

## The Guardian and Observer style guide

# Guardian and Observer style guide: N

‘One thing that literature would be greatly the better for would be a more restricted employment by authors of simile and metaphor.’ **Ogden Nash**

Wed 17 Mar 2021 18.34 GMT

**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**



## Nineteen Eighty-Four

📷 Illustration: Jakob Hinrichs

### **Nabokov, Vladimir**

(1899-1977) Russian-born author of *Lolita*; not Nabakov

### **naïlbomb**

### **naïve, naïvely, naïvety**

no accent

### **Nakba**

the Palestinian “catastrophe”

### **Naked Rambler**

real name Stephen Gough

### **names**

Prominent figures can just be named in stories, with their function at second mention: “Rishi Sunak said last night ...” (first mention); “the prime minister added ...” (subsequent mention).

Where it is thought necessary to explain who someone is, write “Paul Heckingbottom, the Sheffield United manager, said ...” or “the Sheffield United manager, Paul Heckingbottom, said”, etc.

In such cases the commas around the name indicate there is only one person in the position, so write “the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, said” (only one person in the job), but “the former Labour leader Neil Kinnock said” (there have been many).

Do not leave out the definite article in such constructions as “style guru David Marsh said ...” It should be “The style guru David Marsh” (if there are other style gurus) or “David Marsh, the style guru, ...” (if you feel only one person merits such a description)

### **Arnon Nampa**

Thai lawyer and activist

### **Nanjing**

not Nanking

### **Napoleon Bonaparte**

### **narrowboat**

the popular type of British canal boat, 7ft wide and up to 70ft long - do not call it a barge. A wider version (typically 10-14ft wide) is a broadbeam narrowboat

### **Nasa**

National Aeronautics and Space Administration, but no need to spell out

### **Nasrallah, Hassan**

Hezbollah secretary general

### **nation**

should not be used to mean country or state, but reserved to describe people united by language, culture and history so as to form a distinct group within a larger territory.

Beware of attributing the actions of a government or a military force to a national population (“the Israelis have killed 400 children during the intifada”). Official actions always have opponents within a population; if we don’t acknowledge this, we oversimplify the situation and shortchange the opponents

### **national anthem**

### **National Archives**

the former Public Record Office, now merged with the Historical Manuscripts Commission

### **National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers**

(NASUWT) call it “the union” after first mention if you want to avoid using these unlovely initials; note that an “and” seems to have gone missing somewhere

**National Audit Office**

NAO or audit office after first mention

**national curriculum****National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts**

Nesta after first mention

**National Grid**

transmits gas as well as electricity

**National Health Service**

but **NHS** or **health service** is normally sufficient. NHS regions are uc with no hyphens eg NHS North West, NHS South East

**National Hunt**

horse racing over fences and hurdles

**National Institute for Health and Care Excellence**

Nice after first mention

**national insurance**

lc; abbreviate national insurance contributions to NICs after first mention

**nationalists**

(Northern Ireland)

**national living wage**

is the official name, but it is informally and widely known as the minimum wage and it is fine to call it that in most cases. Bear in mind, however, that young people (those under 23 or under 21 from April 2024) can be paid less than this. From school leaving age they must receive what is officially known as the national minimum wage. Avoid calling the national living wage simply the living wage, as this causes confusion with the living wage advocated by the Living Wage Foundation, which is based on the cost of living and voluntarily paid by some employers. The foundation sometimes refers to this as the real living wage

**national lottery****National Lottery Heritage Fund**

formerly called the **Heritage Lottery Fund**

**national parks**

lc, eg Peak District national park, Yellowstone national park

**National People's Congress**

China's national legislature

**National Savings and Investments**

may be abbreviated to NS&I

**national security council (NSC)****national service**

peacetime conscription in the UK lasted from 1949 until 1960

**National Theatre**

the Royal National Theatre, commonly known as the National, comprises three auditoriums: the Olivier, the Lyttelton, and the Dorfman (formerly Cottesloe), and the Temporary theatre (formerly the Shed)

**Native Americans**

Geronimo was a Native American (not an American Indian or Red Indian); George Bush is a native American

**Nato**

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, but no need to spell out

**Natural England**

formerly English Nature

**naught**

nothing; **nought** the figure 0

**navy**

but Royal Navy

**Naypyidaw**

capital of Myanmar

**naysayer**

a “neighsayer”, as we have been known to spell it, would be a horse

**Nazi, neo-Nazi**

but lowercase for **nazism** and in such phrases as **grammar nazi** (which should be used very sparingly)

**'Ndrangheta**

Calabrian version of the mafia

**Neanderthal man**

scientific name and style is *Homo neanderthalensis*. While it may be tempting to describe certain attitudes or, say, politicians as neanderthal, we should bear in mind that archaeologists have known for many years that Neanderthal man was not stupid. British Archaeology magazine has complained about the media's use of neanderthal as a term of abuse

**nearby**

one word, whether adjective or adverb: the nearby pub; the pub nearby

**nearsighted**

**negligent**

careless; **negligible** slight

**Nell Gwyn**

not Gwynn, or Gwynne

**nemesis**

an agent of retribution and vengeance, not a synonym for enemy

**neocon, neoconservative, neoliberal****neophilia**

Even if you have always wanted to appear in *Private Eye*, resist the temptation to write such nonsense as “grey is the new black”, “billiards is the new snooker”, “Barnsley is the new Tuscany”, etc

**Nepali**

for the people and their language, not Nepalese

**nerve-racking****Nestlé****net migration**

a term used by the UK’s Office for National Statistics and government to refer to the net number of people who have come to live in Britain from abroad. That means the number of people who have come, minus the number of people who have left the UK to move elsewhere. In recent times this has always in reality been net immigration, because the number of people coming in exceeds the number leaving.

The meaning of net migration is widely understood, but for greater clarity you can call it net immigration or net migration to the UK and probably should do at some point in an article where it is discussed

**net zero**

no hyphen, eg, net zero emissions

**Netanyahu, Benjamin****Netherlands, the**

not Holland, which is only part of the country; use Dutch as the adjective

**neurodiverse**

should not generally be used as a word to describe individual people. It is generally better to be specific and say a person is autistic, for example, or has ADHD than that they “are neurodiverse”. However, you should always respect people’s own self-descriptions in this regard. It is fine to describe a group of people as neurodiverse where they differ from each other

**Never Never Land**

or simply **Neverland** (JM Barrie used both in his Peter Pan works)

**nevertheless****new**

often redundant, as in “a new report said yesterday”

**new age travellers****newbie****new-build****Newcastle-under-Lyme**

hyphens

**Newcastle upon Tyne**

no hyphens

**New Deal**

capped up, whether you are talking about Franklin D Roosevelt’s job creation policies in the 1930s or Gordon Brown’s 1990s version

**newfound****New Labour**

but **old Labour**

**news agency, news feed**

but newsagent, newsprint, newsreel

**newspaper titles**

the Guardian, the Observer, the New York Times, etc, do not write “the Sun newspaper”, etc: people know what you mean

**New Testament****Newtownards**

Northern Irish town pronounced, and frequently misspelt, as Newtonards

**New Wave**

initial caps for the film movement known in French as the Nouvelle Vague

**new wave**

lowercase for music of the late 70s and early 80s (the likes of Talking Heads); also for any other new wave (eg the Moroccan new wave in cinema)

**new year**

lc; including **new year honours list**, **new year resolutions** and **happy new year**; but

**New Year’s Day**, **New Year’s Eve**

**New York City**

but **New York state**

New York neighbourhoods take initial capital, eg Lower East Side, Upper West Side, West Village, etc

### **New Zealand**

People live in (not “on”) the South Island or in the North Island; note definite article

### **next door**

she lives next door (adverb)

### **nextdoor**

she’s my nextdoor neighbour (adjective)

### **NFU**

the National Farmers’ Union is its full name, but it is an employers’ association rather than a trade union, so it is misleading to refer to it as a union

### **NHS**

National Health Service, but not normally necessary to spell out; health service is also OK

### **nicknames**

are usually capped up, whether in quotation marks or not, for example the Iron Lady, Vlad the Impaler, Phil “the Power” Taylor, Rubin “Hurricane” Carter, “One Size” Fitz Hall

### **Nichpa**

National Infection Control and Health Protection Agency

### **Nietzsche, Friedrich**

(1844-1900) German philosopher; occasionally misspelt, even in the Guardian

### **Nigerian names**

surnames do not exist in the north of Nigeria: a typical name would be Isa Sani Sokoto (Isa the son of Sani who comes from the town of Sokoto); so best to write in full

### **Nigerien**

person from Niger

**nightcap, nightdress, nightfall, nightgown, nightshirt**  
but **night-time**

**Nile delta, Nile valley, Nile River**

**nimby, nimbys, nimbyism**

it stands for “not in my back yard”

### **Nineteen Eighty-Four**

not 1984 for Orwell’s novel

**1922 Committee**

of Tory backbench MPs. If 15% of Tory MPs write to the chair of the committee to formally ask for one, a vote of no confidence in the leader takes place

**El Niño****niqab**

veil that covers the face apart from the eyes

**Nissan**

cars; **Nissen** hut

**nitric, nitrogen or nitrous?**

nitric oxide (chemical name NO) and nitrogen dioxide (chemical name NO<sub>2</sub>) are both found in diesel fumes and are collectively referred to as nitrogen oxides, or NO<sub>x</sub>. High concentrations of nitrogen dioxide cause inflammation of the airways and can also react to form other secondary pollutants, such as ozone, which create their own health problems.

nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O), laughing gas, is not found in diesel fumes

**No 1**

in the charts, the world tennis No 1, etc

**No 10**

Downing Street

**no**

the plural is noes

**Nobel prize**

a Nobel prize winner, a Nobel prize-winning author, etc

Nobel peace prize, Nobel prize in literature, etc

**no-brainer**

means something along the lines of “this is so obvious, you don’t need a brain to know it”, not “only someone with no brain would think this”

**no campaign, yes campaign**

not No campaign, “no” campaign or any other variant

**no doubt that, no question that**

are opposites: “There was no doubt that he was lying” means he was lying; “There was no question that he was lying” means he wasn’t; the two are routinely confused

**Noel**

no accent on Noel as in Christmas (The First Noel, not Nowell); use an accent if told how the person spells his or her name: Noël Coward had one, Noel Edmonds doesn't

**no-fly zone**



**noisome**

Nothing to do with noise, it means offensive or evil-smelling. Looking at what has happened to fulsome, it seems likely that lazy people will start using noisome as a fancy way to mean noisy, which would be a shame

**no man's land**

no hyphens

**no overall control (NOC)**

write out in full at first mention

**non-binary**

Non-binary people identify as neither a woman nor a man. Their gender may feel like both or somewhere in between and it may change over time (see also **pronouns**)

**noncommissioned officer****nonconformist****none**

It is a (very persistent) myth that “none” has to take a singular verb: plural is acceptable and often sounds more natural, eg “none of the current squad are good enough to play in the Premier League”, “none of the issues have been resolved”

**nonetheless****nonfiction****non-white**

avoid this term except in direct quotes, use alternatives such as minority ethnic, people of colour or BAME

**noon**

not 12 noon, 12am or 12pm

**no one**

not no-one

**Nordic countries**

Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland

**Nord Stream 2**

a gas pipeline between Russia and Germany

**normal**

normalcy was popularised in the US by Warren G Harding’s “return to normalcy” 1920 campaign slogan; normality is the British English version. But “back to normal” is preferable to either

**north**

north London, north Wales, north-west England, the north-west, etc

## **North America**

### **north-east England**

Tyneside (Newcastle), Wearside (Sunderland), Teesside (Middlesbrough); we often confuse these or get them wrong in some way that makes it look as if the farthest north-east Guardian journalists have ventured is Stoke Newington

### **northern hemisphere**

### **Northern Ireland**

Can be referred to as a country or region, but avoid referring to it as a province or as Ulster (see Ulster entry).

People from Northern Ireland may refer to themselves as Northern Irish, Irish or British; we should respect that choice where known and relevant, but otherwise refer to people as Northern Irish.

### **northern lights**

also known as aurora borealis; the southern hemisphere counterpart is aurora australis

### **North Macedonia**

The Balkan country officially known as the Republic of North Macedonia was formerly called Macedonia until a name change in 2019. However, its people are still known as Macedonians, not North Macedonians

### **“northern powerhouse”**

use in quotes at first mention, then northern powerhouse at subsequent mentions

### **north of the border**

avoid this expression: we work on national newspapers

### **north pole**

### **Northumbria**

an ancient Anglo-Saxon kingdom, a university and a police authority; the county, however, is Northumberland

### **North-West Frontier province**

one of the four provinces of Pakistan, now known as **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

### **North York Moors**

national park; but **North Yorkshire Moors railway**, 18-mile heritage line between Pickering and Grosmont

### **nosy**

not nose-y

### **notebook, notepaper**

**not-for-profit**

as an adjective, as in “not-for-profit organisation”

**noticeboard****Nottingham Forest, Notts County**

the former should never be abbreviated to “Notts Forest”

**Notting Hill carnival****nous**

common sense

**Nouse**

York University student newspaper

**novel psychoactive substances (NPSs)**

formerly known as legal highs, but now illegal

**novichok****now**

occasionally useful for emphasis, but is now used far too often

**NPCC**

the National Police Chiefs’ Council

**npower**

retail arm of RWE npower; nothing to do with nuclear power

**‘NSync**

not \*NSync or \*NSYNC or \*N Sync or ’N Sync

**(the) nuclear deterrent**

it is better to use more straightforward, less contentious terms, such as nuclear weapons, nuclear arms, nuclear missiles or the nuclear arsenal if that is all you mean

**numbers**

Spell out from one to nine; numerals from 10 to 999,999; thereafter use m, bn or tn for sums of money, quantities or inanimate objects in copy, eg 5m tonnes of coal, 30bn doses of vaccine, £50tn; but million or billion for people or animals, eg 1 million people, 25 million rabbits, the world population is 7 billion, etc; in headlines always use m, bn or tn. Numbers from one to nine should also usually be written as figures when they come alongside a unit of measurement, for example 5 miles, 3kg, but use your discretion if a figure would look oddly precise, for example in a phrase such as: “He drank one pint and left.”

**numbskull****numeracy**

Numbers have always contained power, and many a journalist will tremble at the

very sight of them. But most often the only maths we need to make sense of them is simple arithmetic. Far more important are our critical faculties, all too often switched off at the first sniff of a figure.

It's easy to be hoodwinked by big numbers in particular. But are they really so big? Compared with what? And what is being assumed? A government announcement of an extra £Xm a year will look far less impressive if divided by 60 million (the British population) and/or 52 (weeks in the year). That's quite apart from the fact that it was probably trumpeted last week already, as part of another, bigger number.

Never invent a big figure when a small one will do. Totting jail sentences together ("the six men were jailed for a total of 87 years") is meaningless as well as irritating. Similarly, saying that something has an area the size of 150 football pitches, or is "eight times the size of Wales", is clichéd and may not be helpful.

Be wary of using different ways of reporting comparable figures within a story. It is easier for readers to compare 6% and 10% than to compare 6% and one in 10.

Similarly, writing: "The proportion of X who did Y has fallen from 8.64% to 6.3%" is bad form; the respective figures should be 8.6% and 6.3%.

Avoid meaningless or false precision when reporting statistics. Think about whether it is useful to report a percentage of 57.743% or whether you should round it to 57.7% or even 58%. Particularly as many published statistics are estimates with a margin of error.

If you decide to round up or round down, remember: anything halfway or over is rounded up, so 6.5%, for example, would become 7%, while 6.4% would become 6%.

Here is an easy three-point guide to sidestepping common "mythematics" traps:

**1** Be careful in conversions, don't muddle metric and imperial, or linear, square and cubic measures. Square miles and miles square are constantly confused: an area 10 miles square is 10 miles by 10 miles, which equals 100 square miles.

**2** Be extremely wary of (or don't bother) converting changes in temperature; you run the risk of confusing absolute and relative temperatures, eg while a temperature of 2C is about the same as 36F, a temperature change of 2C corresponds to a change of about 4F.

**3** When calculating percentages, beware the "rose by/fell by X%" construction: an increase from 3% to 5% is a 2 percentage point increase or a 2-point increase, not a 2% increase

### the **Nupes**

An alliance of leftwing political parties in France. For its full name use the translation New Popular Ecological and Social Union

### **Nuremberg**

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**N-word**

to be spelt out only if essential to a story (for example, when quoting someone accused of using it) and only after discussion with senior editorial staff

**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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