reason

**Morrisons**

for the supermarkets (not Morrison or Morrison’s)

**morse code****mortgage borrower, lender**

the person borrowing the money is the mortgagor, the lender is both the mortgagee

and the mortgage holder; to avoid confusion, call the mortgagor the mortgage borrower and the mortgagee the mortgage lender

**mortise lock**

not mortice

**Mosaddegh, Mohammad**

former prime minister of Iran, overthrown in a coup in 1953

**mosquito**

plural mosquitoes

**Mosquito**

“youth dispersal device” that emits a piercing noise inaudible to over-25s

**Mossad, the**

Israeli secret service, the equivalent of MI6 or the CIA. The Hebrew word mossad simply means institute, so the definite article in “the Mossad” is designed to distinguish it from other more mundane institutes

**MOT**

test cars must undergo when they are three years old or more; not MoT, although this was the abbreviation for the former Ministry of Transport

**mother of parliaments**

the great 19th-century Liberal politician and Manchester Guardian reader John Bright described England, the country (not Westminster, the institution), as the mother of parliaments

**mother of three**

etc, not mother-of-three; but do not use unless relevant to the story

**Mother's Day**

or Mothering Sunday

**Mötley Crüe, Motörhead**

include “metal umlauts”

**motorbike, motorcar, motorcycle****motor neurone disease**

may be abbreviated to MND after first mention

**motorways**

junction 4 of the M4, etc

**mottoes****moustache**

not mustache

**movable****mph****MP, MPs**

if spelling out, lowercase: member of parliament

**MP3, MP3 player**

not mp3

**mpox**

the disease formerly known as monkeypox but renamed by the World Health Organization to avoid stigma. You can mention that it was formerly known as monkeypox where this is helpful to readers

**Mr, Ms, Mrs, Miss**

In leading articles: use the appropriate honorific after first mention (unless you are writing about an artist, author, journalist, musician, sportsman or woman, criminal or dead person, who take surname only); use Ms for women subsequently unless they have expressed a preference for Miss or Mrs.

Everywhere apart from leading articles: generally use first name and surname on first mention, and thereafter just surname. You can use an honorific to identify different members of the same family

[See honorifics](#)

**MS**

member of the Senedd Cymru, or Welsh parliament. Formerly called a National Assembly for Wales member, or AM

**MSP**

member of the Scottish parliament

**Muhammad**

Muslims consider Muhammad to be the last of God's prophets, who delivered God's final message. They recognise Moses and Jesus as prophets also.

The above transliteration is our style for the prophet's name and for most Muhammads living in Arab countries, though where someone's preferred spelling is known we respect it, eg Mohamed Al Fayed, Mohamed ElBaradei.

**Muhammad Ali**

born Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr in 1942

**mujahideen**

collective noun for people fighting a jihad; the singular is **mujahid**

**mukhabarat**

secret police in the Arab world (it means "informers")

**multicultural, multimedia, multimillion, multinational, multiparty**  
but **multi-ethnic**

### **Mum or mum?**

capital M if it's just Mum, eg "Mum was a lovely person"; otherwise lowercase, eg "my mum was a lovely person", "how is your mum?", "she's a hard-working mum", etc

### **Mumbai**

formerly Bombay, but no need to say so

### **Murphy's law**

"If there are two or more ways to do something, and one of those ways can result in a catastrophe, then someone will do it"; also known as sod's law.

Not to be confused with **Muphry's law** - "the editorial application of the better-known Murphy's law" - which states: "If you write anything criticising editing or proofreading, there will be a fault of some kind in what you have written"

### **museums**

initial caps, eg British Museum, Natural History Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A on second reference), Metropolitan Museum of Art, etc

### **Muslim**

not Moslem

### **mutual**

Ignore pedants who say mutual should only mean reciprocated - mutual respect, mutual admiration society, mutual destruction - rather than shared. By this logic, Dickens would have had to change the title of *Our Mutual Friend* to *Our Common Friend*

### **muzak**

no need for a capital M

### **MW**

megawatts

### **mW**

milliwatts

### **Myanmar**

not Burma, but its people and language are Burmese. The capital is Naypyidaw, not Yangon.

### **myriad**

A large, unspecified number, derived from the ancient Greek for ten thousand. The OED lists various ways it is used: as a singular noun (there is *a myriad* of people outside), a plural noun (there are *myriads* of people outside), or an adjective (there are *myriad* people outside)

**Myspace**  
no longer MySpace

**myxomatosis**

**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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