

The Guardian and Observer style guide

Guardian and Observer style guide: R

‘Say all you have to say in the fewest possible words, or your reader will be sure to skip them; and in the plainest possible words, or he will certainly misunderstand them.’ **John Ruskin**

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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



Rorschach test

📷 Illustration: Jakob Hinrichs

race card

as in “play the race card”; has become a cliché, especially at election times when someone is certain to be accused of it

racecard

lists racehorses at a racetrack

race-fixing

RAC Foundation

should be described on first mention as a pro-motoring thinktank

racial terminology

A person’s race should only be included if relevant to the story. The words black and Asian should not be used as nouns, but as adjectives: black people rather than “blacks”, an Asian woman rather than “an Asian”, etc.

Say African-Caribbean rather than Afro-Caribbean.

T

Use the word “immigrant” with great care, not only because it is often incorrectly used to describe people who were born in Britain, but also because it has been used negatively for so many years. If relevant, say people are “children of immigrants”, not “second-generation immigrants”.

Also see separate entries on [black](#), [BAME](#), [N-word](#) and [P-word](#)

rack or wrack?

You rack your brains, face rack and ruin, and are racked with guilt, shame or pain; wrack is seaweed

rackets

not racquets, except in club titles

Rada

Royal Academy of Dramatic Art

Radio 1, 2, 3, 4, 4 Extra, 5 Live, 6 Music**radiographer**

takes medical images

radiologist

reads them

Raidió Teilifís Éireann

Irish public broadcasting corporation

radius

plural **radii**

raft

something Huck Finn and Jim were on when they floated down the river; do not say “a raft of measures”, which has very rapidly become a cliché (particularly in political reporting)

Raid

redundant array of independent disks (data storage)

railway station

train station is acceptable, indeed more widely used nowadays, although it still sounds wrong to some older British readers (and writers)

Rainbows

for girls from five (four in Northern Ireland) to seven, at which point they may become Brownies

raincoat, rainfall, rainproof, rainwater

but **rain check**

Ramadan

month of fasting for Muslims

Ramblers, the

formerly known as the Ramblers' Association

Ramsay, Gordon

ex-footballing chef; note that England's World Cup-winning manager in 1966 was Alf Ramsey

Ramsay Street

where Neighbours become good friends

R&B

whether you are listening to Bo Diddley or Beyoncé, although only the former style should be referred to as rhythm and blues

Range Rover

no hyphen

Rangers

not Glasgow Rangers

Rangoon

is now Yangon

rape

Always include helpline numbers on stories about rape and sexual abuse:

Information and support for anyone affected by rape or sexual abuse issues is available from the following organisations. In the UK, [Rape Crisis](#) offers support on 0808 500 2222 in England and Wales, 0808 801 0302 in [Scotland](#), or 0800 0246 991 in [Northern Ireland](#). In the US, [Rainn](#) offers support on 800-656-4673. In Australia, support is available at [1800Respect](#) (1800 737 732). Other international helplines can be found at ibiblio.org/rcip/internl.html

rarefy, rarefied**rateable****rating agency**

not ratings

ravage or ravish?

To ravage is to destroy or severely damage something. To ravish, confusingly, can mean one of two distinct things: to seize someone and carry them off, or to enrapture. The OED gives examples, both from the 1990s, of a child being ravished by a lion and a wine lover being ravished by a glass of chablis

Rawlplug

TM

Ray-Ban

TM; it's OK to call them **Ray-Bans**

razzmatazz**re/re-**

Use re- (with hyphen) when followed by the vowels e or u (not pronounced as “yu”): eg re-entry, re-examine, re-urge.

Use re (no hyphen) when followed by the vowels a, i, o or u (pronounced as “yu”), or any consonant: eg rearm, rearrange, reassemble, reiterate, reorder, reread, reuse, rebuild, reconsider, retweet.

Exceptions (where confusion with another word would arise): re-cover/recover, re-creation/recreation, re-form/reform, re-sent/resent, re-sign/resign

reach out to

ask or contact are preferable; both shorter and simpler

realpolitik**rebut, refute or repudiate?**

To rebut is to contest or deny something; to refute is to prove that it's wrong. So when a politician claims to have refuted an allegation, what they mean is rebut. To repudiate someone is to disown them.

If you don't know the difference, you could always try “refudiate”, a word coined by Sarah Palin, perhaps inspired by George W Bush's “misunderestimate”

received pronunciation (RP)

a traditionally prestigious accent, associated with private schools and used by an estimated 3% of the population of England, also known as BBC English, Oxford English or the Queen's English; nothing to do with Standard English, which includes written as well as spoken language and can be (indeed, normally is) spoken with a regional accent

recent

avoid: if the date is relevant, use it

recourse, resource or resort?

You might have recourse to your mother to comfort you when your hamster dies. She would, therefore, be a resource you could turn to. As a last resort, you might resort to your brother as well

recur

not reoccur

Red Crescent, Red Cross**redbrick**

university; the original six were Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester

and Sheffield

redshirts

formally known as the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), they were at the forefront of protests against the Thai government in 2010; their opponents, loyal to the Bangkok regime, were the yellowshirts

red tape

unnecessary rules and procedures, too often claimed as fuel for political “bonfires”. Do not accept this term uncritically. One person’s red tape may be another’s vital protection of public interests

redundancy

Strictly (and in legal terms) jobs, rather than people, are made redundant.

From a reader: “Please could the Guardian set an example to all journalists by saying that 1,028 jobs were made redundant, not 1,028 staff? That subtle difference can make a big difference to the self-respect of the people whose jobs have been made redundant, and, in my experience (four redundancies) to the attitude of future employers too”

“red wall”

a phrase to describe a set of constituencies in northern England, north Wales and the Midlands that traditionally voted Labour. As many of them turned Tory in 2019, it requires quotation marks at first mention

referendum

plural referendums, not referenda

reforestation

not reafforestation

re-form

to form again

reform

to change for the better. We should not take the initiators’ use of the word at its face value, particularly in cases where we believe no improvement is likely. The latest set of changes to education or the health service may, or may not, be reforms

refugee

According to the Refugee Council, a refugee is defined as “a person who, owing to a 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”.

The refugee convention of 1951 is the key legal document in defining who is a refugee, their rights and the legal obligations of states towards refugees

refute

This much abused word should be used only when an argument is disproved; otherwise contest, deny, rebut

regalia

plural, of royalty; “royal regalia” is tautologous

regard

with regard to, not with regards to (but of course you give your regards to Broadway)

Regent's Park

in London

regime

no accent, can be used to describe a government widely regarded as authoritarian

regional assemblies

abolition of the eight bodies representing English regions outside London, along with the regional development agencies, was announced in 2010

register office

not registry office - the first thing reporters used to be taught on local newspapers, although you still see the mistake

registrar general**regrettably**

unfortunately; **regretfully** with regret

rehome or rehouse?

The former applies to animals, the latter to people

reign or rein?

A ruler reigns, but a horse is reined in

Reims

not Rheims

reinstate**religious right****remain, remainer, remain campaign**

for those in favour of the UK remaining in the EU, note lower case; see leave

Remembrance Sunday**Renaissance, the****reopen**

repellant

noun, **repellent** adjective: you fight repellent insects with an insect repellant

repertoire

an individual's range of skills or roles

repertory

a selection of works that a theatre or dance company might perform

replaceable**report**

the Lawrence report, etc; use report on or inquiry into but not report into, ie not "a report into health problems"

reported speech

When a comment in the present tense is reported, use past tense: "She said: 'I **like** chocolate'" (present tense) becomes in reported speech "she said she **liked** chocolate".

When a comment in the past tense is reported, use "had" (past perfect tense): "She said: 'I **ate** too much chocolate'" (past tense) becomes in reported speech "she said she **had eaten** too much chocolate" (not "she said she ate too much chocolate").

Once it has been established who is speaking, there is no need to keep attributing, so long as you stick to the past tense: "Alex said he would vote Labour. There was no alternative. It was the only truly progressive party," etc

republicans

lowercase (except for US and other political parties)

research excellence framework (Ref)

Likewise, teaching excellence framework (Tef)

Reserve Bank of Australia

the Reserve Bank, or RBA after first mention

resident doctors

formerly known as junior doctors, which you can point out in the copy if use of the new term seems confusing

residents

has a rather old-fashioned feel to it, especially in the deadly form "local residents"; on the whole, better to call them people

resistance, resistance fighters

See terrorism/terrorists

respective

unnecessary in a sentence such as "Smith and Jones spoke on behalf of their

respective constituencies”; essential in “Smith and Jones represented the constituents of Dorset North and Dorset South respectively”

restaurateur

not restauranteur

résumé**retail prices index (RPI)**

prices not price, but normally no need to spell it out. No longer the official measure of inflation (that is the consumer price index), but still used for uprating pensions and other state benefits

Rethink

formerly the National Schizophrenia Fellowship

reticent

unwilling to speak; do not confuse with reluctant, as in this example from the paper: “Like most graduates of limited financial means, Louise Clark was reticent about handing over a huge wad of dosh”

Réunion

French island in the Indian Ocean; not La Réunion

Reuters**the Rev**

at first mention, thereafter use courtesy title: eg the Rev Joan Smith, subsequently Ms Smith if honorific is needed; never say “Reverend Smith”, “the Reverend Smith” or “Rev Smith”

veille**Revelation**

last book in the New Testament: not Revelations, a very common error; its full name is The Revelation of St John the Divine

“revenge porn”

always in quote marks, please. It is better to refer to it as sharing intimate images without consent

Revenue and Customs

or **HMRC**: either is acceptable shorthand for HM Revenue and Customs, formed in 2005 from a merger of the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise

Revolutionary Guards

(plural) in Iran. The official name is Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution; “Revolutionary Guard” is meaningless in Iran.

In Libya, however, Muammar Gaddafi had his very own Revolutionary Guard (singular), now disbanded. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein also had one

rheumatoid arthritis

don't call it rheumatism or arthritis, but it can be abbreviated to RA after first mention

Rhodes scholar**RIBA, the**

the Royal Institute of British Architects

Rice, Condoleezza**rice paddies**

tautologous, as **padi** is the Malay word for rice; so it should be paddy fields or simply paddies

Richmond

historic town in North Yorkshire.

We sometimes confuse the parliamentary constituency of Richmond with that of Richmond Park, in south-west London, suggesting that the north of England is a faraway country about which we know little and care less

Richter scale

expresses the magnitude of an earthquake, but scientists no longer use Richter's methodology as it does not work for large quakes or ones where the epicentre is farther than 600km away.

It was superseded in 1979 by the more uniformly applicable moment magnitude scale. So we talk about "an earthquake of magnitude 7.2" or whatever it is

rickety**ricochet, ricocheted, ricocheting****ridden, riddled or raddled?**

crime-ridden, disease-ridden; riddled with errors, riddled with bullets; a raddled appearance

rifle

to flick through a book, newspaper or magazine; often confused with **rifle**, to search or ransack and steal from, eg rifle goods from a shop

right now

adds nothing, and should normally be deleted.

We asked: "Who are the most powerful people in the UK media right now?"

"Who are the most powerful people in the UK media?" would have had just as much impact, and been much less annoying

right to buy, help to buy, buy to let

no initial caps; hyphenate before a noun, eg right-to-buy scheme, help-to-buy programme, buy-to-let mortgages

right wing, the right, rightwinger

nouns

rightwing

adjective

Riley

as in “living the life of Riley”, defined by the OED as “an enviably enjoyable, luxurious or carefree existence”

RIM

abbreviation for Research In Motion, the BlackBerry company

Rime of the Ancient Mariner

not Rhyme

ringfence, ringtone**Rio**

Rivers that are widely known as “Rio” in English do not have to be translated to River, for example the Rio Grande in the US, the Rio Negro in South America

riot grrrl**risque**

no accent

riverbank, riverbed**rivers**

The “River” part comes first in the names of British rivers: the River Severn, River Thames, etc; elsewhere, it normally comes second: the Yellow River, Hawkesbury River, etc.

Most of the time it can be left out altogether, however: the Amazon, Thames, Yangtze, etc.

Rivers that are widely known as Rio in English do not have to be translated to River, for example the Rio Grande in the US, the Rio Negro in South America

riveted, riveting**RNIB**

Royal National Institute of Blind People (no longer “the Blind”)

roadmap

has become a cliché unless you are literally talking about a map

roadside

rob

you rob a person or a bank, using force or the threat of violence; but you **steal** a car or a bag of money

Rock

cap if referring to Gibraltar

rock'n'roll

one word, but Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

Rodgers, Richard

composer known for his Broadway musical partnerships with lyricists Lorenz Hart and Oscar Hammerstein II

Rogers, Richard

British architect, Lord Rogers on second mention, thereafter just Rogers

role

no accent

Rollerblade

TM; say inline skates

rollercoaster

one word

roll out

as a verb, but **rollout** in noun form. However, preferable terms include: introduction, distribution, delivery, administration, deployment, supply etc

rollover

noun (as in lottery rollover)

Rolls-Royce**Roman Catholic**

The archbishop of Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Liverpool, St Andrew's, Southwark and Westminster: it is not normally necessary to say Roman Catholic (as there is no Anglican equivalent).

The Roman Catholic bishop of Aberdeen, Argyll, Lancaster, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Shrewsbury (for all of which there are Anglican bishops).

Unless obviously Roman Catholic from the context, say the Roman Catholic bishop of Brentwood, Clifton, Dunkeld, Galloway, Hexham and Newcastle, Leeds, Menevia, Middlesbrough, Motherwell, Northampton, Nottingham, Paisley and Salford.

In a UK setting use Roman Catholic in describing Roman Catholic organisations and individuals and wherever an Anglican could argue ambiguity (eg "the Catholic church"). But Catholic is enough in most overseas contexts, eg Ireland, France, Italy, Latin America

Romania**Romany**

noun, adjective; **Roma** plural

romcom**Romeo**

cap up, whether referring to Juliet's boyfriend or using generically ("he's the office Romeo")

roofs

plural of roof (not rooves, which has appeared in the paper)

Rooney, Coleen

not Colleen

ro-ro

roll-on, roll-off ferry

Rorschach test

psychological test based on the interpretation of inkblots

Rose Garden

capped up for the White House Rose Garden; do not use it, capped up or otherwise, to describe the Downing Street garden, which is not specifically a rose garden and does not have an official name

rosé

wine

rottweiler**rouble****roughshod****roundtable**

(adjective); **round table** (noun): you might hold roundtable discussions at a round table

round up

verb; **roundup** noun

routeing or routing?

They are routeing buses through the city centre after the routing of the protesters

Rovers Return, the

(no apostrophe) Coronation Street's pub; it sells Newton & Ridley beer

Royal Academy of Arts

usually known simply as the Royal Academy

Royal Air Force
or **RAF**

Royal Ballet

Royal Botanic Garden
(Edinburgh)

Royal Botanic Gardens
(London), also known as **Kew Gardens** or simply **Kew**

Royal College of Nursing
not the Royal College of Nurses

Royal College of Surgeons

royal commission

Royal Courts of Justice

royal family

Royal Institute of International Affairs
also known as Chatham House

Royal Logistic Corps
not Logistics

Royal London hospital

Royal Mail
for the company, not “the Royal Mail”

Royal Marines
marines after first mention

Royal Military Police

Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)
no longer called Action on Hearing Loss

Royal Navy
or **the navy**

Royal Opera, Royal Opera House

royal parks

Royal Society of Arts
RSA after first mention; its full name is Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce

RSPB, RSPCA

do not normally need to be spelt out, but our readers outside the UK deserve a brief explanation of what they are

rubber

strictly, a series of card games or sporting encounters, not an individual match; so if (say) Great Britain's tennis team lost the first three matches of a five-match Davis Cup tie, you would have a dead rubber (but it would be wrong to call the fourth or fifth matches "dead rubbers")

Rubens, Peter Paul

(1577-1640) Flemish painter

Rubicon

as in Clegg crossed his personal Rubicon

rugby league, rugby union**rulebook****Rule, Britannia!****runner-up****run off, run up**

verbs

runoff, run-up

nouns

rupee

Indian currency

rupiah

Indonesian currency

Russian Revolution**Russian roulette**

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Most viewed
