

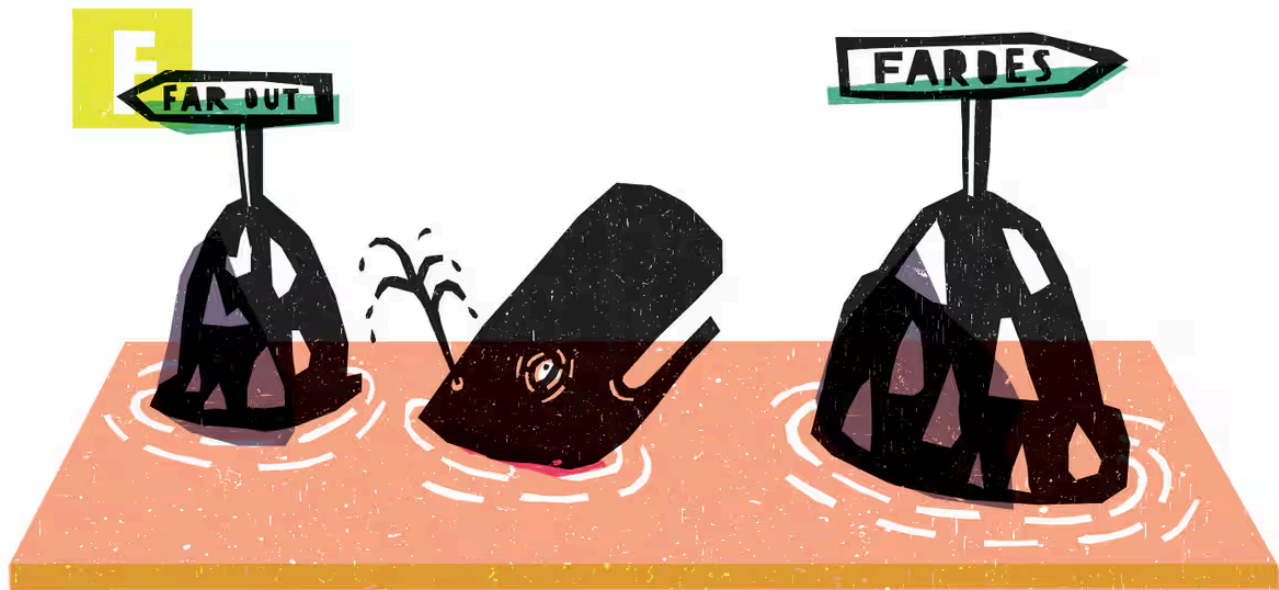
The Guardian and Observer style guide

Guardian and Observer style guide: F

‘There’s nothing to it, really ... it’s just a matter of checking the facts and the spelling, crossing out the first sentence, and removing any attempts at jokes.’ **Michael Frayn**

Fri 30 Apr 2021 14.38 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



Faroe Isles

📷 Illustration: Jakob Hinrichs

Fàbregas, Cesc

a Catalan, not Spanish, name; note the accent

facade

no cedilla

Facebook

no need to call it “the social networking site” every time - we know what it is

facelift

factchecker, factchecking

factoid

not a trivial fact, but a mistaken assumption repeated so often that it is believed to be true (a word coined by Norman Mailer, who defined it as “something that everyone knows is true, except it ain’t!”)

T

FA Cup

the Cup (the cap C is hallowed by convention); all other cups lc at second mention

fahrenheit

use in brackets, without degree symbol, after celsius figure, eg 37C (98.6F); to convert, multiply the celsius temperature by 1.8, then add 32; alternatively, double the celsius figure, subtract one-tenth of that figure, and add 32; or you could save yourself the bother by using a conversion website

Fáilte Ireland

Ireland's tourism authority

Fairtrade

The Fairtrade mark is a certification system run by the Fairtrade Foundation; products are entitled to be called Fairtrade (cap F) if they meet the following criteria: a price that covers producers' costs, a premium for producers to invest in their communities, and long-term and more direct trading relations; fair trade refers to the movement as a whole, eg only fair trade will enable farmers in developing countries to become self-sufficient

fairytale

noun and adjective; but fairy story

faith schools

may be called religious schools without fear of divine retribution

“Fake Sheikh”**falafel****fallopian tubes****fallout****Falluja****false-flag operation****families**

word favoured by politicians to make them sound caring and concerned (“hard-working families”), which doesn't mean we have to do so, as in this 2010 Guardian splash headline: “Families face nuclear tax on power bills”.

As a reader pointed out: “So don't older people, single people, etc, face the same tax? ... the implicit attitude [is] that those not part of families are of secondary significance.” Quite

family-size, fun-size

not family-sized, fun-sized

famous, famously

If something's famous, you don't need to tell people; if you need to tell people something's famous, it isn't.

"Famously" is typically used to mean one of two things:

I know everyone knows this, but I can't think of an original way to start so I am going to say it anyway.

Harold Macmillan, asked what the biggest challenge is for any leader, famously replied: "Events, my dear boy, events."

You don't know this? I do. That shows I am clever and know lots of stuff you don't.

Reich famously declined to continue in academia, preferring to support himself via a series of blue-collar jobs.

From a reader: "Please can you rein in the many writers who insist on dropping the word famously into their copy ... as in famously overused, famously redundant or famously not really famous at all."

A preferable alternative to "famously" is "memorably", which at least suggests that you remember it, rather than assuming that everyone does or should

fanbase, fanbelt, fanclub, fanmail**Faragists**

if you describe Ukip supporters in this way (not Farageists, even though they are followers of Nigel Farage)

far away

adverb; **faraway** adjective: she moved to a faraway place, and now lives far away

Farc, the

it stands for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia; note the definite article

far east

but **east Asia** or **south-east Asia** is preferable

farm worker

not farm labourer

Faroe Islands

or just **Faroes**

farrago

a hotchpotch or jumbled mixture; not synonymous with fiasco (a humiliating failure)

Farsi

language spoken by the majority of Iranians (not Persian)

farther or further?

farther and farthest are the comparative and superlative of far as in distance (eg farther away, the farthest point north): “a few miles farther, and we will reach the farthest point”.

further and furthest are the comparative and superlative of far as in degree (eg further discussion, the candidate furthest to the left)

fascism, fascist

not facism, facist, careless but common errors

fashion

collections should be spelled out with slashes (spring/summer 2014 or autumn/winter 2013) everywhere except captions and web furniture, where SS14 and AW13 are acceptable if necessary.

companies are singular: Temperley has presented full-length silk gowns; Dolce & Gabbana is hiring a new chief financial officer, etc.

fashion weeks like this: London fashion week, Milan fashion week, etc

fast track

noun; **fast-track** verb

fatal

deadly; **fateful** momentous

“The fateful game arrived. It was to prove fatal for Wednesday’s hopes of promotion”

fatality

a fatality is worse than death, and like most euphemisms best avoided

fat cats

should be used sparingly, even if writing about overweight moggies

father of two, mother of two

etc (no hyphens); only describe people in this way if relevant

Father’s Day**fatwa**

an edict, not necessarily a death sentence

fayre

a fete worse than death

fazed

overwhelmed; **phased** stage

“Everything seemed to faze him, but it was just a phase”

FBI

Federal Bureau of Investigation; no need to spell out

FDA

what the former First Division Association now calls itself; you will need to say it is the senior civil servants' union or no one will know who you are talking about; note that FDA also stands for the US food and drug administration

fedayeen

Arab fighters (the word means those who risk their lives for a cause); can be capped up when referring to a specific force, eg the Saddam Fedayeen militia, which fought coalition forces in the 2003 Iraq war

Federal Reserve

at first reference, **the Fed** thereafter

fed up with

not fed up of

feelgood factor**fellow**

lc, eg a fellow of All Souls, fellow artist, fellow members, etc (and do not hyphenate)

female

not “woman” or “women” in such phrases as female home secretary, female voters

female genital mutilation

not “female circumcision”

ferment or foment?

You ferment alcohol, but foment unrest

Fernández de Kirchner, Cristina

former president of Argentina, previously first lady and later vice-president. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner on first mention, Fernández de Kirchner thereafter. Her husband and predecessor as president, Néstor Kirchner, died in 2010

ferris wheel

no need for a cap F, although the first was built by George Washington Gale Ferris Jr for the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893

festivals

lc, whether artistic or sporting: Cannes film festival, Cheltenham festival, Edinburgh festival fringe, London jazz festival, etc

fete

no accent

fetid

not foetid

fewer or less?

fewer means smaller in number, eg fewer coins; less means smaller in quantity, eg less money

Ffestiniog**fiance**

male, **fiancee** female; but note divorcee is both male and female

Fianna Fáil

Irish political party

fiasco

like debacle and farce, overused in news stories: who says it's a fiasco?

fibula

lower leg bone, plural fibulas; also Latin for brooch or clasp, plural fibulae

field marshal

but with initial capitals when used as a title, for example Field Marshal John Smith

Fifth Republic**50/50****figures**

Spell out from one to nine; numerals from 10 to 999,999; thereafter 1m, 3.2bn (except for people and animals, eg 2 billion viewers, 8 million cattle); spell out ordinals from first to ninth, thereafter 10th, 31st, etc

filesharing**fillip**

not filip

filmgoer, film-maker, film star**Filofax**

TM; use personal organiser unless you are sure

finalise, finalised

avoid; use **complete, completed** or **finish, finished**

“final solution”**Financial Conduct Authority**

FCA on second mention

financial years

2011-12, etc

Fine Gael

Irish political party

fine-tooth comb**Finnegans Wake****fire-and-rehire**

when used as a noun or adjective, as in “he is opposed to fire-and-rehire” or “a fire-and-rehire scheme”. No need for the hyphens if they are being used as verbs as in: “There is a dispute over whether companies should be allowed to fire and rehire workers.”

fire brigade, fire service

lc, eg Cheshire fire brigade

firebomb**firefight**

do not use to describe a military skirmish

firefighter

not fireman

firewall**firing line**

the people who do the firing; if they are aiming at you, you are **in the line of fire** not in the firing line

firm

strictly a partnership without limited liability, such as solicitors or accountants, but may be used in place of company in headlines

first, second, third

rather than firstly, secondly, thirdly, etc; spell out up to ninth, then 10th, 21st, millionth

first aid**first floor, second floor**

In the UK, the first floor you come to when you go upstairs is the first floor (the clue is in the name); the second floor is the one above that

first-hand**first home buyers**

but homebuyers

first lady/first gentleman

only used to refer to the spouses of heads of state. In monarchies such as the UK, the

head of state is the queen or king, so the spouse of the prime minister is not the first gentleman/lady. If a writer wishes to use the term as shorthand for the spouse of a prime minister, quote marks can be used to indicate it is not an official title, eg Carrie Johnson becomes the UK's "first lady".

first minister

(Scottish parliament, Welsh assembly, Northern Ireland assembly)

first name, forename, given name

not Christian name.

Use one on first mention, but not subsequently, except for people under 18.

Avoid just initials, unless that is how a person is known - TS Eliot, DBC Pierre, etc.

In stories about more than one member of a family, for example where two brothers appear in a court case, first names can be used to distinguish between them.

Occasionally, using first names in features or interviews will strike the most appropriate tone

first world war, second world war

but **world war three**

fish populations

preferable to fish stocks

fisher/fishers

rather than fisherman/fishermen or fisherwoman/fisherwomen. But fisherman's jumper

fission or fusion?

In nuclear fission, the nucleus of an atom splits to produce two smaller elements often releasing free subatomic particles and energy.

In nuclear fusion, two or more atomic nuclei come together and combine. In the process some of their mass is converted into large amounts of energy. Fusion is the reaction that powers the sun

fit

avoid using this term to describe a seizure

fit for purpose

cliche that quickly proved itself unfit for the purpose of good writing

fit the bill

not fill the bill

fixed-penalty notice

fjord

rather than fiord. A sea inlet surrounded by high cliffs, particularly in Norway

FKA twigs

Abbreviate to “twigs” on second mention

flagship

a flagship is a ship, a “flagship store” would be a store where one bought flagships, and a “flagship local authority” is a cliché

flak

not flack

flammable

rather than inflammable (although, curiously, they mean the same thing); the negative is non-flammable

flash memory

computer memory that can be erased and reprogrammed, used for example in mobile phones, digital cameras and MP3 players

flashing

best avoided as a description of a sexual offence. It sounds as if you are making light of the incident. It is better to call it indecent exposure or say someone exposed themselves

flashmob**flatmate, flatshare****Flat racing****“flatscreen TV”**

All TVs nowadays are flatscreen, so the adjective is unnecessary

flaunt or flout?

to flaunt is to make a display of something, as in flaunting wealth; to flout is to show disregard for something, as in flouting the seatbelt law.

Think of Max Bialystock in *The Producers* admiring a white Rolls-Royce in the street: “That’s it, baby, when you’ve got it, flaunt it, flaunt it!” Then think of Bialystock and Bloom, his partner, flouting the law - as well as the principles of good taste - by staging *Springtime for Hitler*

fledgling

not fledgeling

flexitime**flip-flops**

flood water, flood waters

but rainwater, wastewater; also, **flood plain, flood plains**

floor

Normally indoors, apart from in expressions such as forest floor and ocean floor. If, say, a policeman knocks you over, you fall on to the ground, not the floor, although you might say you have been floored.

In the UK, the ground floor is at street level and the first floor is one level up

Florence + the Machine

not “and” or “&”

flotation

whether in a tank, or on the stock market

flotsam and jetsam

The former is cargo or wreckage found floating in the sea; the latter (originally a variant of jettison) is stuff that has been thrown overboard. Used together to mean odds and ends

flounder or founder?

to flounder is to perform a task badly, like someone stuck in mud; to founder is to fail: a business might be foundering because its bosses are floundering

flu**fluky**

not flukey

flyer

not flier

flying squad**flypast**

noun

fo’c’sle

abbreviation of forecastle, and a surviving entry from the 1928 “Style-book of the Manchester Guardian”

focus, focused, focusing**foetus**

not fetus

fogey, fogeys

not foggy or fogies

Fogg, Phileas

not Phineas

folklore, but folk song**following**

after is preferable, eg Wednesday went to pieces after their latest relegation

follow-up

noun; **follow up** verb

font

receptacle for baptism, digital file (originally a foundry) that contains a typeface;

fount of all knowledge and wisdom

food bank**foodie****foolproof****foot-and-mouth disease****footie**

abbreviation for football, but note that in Australia (particularly Victoria), footy is what they call Australian rules football

for all its worth

but **for what it's worth**

The former means for all (of) its worth (of is implied), as in for all (of) its value; the latter is a contraction of for all it is worth

forbear

refrain; **forebear** ancestor: "I forbear from blaming my forebears for my family's lack of ambition"

foreign accents

Use accents on French, German, Portuguese, Spanish and Irish Gaelic words - and, if at all possible, on people's names in any language, eg Sven-Göran Eriksson (Swedish), Béla Bartók (Hungarian). This may be tricky in the case of some languages but we have had complaints from readers that it is disrespectful to foreign readers to, in effect, misspell their names

foreign names

The French (or French origin) de or le and the Dutch van are normally lowercase when the name is full out: eg Charles de Gaulle, Graeme le Saux, Giovanni van Bronckhorst; but De Gaulle, Le Saux, Van Bronckhorst when written without forenames. A notable exception in France is the National Rally leader, Marine Le Pen (uppercase L).

In Belgium, on the other hand, the Van is often uppercase even when the name is full out, as, for example, in the case of the former president of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy.

The Italian De or Di is normally uppercase, eg Antonio Di Natale.

As ever, we seek to follow the person in question's own preference in this regard, when we are aware of it

Foreign Office

abbreviated to FCDO not FO, as its official name is Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

foreign placenames

Style for foreign placenames evolves with common usage. Leghorn has become Livorno, and maybe one day München will supplant Munich, but not yet. Remember that many names have become part of the English language: Geneva is the English name for the city that Switzerland's French speakers refer to as Genève and its German speakers call Genf.

Accordingly, we opt for locally used names, with these main exceptions (the list is not exhaustive, apply common sense): Archangel, Basel, Berne, Brittany, Catalonia, Cologne, Dunkirk, Florence, Fribourg, Genoa, Gothenburg, Hanover, Lombardy, Milan, Munich, Naples, Normandy, Nuremberg, Padua, Piedmont, Rome, Sardinia, Seville, Sicily, Syracuse, Turin, Tuscany, Venice, Zurich.

The late Muammar Gaddafi renamed Libya "The Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriyya", but it never really caught on.

foreign political parties

In general, we use the English translation of a political party if (a) that is how it is most commonly known in the English-speaking world, or (b) the party's name in its own language is not easy for readers to translate themselves. Otherwise, we use the name of the party in its own language. All initialisms are in the party's own language.

Germany

Christian Democratic Union, or Christian Democrats (CDU); (Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands, in German)

Social Democratic party, or Social Democrats (SPD); (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, in German)

Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)

Stand up (Aufstehen)

France

Renaissance (formerly La République En Marche)

the National Rally (RN) (Rassemblement National, in French; formerly Front National)

France Unbowed (La France Insoumise, in French)

Les Républicains

Reconquête

the Nupes (not a party, but a grouping of parties; translate as the New Popular Ecological and Social Union)

Spain

Citizens party (Ciudadanos, in Spanish)

People's party (Partido Popular, in Spanish, PP)

Podemos (We Can, in English)

Spanish Socialist Workers' party (PSOE)

Vox

Italy

Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia, in Italian)

Five Star Movement (M5S); (Movimento 5 Stelle, in Italian)

Lega (League, in English)

Greece

Syriza (Greek acronym for Coalition of the Radical Left)

New Democracy

Golden Dawn

To Potami (The River, in English)

Netherlands

Freedom party (PVV) (Partij voor de Vrijheid in Dutch, literally translated as Party for Freedom)

People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie in Dutch)

Hungary

Fidesz (its full name in Hungarian is Fidesz - Magyar Polgári Szövetség, which can be translated as Fidesz - Hungarian Civic Alliance; Fidesz is an acronym formed from the Hungarian for Alliance of Young Democrats)

Poland

Law and Justice (PiS) (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość in Polish)

Civic Platform (PO) (Platforma Obywatelska in Polish); part of the Civic Coalition

foreign secretary

foreign words and phrases

Italicise, with roman translation in brackets, if it really is a foreign word or phrase and not an anglicised one, in which case it is roman with no accents (exceptions: exposé, lamé, paté, résumé, roué). Remember Orwell: do not use a foreign word where a suitable English equivalent exists

forensic

is not a synonym for scientific. It derives from forum (Latin for court) and that is what it means: all evidence in court is forensic. A forensic scientist is one whose work is done for legal purposes (so a page 1 headline in which we referred to “new

forensic evidence” should have said “new scientific evidence”). Forensic medicine means medical jurisprudence

foresee, foreseeable

forests

take initial capital, eg Black Forest, Epping Forest, New Forest

forest fires

in the UK; elsewhere, use the term that is most common, eg bushfires in Australia, wildfires in the US. If you’re not sure about other countries, use wildfires as the default

forever

continually: he is forever changing his mind

for ever

for always: I will love you for ever

for free

avoid: we said police recruits might be forced to work “for free”; it would have been more elegant to say “for nothing”

forgo

go without; past tense forwent, past participle forgone

forego

go before; forego, past tense forewent, past participle foregone (as in “foregone conclusion”)

forklift truck

formally

in a formal manner; **formerly** in the past: “He formerly dressed formally, but now he’s a slob.”

Everyone knows this, but they are frequently mixed up

former Soviet republic

this term can be used for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, where relevant to the story, but not just as a convenient shorthand for describing independent countries that have histories and identities outside of the USSR

Formica

TM

formula

plural **formulas**, but **formulae** in a scientific context

Formula One

in copy; **F1** is fine in headlines and standfirsts

fortuitous

by chance, not by good fortune. The same football commentators who ruled that deflections must always be described as “wicked” also decided that fortunate or lucky does not sound as impressive as fortuitous.

If we use the word correctly, it is entirely fortuitous

fosbury flop**fossil gas**

a newer name for what the energy industry prefers to call natural gas

founder or flounder?

A business will typically founder (think of a sinking ship) because its managers flounder (think of a drowning man)

fount

(not font) of knowledge

Fourth of July**foxhunting****FPA**

Family Planning Association at first mention, thereafter the FPA, although the organisation has decided to style itself “fpa” (lc, no definite article) in its literature and on its website

FRA

fellow of the Royal Academy; **FRS** fellow of the Royal Society

fractions

two-thirds, five-eighths, etc, but two and a half, three and three-quarters, etc.

However, use 1/3, 3/4 in tables, recipes, etc.

Do not mix fractions and percentages in the same story

français, Français

le français is the French language, *le Français* the French man

Frankenstein

the monster’s creator, not the monster

Frankenstein food

has become a cliché to describe GM food; do not use

Frappuccino

TM

fraud squad**free climbing, free climber**

climbing using ropes and protection, but only to protect against injury in falls and not to assist progress - compare with free solo climbing

freedom of information

But Freedom of Information Act. FoI when abbreviated

freefall**Freemasonry, the Freemasons, Freemason, Mason**

for the semi-secret society and its members; but **masonic**, adjective referring to Freemasonry and its practices

freeport**free rein**

as in giving free rein to one's ideas - the expression comes from holding a horse's reins loosely

free schools

Even if you disapprove of them, there is no need to use quotation marks or call them "so-called free schools" in news stories.

Free schools are outside local authority oversight, not "local authority control". No schools are directly under local authority control, although local authorities oversee admissions and standards at some schools

free solo climbing, free solo climber

climbing without ropes or protection. Can be abbreviated to free soloing, free soloist - compare with free climbing

french fries, french horn, french kiss, french letter, french polish, french toast, french window, but French bulldog**French Guiana**

an overseas département of France on the Caribbean coast of South America; do not confuse with Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, or Guinea-Bissau, which are all in Africa, or Guyana, which is also in South America

French Revolution**fresco**

plural **frescoes**

freshers' week**Freud, Lucian**

British artist, not Lucien

Freudian slip**fricassee**

no accent

friendlily

curious adverb defined by the OED as “in a friendly manner, like a friend”

friendly fire

no quotation marks necessary

Friends of the Earth

abbreviated to FoE after first mention

Friends Provident

no apostrophe

Frisbee

TM; if in doubt, call it a flying disc

frontbench, frontline, frontman, frontrunner**fRoots**

folk and roots music magazine. Do not delete the f

frostbite, frostbitten**FTSE 100****fuchsia**

a word frequently misspelt (in the Guardian and elsewhere) as “fuschia”; it may help to note that it is named after a botanist called Fuchs

fuck

not “a good, honest old-fashioned Anglo-Saxon word” (as it is often described) because there is no such thing as an Anglo-Saxon word (they spoke Old English) and, more important, its first recorded use dates from 1278.

Use only when relevant, typically when quoting someone; can be spelt out in full, although “the F-word” offers an alternative

[See swearwords](#)

fuel

overused as a verb, although handy in headlines

Fulbright scholarship

not Fullbright

fulfil, fulfilling, fulfilment**“full-time mother”**

(or for that matter “full-time father”) should be avoided, as it implies that parents

who go to work aren't full-time parents

fully vaccinated

Please take care to explain what fully vaccinated means in relation to Covid-19 immunisation (eg two jabs and a booster or third dose for an eligible cohort of adults) if it is used, which would only be if it's pertinent to the story. Otherwise use vaccinated for people who have had as much protection as they are eligible for and unvaccinated or partially vaccinated for those who haven't

fulsome

Not a fancy word for full, it indicates cloying, lavish excess, as in this eloquent description in the London Review of Books, by Rosemary Hill, of books about Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother: "His biography was pious to a degree and, like his equally fulsome edition of her letters, much too long."

This sorely misused word is most often seen in the phrase "fulsome praise", which should not be used in a complimentary sense

fundraiser, fundraising

fungus

plural fungi

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
