

The Guardian and Observer style guide

Guardian and Observer style guide: G

'The life of the journalist is poor, nasty, brutish and short. So is his style.' **Stella Gibbons, Cold Comfort Farm**

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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



Glasgow kiss

📷 Illustration: Jakob Hinrichs

G7

Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States

Gaddafi, Muammar

former Libyan leader rather than president (he held no government office and was generally known in Libya as “leader of the revolution”); Gaddafi on second mention

Gaelic

when referring to the Scottish language, but use Irish and Welsh for the native languages of those countries

gaff

hook or spar, also slang for house; **blow the gaff** give away a secret

gaffe

blunder

gaffer tape

Galápagos

T

Gallagher

Oasis brothers (Noel and Liam)

Gallaher

cigarette company

gallery

takes an initial cap when it forms part of the name of the gallery, eg National Gallery, Leeds Art Gallery, Saatchi Gallery, but lowercase otherwise, eg the White Cube gallery

Gambia, the

not Gambia

gambit

an opening strategy that involves some sacrifice or concession; so to talk of an opening gambit is tautologous - an opening ploy might be better

Game Boy**gamechanger, gamechanging****gameplan, gameshow****Gandhi**

not Ghandi

gang-rape**García Lorca, Federico**

(1898-1936) Spanish writer

García Márquez, Gabriel

Colombian novelist

Garda Síochána

Irish police force; garda (plural gardaí) police officer

garotte

not garrotte or garrote

garryowen

up-and-under (rugby union)

Garryowen

Irish rugby club that gave the garryowen its name

gases

plural of gas, but the verb is gasses

gatecrash

Gategate

The hapless quintet who broke into Democratic headquarters at the Watergate building in Washington DC in 1972 can have had no idea of the forces they were unleashing – forces that in due course led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon, and began a proud tradition of inane journalism that shows no sign of diminishing 40 years later.

Examples range from the mildly droll – Gatecrashergate, Henry Gatesgate (also known as Stupidgate) – to the utterly feeble (Sexy Photo Gate).

Among numerous other instances are Bertiegate, Betsygate, Billygate, Camillagate (not to be confused with Dianagate, also known as Squidgygate), Cheriegate, Closetgate, Contragate, Fajitagate, Flakegate, at least two Grannygates, Hobnobgate, Irangate, Iraqgate, Irisgate (it is compulsory for stories about this to be headlined “And here’s to you, Mrs Robinson... “), Katrinagate, Koreagate, Monicagate, at least two cases of Nannygate, Nipplegate, Partygate, Smeargate, various Strippergates, Toiletgate, three different outbreaks of Troopergate, and Whitewatergate.

Sporting gates include Beachballgate, Bloodgate, Buttongate, Chicanegate, Crashgate, Handgate/Henrygate/Thierrygate, Liargate, Pizzagate, Tevezgate and, of course, Tigergate.

Occasionally, as with Climategate or Plebgate, such an ephithet may be useful as a way to pull together a lot of material on the same subject, but most gates are lazy and more likely to put readers off than engage them

Gatt

general agreement on tariffs and trade

Gaudí, Antoni

(1852-1926) Catalan architect

Gauguin, Paul

(1848-1903) French painter

gay marriage

equal marriage, same-sex marriage, or simply marriage are preferable

gay village**Gaza City**

not Gaza city

Gaza Strip

not Gaza strip. Do not call Gaza an enclave; it is better to call it a territory. Don’t call Palestinians in Gaza “Gazans”. Some Gaza placenames: Beit Hanoun (not Hanun), Beit Lahiya (not Lahia), Deir al-Balah, Gaza City, Jabaliya (not Jabalia), Khan Younis

Gb

gigabits; **GB** gigabytes

GCSE grades

for grades in England use figures: grade 9, grade 1 etc

G'day

Australian greeting

Geldof, Bob

has an honorary KBE but, as an Irish citizen, is not eligible to use the style Sir so please don't call him "Sir Bob Geldof"

gender issues

Our use of language reflects our values, as well as changes in society. Phrases such as career girl or career woman, for example, are outdated (more women have careers than men) and patronising (there is no male equivalent).

So we use actor or comedian for women as well as men, not actress or comedienne (but waiter and waitress are acceptable - at least for the moment); firefighter, not fireman; PC, not WPC (police forces have abandoned the distinction), postal workers, not postmen, etc.

Avoid terms such as businessmen, housewives, male nurse, woman driver, woman (lady!) doctor, etc, which reinforce outdated stereotypes. If you need to use an adjective, it is female and not "woman" in such phrases as female bishops, female MPs, female president.

Do not gratuitously describe a woman as a "mother-of-three": family details and marital status are only relevant in stories about families or marriage.

Use humankind or humanity rather than mankind, a word that, as one of our readers points out, "alienates half the population from their own history". Similarly, avoid man hours or man years, instead say eg the equivalent of one person working for 1,000 years.

Never say "his" to cover men and women: use his or her, or a different construction; in sentences such as "a teacher who beats his/her pupils is not fit to do the job", there is usually a way round the problem - in this case, "teachers who beat their pupils ..."

Men (rarely women - funny, that) who occasionally question our policy and accuse us of "political correctness" may care to reflect on the fact that Fowler's used to list such "established feminine titles" as adventuress, authoress, editress, executrix, giantess, huntress, inspectress, Jewess, poetess, procuress, quakeress, songstress, tailoress, wardress; it also proposed new ones such as dancerness and doctress ("everyone knows the inconvenience of being uncertain whether a doctor is a man or a woman")

T

gender reassignment

Use instead of “sex change”. Gender reassignment is one of the nine protected characteristics under the 2010 Equality Act. The others are: age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation

general election**General Medical Council**

(GMC), doctors’ disciplinary body

General Strike

of 1926

General Synod

but synod after first mention

generation X/Y/Z/Alpha

there is no consensus about the exact dates when generations begin and end, but broadly speaking generation X applies to people born between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s; generation Y (millennials) to those born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s; generation Z to those born between the mid-1990s and early-2010s and generation Alpha for those born since. Abbreviate to gen X, gen Y, gen Z or gen Alpha

Geneva conventions

(not convention); four treaties, last revised and ratified in 1949, which with three more recently adopted protocols set out international standards for the humanitarian treatment of prisoners of war and civilians caught up in war.

The refugee convention of 1951, though signed in Geneva, is not part of the Geneva conventions. It is the key legal document in defining who is a refugee, their rights and the legal obligations of states

genocide

the UN convention approved in 1948 defines genocide as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group”

geoengineering**geography**

distinct areas are capped up: Black Country, East Anglia, Lake District, Midlands, Peak District, Potteries, West Country, etc; but areas defined by compass points are lc: the north, the south-east, the south-west, etc

geordie

noun and adjective; refers to people from Tyneside, and their accent

geriatrics

branch of medicine dealing with elderly people, not an amusing way to describe them in an attempt to make yourself sound cool

german measles

but rubella is preferable

German nouns

capped up, as they are in German

gerund

Nothing to be frightened of. Think of it as a verb used as a noun: I like running, smoking is bad for your health, etc. You are supposed to use a possessive: I was worried by his smoking, rather than I was worried by him smoking. In practice, many people – yes, even journalists – don't bother

ghetto

plural **ghettoes**

ghoti

alternative spelling of the word “fish” (gh as in trough, o as in women, ti as in nation) sometimes attributed to George Bernard Shaw, although there is no evidence that he ever said or wrote it

giant

We know that BP and Vodafone are big companies, so don't need to be told that they are “the oil giant” or “the telecoms giant”

giantkiller, giantkilling

no hyphen

Gibraltar

overseas territory or dependency, not a British colony; also referred to as the Rock; its inhabitants are Gibraltarians

gif

stands for graphics interchange format. When CompuServe introduced it in 1987, it was pronounced with a soft G as in giraffe, although it is also widely pronounced with a hard G as in goat

gift

not a verb (unless, perhaps, directly quoting a football manager or player: “We gifted Barnsley their fifth goal”)

gigawatts

abbreviate as GW; 1GW is equal to 1bn watts. Gigawatt hours are abbreviated as GWh

gin and tonic

plural gin and tonics; abbreviation G&T, plural G&Ts

girl

female under 18

girlie

noun (only when quoting someone); **girly** adjective (eg girly clothes); **girlish** behaviour

giro

banking; **gyro** navigation aid

Giscard d'Estaing, Valéry

former French president, Giscard on second mention

Giuliani, Rudolph

or **Rudy** (not Rudi) former New York mayor

Giuseppe

regularly misspelt as Guiseppe; this is sloppy

GLA

Greater London authority, not “Greater London assembly”.

The GLA comprises the mayor, who runs it, and the London assembly, which holds the mayor to account

glamour

but **glamorous**

Glasgow kiss

a head-butt

glasnost**GlaxoSmithKline**

GSK on second mention and in headlines

Glen Coe

Highlands valley where the MacDonalds were massacred

Glencoe

the nearby village

“global Britain”

at first mention; global Britain thereafter

“global gag rule”

Use in quotes at first mention to make clear it is not the actual name of the policy. is called the Mexico City policy and wherever relevant this, along with a brief description of the policy, should be included in articles eg The “global gag rule”,

T

officially called the Mexico City policy, bans US federal funding for NGOs in foreign countries that provide abortion services or abortion advocacy.

global heating

preferable to **global warming**

globish

a form of simple English used by non-native English speakers

GM crops, GM food

normally no need to write genetically modified in full; avoid the term “Frankenstein food”

GMT

Greenwich mean time: the ship ran aground at 8am local time (0700 GMT)

goalline, goalpost**goat's cheese****gobbledegook**

not gobbledygook

gobsmacked

is best used only if directly quoting someone

God

but he, him etc rather than He, Him

godchild, godfather, godmother, godparents, godson, goddaughter**God particle, Higgs boson, Large Hadron Collider****going forward**

unappealing jargon when employed as an alternative to “in the future”

goldmine**Goldsmiths, University of London**

comma but no apostrophe and no “college”

golf holes

are given as numbers: 1st, 2nd, 18th, etc

‘golliwog’

unless you are quoting someone directly, please use a less offensive term such as golly or golly doll

go native

a phrase that carries derogatory connotations about Indigenous cultures. Avoid

gong

strikes the wrong tone in reporting about awards and medals (for example we had

people winning “gongs” at the RIBA architecture awards); can be effective used disparagingly (“the more gongs the prime minister doles out to donors and party hacks, the more he stands accused of cronyism”)

González Duránte, Miriam

González Duránte after first mention; do not call her Miriam Clegg or Mrs Clegg

Good Friday agreement

goodness, for goodness sake

goodnight

goody bag, goody-goody, oh goody!

but **goodies**

Google

takes initial cap, even when used as a verb (“I Googled myself”); named after googol, the number 1 followed by 100 zeros

Gorbachev, Mikhail**Gorky’s Zygotic Mynci**

“the most ridiculous crap name we could think of”, according to the band

Gormley, Antony

go-slow

noun; **go slow** verb

Goths

(uc) Germanic tribe that invaded the Roman empire

goths

(lc) Sisters of Mercy fans who invaded the Shepherd’s Bush Empire

government

lc in all contexts and all countries; resist the awful trend to say such things as “Lord Browne fended off accusations of being too close to government” - it should be the government.

Like other collective nouns, government can be singular or plural, depending on context: “the government is on the rocks”, but “when the government say ‘we’re all in this together’ they mean the Old Etonian Association”

government departments

[See departments of state](#)

governor general

(plural is governor generals; see attorney general)

graffiti

are plural; the singular is **graffito**

gram

not gramme; eg kilogram, microgram etc

grammar

“It will be proved to thy face that thou hast men about thee that usually talk of a noun and a verb, and such abominable words as no Christian ear can endure to hear”

(William Shakespeare, Henry VI Part 2)

Ambrose Bierce defined grammar as “a system of pitfalls thoughtfully prepared for the feet of the self-made man”. He had a point. Generations of schoolchildren were taught grammar as an arbitrary set of dos and don’ts laid down by people who knew, or thought they knew, best.

Nowadays, grammar might be more helpfully defined as the set of rules followed by speakers of a language: for example, why in English we say “I went out” and not “I out went”. Using correct grammar is a way to communicate effectively, not to feel superior to other people because you know what a conjunction is.

Don’t feel too downhearted if you were taught grammar badly, or not at all; as the linguist Steven Pinker says: “A preschooler’s tacit knowledge of grammar is more sophisticated than the thickest style manual”

Grammer, Kelsey

actor fondly remembered as Dr Frasier Crane

grandad

but granddaughter

grandee

has become a cliché applied to almost any long-serving politician (though not, so far, to John Prescott); it sounds vaguely, and inappropriately, deferential

grandparent

Mention this status only when relevant: leave “battling grannies” and similar examples of ageism and sexism to the tabloids; in particular we should avoid such patronising drivel as “How this 55-year-old granny came to earn \$25m a year” (on the front page of the paper) – just in case anyone still didn’t get the message, the front of G2 said: “She’s five foot two, she’s a grandmother and she earns \$25m a year”.

Our policy on this matter prompted the Spectator columnist Rod Liddle to ask: “Why Has The Word ‘Grandmother’ Been Banned By The Guardian?” It hasn’t

T

grand prix

plural grands prix; cap up individual races, eg British Grand Prix

grand slam

(lc) a term originating in contract bridge, now used in various sports, notably golf and tennis - in both of which it refers to winning all four major tournaments in the same year - and rugby union, where it involves beating all five opponents in the Six Nations championship

grassroots

one word

gravadlax**great-aunt, great-grandfather, great-great-grandmother, etc****Great Britain**

England, Wales and Scotland; if you want to include Northern Ireland, use Britain or the UK

Great Leap Forward

Mao Zedong's ill-fated attempt to modernise Chinese agriculture and industry from 1958-61

Great Train Robbers, Great Train Robbery

of 1963

Great War

with initial caps if quoting someone, but first world war or 1914-18 war is normally preferable

Greek placenames

We normally use generally accepted anglicised names:

Andros, Cephalonia, Corfu (not Kerkira), Ithaca, Kos, Paxos, Rhodes, Santorini (not Thira), Symi (with a Y); but note Lefkada (not Lefkas), Peloponnese (not Peloponnessus), Thessaloniki (not Salonika)

Greek royalty

As the Greek monarchy was abolished in 1973 we should avoid using titles such as king, queen, crown prince and princess, even though family members continue to do so. We can, however, refer to Constantine as the former king. The family does not have an official surname so other individuals can either be referred to as "Alexia/Pavlos, the daughter/son of the former king, Constantine II" or, if necessary, the name Glücksburg can be used as this is the royal house to which they belong

green

a green activist, the green movement, but uc when referring to so-named political parties, eg the Green party

green belt

designated areas around cities subject to strict planning controls, not open countryside in general

greenfield site

one that has not been built on before, in contrast to a brownfield site

greengrocer's apostrophe

[See apostrophes](#)

greenhouse effect

Energy from the Earth's surface is trapped in the lower atmosphere by gases that prevent it leaking into space, a natural phenomenon that makes life possible, whose enhancement by natural or artificial means may make life impossible. Not the result of the hole in the ozone layer, whose thinning in the upper atmosphere is due to CFCs; the connection is that CFCs are also greenhouse gases

Green Investment Bank**green line**

marks the boundary between Israel and the West Bank and between Israel and the Gaza Strip. Do not describe it as a border

green paper**grill**

on an oven

grille

on a car or a gate

grisly

gruesome

grizzly

bear

Grossman, Loyd

TV presenter and chef with his own brand of pasta sauces, singer with Jet Bronx and the Forbidden (reunited in 2009 as the New Forbidden)

groundbreaking**groundwater, rainwater; flood water, flood waters, drinking water****Ground Zero**

initial caps for the former site of the World Trade Centre in New York; lc when referring to the exact location of explosions, eg ground zero at Hiroshima in 1945

grow

flowers may grow but companies don't "grow profits" and governments don't "grow economies"; horrors such as "grow the business" should only be used when quoting someone

grownup, grown up

You become a grownup when you have grown up

Grub Street**G-spot****Guantánamo Bay****Guernica**

but the Tree of Gernika

guerrilla**Guevara, Che**

(1928-67) Argentinian-born revolutionary

Guggenheim Museum

cap M if you use the word, although it is not normally necessary. Frank Lloyd Wright designed the Guggenheim in New York, Frank Gehry the one in Bilbao (and another proposed for Abu Dhabi). We have sometimes confused the two

Guides

not “Girl Guides”; the organisation is Girlguiding

Guildhall

(City of London), not “the Guildhall”

Guinea

formerly French Guinea, a republic in north-west Africa that became independent in 1958; do not confuse with Equatorial Guinea, French Guiana, Guinea-Bissau, or Guyana

Guinea-Bissau

formerly Portuguese Guinea, independent since 1974, lying on the coast to the north-west of Guinea

guinea pig**guineas**

Younger readers may not be aware that a guinea was worth £1 1s (£1.05) unless they buy or sell racehorses (the buyer still pays the auction house in guineas, and the auction house then gives the vendor the same number of pounds, thus netting the auctioneer their 5% commission)

Guinness World Records

formerly the Guinness Book of Records

gulag

a forced labour camp; but **the Gulag** for the government agency that ran the gulags in Soviet Russia

Gulf, the

not the Persian or Arabian Gulf

Gulf Stream**Gulf war**

the first Gulf war is now known as the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88); 1991 was the Gulf war: 2003 was the Iraq war

gull

not “seagull”

gun battle

not gunbattle or firefight

Guns N’ Roses

may be abbreviated to GNR after first mention

Gurkha**GUS**

the former Great Universal Stores split into the credit rating agency Experian and Home Retail Group in 2006

guttural

not gutteral

Guyana

formerly British Guiana, a nation in South America that gained its independence in 1966; not to be confused with French Guiana or the three African states of Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau; its inhabitants are Guyanese (noun and adjective), not Guyanan

gymnasium

plural gymnasiums

Gypsies

with an initial cap, also Irish Travellers

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