

The Guardian and Observer style guide

Guardian and Observer style guide: P

'When is misuse not misuse? When everybody does it.' **Steven Pinker**

Fri 30 Apr 2021 14.40 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

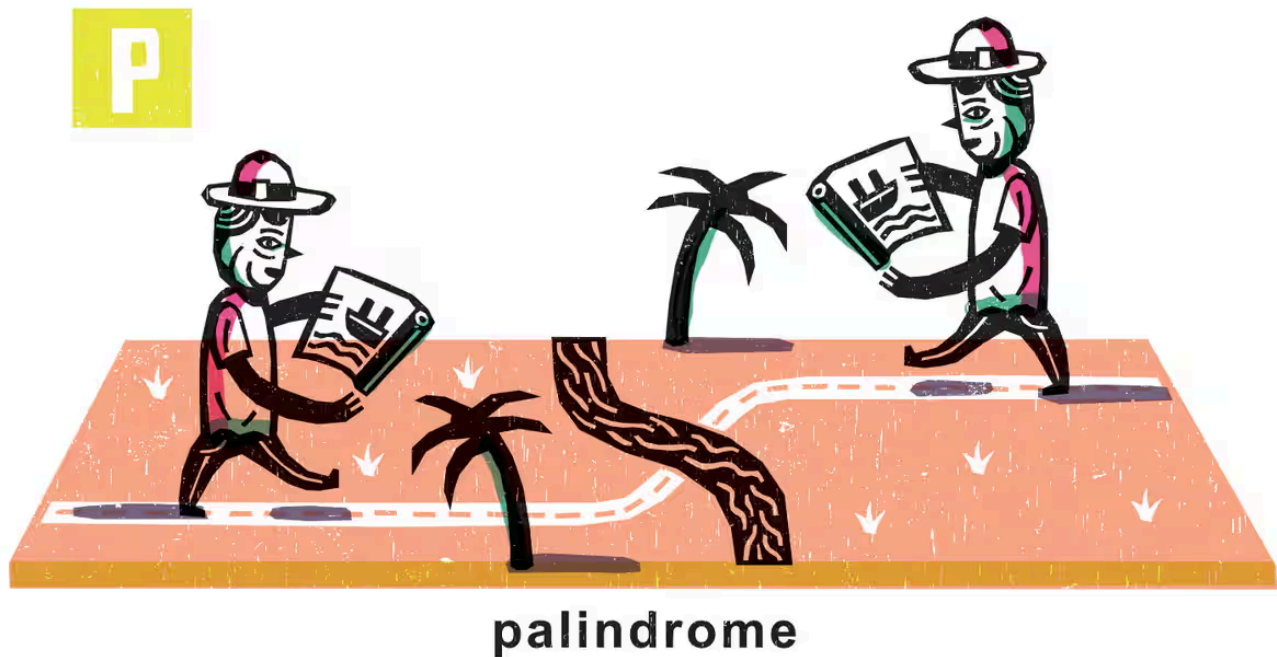


Illustration: Jakob Hinrichs

pace

Latin tag meaning “by the leave of”, as a courteous nod to the views of a dissenting author, or “even acknowledging the existence of”, not a clever way to say “such as”

Pacific Ocean

PacifiCorp

part of ScottishPower

Pac-Man

paean

song of praise; paeon metrical foot of one long and three short syllables; peon
peasant

page 1

etc but **Page 3** girl

El País

Spanish newspaper

Palaeolithic**palate, palette or pallet?**

The palate is the roof of the mouth or sense of taste; an artist mixes paint on a palette; a pallet is one of those wooden frames you see on a forklift truck

palazzo

plural palazzos

pale

The expression “beyond the pale”, meaning unacceptable, outside the boundary, has nothing to do with buckets; it is derived from the Latin *palus*, a stake used to support a fence, from which palisade is also derived

Palestine

is best used for the occupied territories (the West Bank and Gaza); if referring to the whole area, including Israel, use “historic Palestine” (but Palestine for historical references to the area before 1948)

Palestine Solidarity Campaign

for the campaign group

Palestinian Authority

the authority, rather than PA, on second reference

Palestinian ministry of health

manages healthcare in both the West Bank and Gaza. Therefore many of its functions and staff are not linked to Gaza or its Hamas government. Be careful not to imply that they are

Palestinians

don't call Palestinians in Gaza “Gazans”

palindrome

A man, a plan, a canal. Panama!

Palme d'Or

at the Cannes film festival

Palme, Olof

(1927-86) Swedish prime minister who was assassinated in a Stockholm street (not Olaf)

panacea

a remedy for all ills; so it's a misuse of the word to say (as we did) that “exercise is no panacea for depression”

panama hat**P&O**

Pandora's box**panelled, panelling, panellist**

two Ls

panic buy

noun; **panic-buy** verb

panjandrum

a pretentious or self-important person in authority

Panjshir valley

of Afghanistan

antyhose

not antihose, normally tights in the UK; despite comprising one garment, they are plural

antywaist

insult favoured by rightwing politicians and talkshow hosts in the US

paparazzo

plural paparazzi; named after a character in Fellini's 1960 film *La Dolce Vita*

paperboy, papergirl

but paper round

paperclip**papier-mache**

no accents

paraffin

rather than kerosene, except in relation to aircraft fuel

parallel, paralleled**Paralympic Games**

or just Paralympics, or the Games

paraphernalia

takes a singular verb: I save all the paraphernalia that accompanies every box set

parent-teacher association

abbreviation PTA

parentheses

If the sentence is logically and grammatically complete without the information contained within the parentheses (round brackets), the punctuation stays outside the brackets.

(A complete sentence that stands alone in parentheses starts with a capital letter and ends with a stop.)

“Square brackets,” the grammarian said, “are used in direct quotes when an interpolation [a note from the writer or editor, not uttered by the speaker] is added to provide essential information”

parents

Partners have children with, not by, a woman ie Joe Bloggs has three children with his wife, Jo, not three children by Jo

Parkinson's disease

is the proper name but it is acceptable to call it Parkinson's

Parkinson's law

“Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion”

parkrun

lower case; free weekly running event held in parks around the world

parliament, parliamentary

but Houses of Parliament.

Initial capital for parliaments referred to by their name in the relevant language, eg Bundestag, Duma, Folketing, Knesset

parliamentary Labour party

PLP after first mention

Parma ham

but parmesan cheese

Parole Board**partakes**

If you must, it is partakes of, not partakes in, but it sounds pompous and quaint

Parthenon marbles

official name, recognised by both Britain and Greece, for the Elgin marbles

partially or partly?

Use partial or partially to mean the opposite of impartial; otherwise partly is generally preferable: “I may be being partial, but booking me to stay in a partly built hotel merits a refund”

part-time**partwork**

one in a series of regularly published supplements or magazines

party

lc in name of organisation, eg Conservative party, Monster Raving Loony party

Pashtuns

(singular Pashtun; they speak Pashtu) make up about 40% of the Afghan population (called Pathans during the British Raj); a significant proportion of Pakistan's population is also Pashtun

pasodoble

not paso doble; plural pasodobles

passerby

plural passersby

passive voice

active verbs are much more effective, especially in headlines: compare "my hamster was eaten by Freddie Starr" with "Freddie Starr ate my hamster"

Passport Office

formerly the Identity and Passport Service

password**past or last?**

interchangeable in such phrases as "six times in the last week", "twice in the past year".

But last means "most recent" in this sentence:

"United have beaten Wednesday five times in their last six meetings"

whereas past refers to the past as a whole in this sentence:

"United have beaten Wednesday five times in their past six meetings" (suggesting they have only ever played each other six times)

paté

no circumflex accent needed, but keep the acute to avoid confusion with pate

Patent Office

now the Intellectual Property Office, responsible for copyright, designs, patents and trademarks

patients

are discharged from hospital, not released

patronise

To patronise is to be condescending about someone or something. If you use it to mean shop somewhere ("I patronise my local Budgens"), you will sound like a twerp

payback, paycheck, payday, payoff, payout, payslip, paywall**pay packet****pdf****peacekeeper, peacetime**

Peak District**Pearl Harbor****peccadillo**

plural peccadilloes

pedaller

pedals (eg a bicycle)

pedlar

peddles (eg drugs)

pedalo

plural pedalos

pedro giménez

white grape grown in South America

pedro ximénez

white grape grown in Spain (and type of sherry)

peers

Our style is to refer to peers by the name by which they are most widely known, which in most cases will be the one they had before their peerage. Use this at first mention, a simple title (Lord or Lady) at second mention, and thereafter surname only. Some examples:

Andrew Adonis (first mention), Lord Adonis (second mention), Adonis (thereafter).

Paddy Ashdown, Lord Ashdown, Ashdown.

Sebastian Coe, Lord Coe, Coe.

Norman Foster, Lord Foster, Foster.

Tony Hall, Lord Hall, Hall.

Greville Janner, Lord Janner, Janner.

Jenny Jones, Lady Jones, Jones.

Martha Lane Fox, Lady Lane-Fox (note hyphen), Lane Fox.

Andrew Lloyd Webber, Lord Lloyd-Webber (note hyphen), Lloyd Webber.

Peter Mandelson, Lord Mandelson, Mandelson.

David Owen, Lord Owen, Owen.

John Prescott, Lord Prescott, Prescott.

John Reid, Lord Reid, Reid.

Richard Rogers, Lord Rogers, Rogers.

Chris Smith, Lord Smith, Smith.

Sayeeda Warsi, Lady Warsi, Warsi.

For people who were not widely known before becoming peers, or who are better known by their title, use a simple title at first mention, and thereafter surname only. Examples:

T

Lord Sewel (first mention), Sewel (thereafter).

Lady Stowell, Stowell.

Even if you claim to be on good terms with the peer in question, avoid such constructions as “Lady Helena Kennedy” or “Baroness Shirley Williams”: call them Helena Kennedy QC at first mention, then Lady Kennedy, then Kennedy; Shirley Williams, then Lady Williams, then Williams.

Do not use Baron, Baroness etc unless there is a particular reason to do so – for example, for satirical or ironic purposes (“Baron Mandelson of Foy in the county of Herefordshire and Hartlepool in the county of Durham”).

Where two or more peers share the same name, make it clear which one you are writing about, for example:

Lola Young, the former actor, artist and academic (first mention), Lady Young of Hornsey (second mention), thereafter Young.

Barbara Young, a former chief executive of the Environment Agency and Care Quality Commission (first mention), Lady Young of Old Scone (second mention), thereafter Young.

Peers in historical pieces should be given their titles only if they had received them at the time, for example Herbert Asquith’s Liberal government and Margaret Thatcher’s Tory government (not Lord Asquith’s, Lady Thatcher’s) – they had not yet been given peerages

peewit

peking duck

pendant

noun; pendent adjective

peninsula

noun; peninsular adjective

penknife

penny, pence

1p is one penny, not “one pence”

pensioners

not “old age pensioners” or “OAPs”; older people is preferable to “elderly people” or (even worse) “the elderly”.

While this term is useful in headlines, it should be avoided in text as a description of an individual. As one of our readers notes: “This usage defines older people by their non-participation in the workforce and immediately typifies them as dependent drains on the public purse. Rupert Murdoch and Michael Caine are never described as ‘pensioners’ because they are perceived as still contributing to the economy, so does the term only apply to the little people?” Reporters should ask what job people

used to do and then describe them as a retired banker/powerboat racer or former whatever (including homemaker)

peony

flower

people-smuggling

with a hyphen. Consider the ambiguity in sentences such as: “The problem of people smuggling between north Africa and Europe has increased.” There is usually no need to hyphenate **people smuggler**

Pepsi-Cola

TM; a brand of cola; the company is PepsiCo

per cent

% in headlines and copy

percentage rises

seem to give us a lot of problems: an increase from 3% to 5% is a 2 percentage point increase or a 2-point increase, not a 2% increase; any sentence saying “such and such rose or fell by X%” should be considered and checked carefully

peremptory

not open to challenge; **perfunctory** careless: if you carry out a task in a perfunctory way, you may face peremptory dismissal

Pérez de Cuéllar, Javier

Peruvian diplomat and former UN secretary general

perfect storm

a perfect cliché, best avoided

performance-related pay**Performing Right Society**

not Rights

permissible**Peronists**

supporters of the nationalist/populist ideology of the late Argentinian president Juan Domingo Perón

personal equity plans

were known as Peps

personal independence payment (Pip)**persons**

are people in our papers, even if they are the luckiest persons in the world

Perspex

TM

perspicaciousshrewd; **perspicuous** easily understood**peruse**

Some maintain that to peruse is to scrutinise or study carefully, rather than browse or skim, although Samuel Johnson defined it in the latter sense. So if you use it your meaning will be unclear and, even if you are being ironic, you will sound pretentious

peshmerga

Kurdish armed fighters (it means “those who face death”)

Peterhouse, Cambridge

not “Peterhouse College”

PETN

pentaerythritol tetranitrate, a powerful explosive favoured by terrorists because its colourless crystals are hard to detect in a sealed container

petri dish**PFAS**

stands for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, so no need to add an extra s to make it plural. Sometimes known as “forever chemicals”

pH**PhD****phenomenon**

plural phenomena

the Philippines

inhabited by Filipinos (male) and Filipinas (female); adjective Filipino for both sexes, but Philippine for, say, a Philippine island or the Philippine president

Philips

electronics company; Phillips auctioneers, screwdriver

philistine

lc unless you are talking about the Old Testament Philistines

Phnom Penh**phone hacking**

no hyphen for the noun, but hyphenated when used adjectivally, eg the PCC responded with its customary vigour to the phone-hacking scandal

phoney

not phony

phosphorus

not phosphorous

photocall, photocopy, photofit, photojournalism, photoshoot**photo-finish****photo opportunity****pi**

the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter, as every schoolgirl knows

picaresque or picturesque?

A picaresque novel is one in which the hero is a rogue who has a series of adventures, for example Henry Fielding's *The Adventures of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749) or John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1980). Nothing to do with picturesque, which means visually pleasing

picket

noun (one who pickets), not picketer; picketed, picketing

pick-me-up

You might pick yourself up with one

piecework**pigeonhole**

verb or noun: I will not be pigeonholed as someone who puts everyone in a pigeonhole

Pigs

should not be used as an acronym for Portugal, Ireland (or Italy), Greece and Spain in stories about eurozone countries whose economies are deemed more embattled than others

pigsty

plural pigsties

pilates

fitness exercises developed by Joseph Pilates in the early 20th century

the pill

contraceptive

pillbox**pilot**

a maritime pilot is someone with expertise in manoeuvring vessels and knowledge of a local stretch of water who helps ships navigate their way in confined conditions. Saying someone who is inexpertly steering a small boat or dinghy is piloting it gives a misleading impression

Pimm's

the most popular version is Pimm's No 1 cup, which has gin as its base (the others are or were No 2, whisky; No 3, brandy; No 4, rum; No 5, rye; and No 6, vodka)

pin

or pin number (we realise pin stands for personal identification number), not Pin or PIN number

Pinocchio**pinstripe**

suit, not pinstriped

Pipa

Protect Intellectual Property Act

pipe bomb, but **pipeline****Pissarro, Camille**

(1830-1903) French impressionist painter; his son Lucien (1863-1944) was also an artist

pixelated

an image divided into pixels, the basic unit of representation on a television or computer screen, or to display a person or object in pixels to disguise their identity

pixilated

drunk

PKK

Kurdistan Workers' party

placename**plainclothes**

detectives

plane

a higher plane, not a higher plain (unless literally)

planets

take initial cap: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune (note that Pluto is now classified as a dwarf planet, along with Ceres and Eris); the sun and the Earth's moon are lc, but named moons are capped up,: Europa, Io, etc

planning

not "forward planning"

Planning Inspectorate

handles planning inquiries and appeals in England and Wales

plaster of paris

plateau

plural plateaux

plateglass**platform 2, platform 9¾, etc****platypus**

plural platypuses

playwright

although they write

Play-Doh

TM but you can say play-dough

play down

although “downplay” is becoming increasingly popular

playing the race card

an overused phrase

playoff

noun, but two words as a verb, as in Wigan will play off against St Helens

PlayStation**plc**

not PLC

plea, pledge

words used all the time by journalists (particularly when writing headlines), but only rarely by normal people

pleaded

not pled

pleasantry

a playful word or joke, not just something pleasant

plebeian

not plebian

pluses

rather than plusses

pocketbook, pocketknife

but pocket money

poet laureate

Carol Ann Duffy took over from Andrew Motion in 2009

‘poet laureate of punk’

a cliché best avoided, not least because we have used it to describe the following people: Patti Smith (who has perhaps the best claim to the title), John Cooper Clarke, Ian Dury, Elvis Costello, Iggy Pop, Dee Dee Ramone, Katie Harkin (Sky Larkin, Sleater-Kinney) and Tim “TV” Smith (the Adverts)

poetry

Ideally, run line by line, as it was written:

I struck the board and cry’d, ‘No more;
I will abroad.’
What, shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free; free as the rode,
Loose as the winde, as large as store.

If you don’t have room to run it line by line, separate the lines with spaces and a slash:

I struck the board and cry’d, ‘No more; / I will abroad.’ / What, shall I ever sigh and pine? / My lines and life are free; free as the rode, / Loose as the winde, as large as store.

Italics are acceptable, though not essential

point-to-point**pointe**

(ballet); on pointe, not on point or en pointe

Pokémon

singular and plural

Polari

A form of language used mostly by gay men and lesbians, derived in part from slang used by sailors, actors and prostitutes and popularised in the 1960s BBC radio comedy *Round the Horne* by the characters Julian and Sandy. Example: “Vada the dolly eke on the bona omee ajax” (Look at the gorgeous face on that nice man over there); “naff” is an example of Polari that has passed into more general use, as are “butch”, “camp” and “dizzy”

Polaroid**pole position**

The fastest qualifier in a motor race starts from pole position or on pole, alongside one other driver (on occasion, two or more others) on the front row of the grid.

Take care if using metaphorically, and do not spell it “poll position”, even in electronic stories, as we have been known to do

Police Federation

Normally no need to use its full title, the Police Federation of England and Wales, but note initial caps. The style for individual force federations is Metropolitan police federation, Essex police federation, etc.

It's fine to use "the federation" after first mention but make it clear whether you are referring to the national body or a local one

police forces

Metropolitan police (the Met after first mention), West Midlands police, New York police department (NYPD at second mention), etc, but note Royal Military Police and British Transport Police.

Police forces are normally plural: Kent police are investigating, etc, but note that while the Metropolitan police are plural, the Met is singular, as is Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI at second mention)

police ranks

Use abbreviation at first mention, then just surname, eg DCI Jane Tennison, thereafter Tennison.

Other abbreviations: PC (for both male and female police constables), Sgt, DS (Detective Sergeant), Insp, DI, Ch Insp, DCI, Supt, Ch Supt, Det Supt (Detective Superintendent), DCS.

Do not abbreviate commissioner, commander, etc

Chief constable is a job, not a title: John Smith, chief constable of Greater Manchester; Smith at second mention.

In general, use police officer rather than policewoman or policeman; if their gender is relevant to the story, use female/male police officer.

police units

lc: anti-terrorist branch, flying squad, fraud squad, special branch, vice squad, etc

policyholder, policymaker, policymaking

"Polish death camps"

and similar phrases confusing location with perpetrator should not be used when referring to countries occupied by Nazi Germany during the second world war; the appropriate phrase here would be "Nazi death camps in German-occupied Poland" or similar

politburo

political correctness

a term to be avoided on the grounds that it is, in Polly Toynbee's words, "an empty rightwing smear designed only to elevate its user"

political language

Use quotation marks around partisan or questionable phrases such as “big society” (at first mention), “broken Britain” and “death tax”

political parties

Always lowercase for the word “party”: Labour party, Green party, Communist party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist), UK Independence party, etc.

Note that it is Scottish National (not “Nationalist”) party; Plaid Cymru; and in the US, Democratic (not “Democrat”) party, although its supporters are Democrats.

Abbreviate where appropriate (for example, election results) as follows: Con, Lab, Lib Dem, Green, SNP, PC, Ukip.

In Northern Ireland: Social Democratic and Labour party (abbreviation: SDLP), Sinn Féin (SF), Alliance party, Democratic Unionist party (DUP), Ulster Unionist party (UUP).

Political parties are normally singular, eg Labour is promising to raise taxes, the Conservative party is not very compassionate; but the Conservatives are the nasty party, the Liberal Democrats lost most of their seats, etc

pollack

not pollock

polo neck**pomp or prime?**

We should say that someone is “in his prime” rather than the football commentator’s cliché “in his pomp”

poncey

not poncy

pond

not a terribly witty way to refer to the Atlantic (“on the other side of the pond”) which, in the words of one Guardian writer, is “smug, hackneyed, old-fashioned, inaccurate and generally crap”

Pontins**poo**

what George W Bush’s dog did on the White House lawn, but you might pooh-pooh someone’s ideas

pop art**pope, the**

and papacy, pontiff; not always necessary to give his name in full

poppadom

poppers

alkyl nitrite, not nitrate

popular

liked; **populist** wants to be liked: a party's policies may be populist, but its politicians may remain unpopular

Popular Conservatism

or PopCon for short, is a rightwing grouping within the Conservative party

populism

Broadly speaking, this refers to political actions or strategies that claim to promote the interests and views of ordinary people, often in opposition to the perceived elite. Populism is often mistakenly used as a synonym for far-right politics but populists can appeal to people across the political spectrum so be clear about what kind of populism is being referred to eg leftwing populism, the far-right populist etc

pore or pour?

You might pore over the style guide after pouring a cup of coffee

pornography

is preferable, as a term, to “porn”

Portakabin, Portaloo

TM; say portable building, portable toilets, or you are certain to receive a letter from the Portakabin lawyers pointing out the error of your ways

Porthmadog

not Portmadoc

Portland stone

comes from the Isle of Portland in Dorset; **portland cement** doesn't

Port of London authority

PLA on second mention

portuguese man o'war

not strictly a jellyfish, although jelly-like; lowercase P unless you are writing about the 15th-century Portuguese navy.

As with, say, bass, deer and sheep, the plural is the same word as the singular: one portuguese man o'war, two portuguese man o'war, etc, unless you really are talking about ships, in which case it's men o'war

post office operators

gender-neutral, preferred term for postmasters, postmistresses, subpostmasters and subpostmistresses

postal workers

not postmen

postcode**Postcomm**

UK postal services regulator; its full name (which you do not need to use) is Postal Services Commission

postgraduate**Post-it**

TM

postmodern, postmodernist**postmortem**

one word, as adjective or noun

postnatal**Post Office**

cap up the organisation, but you buy stamps in a post office or sub-post office

postwar

but make it clear if you are referring to the second world war

potatoes

lower case, eg king edward, maris piper, unless a protected origin variety such as Jersey Royals

potentially

rarely necessary: verbs such as could and might already convey potentiality, so “could potentially” and “might potentially” are tautologous, as well as clumsy

pound

in text, symbol £ only when figures are used (Britain saves the pound; Oliver saved £1; pound (weight) abbreviates to lb, eg 2lb

POV

abbreviation for point of view

Pov

term coined by a Guardian journalist to depict laboured attempts to produce synonyms by writers seeking what Fowler called “elegant variation” (and Orwell “inelegant variation”), often descending into cliché or absurdity. Thus Dalí becomes “the moustachioed surrealist” and Ireland “the cockatoo-shaped landmass”. Pov, incidentally, stands for “popular orange vegetable”

PoW

abbreviation for prisoner of war

Powergen

powerpop

one word; musical genre defined by nostalgia for the 60s, in the form of chiming electric guitars and vocal harmonies. Its proponents often profess to being inspired by the Beatles and the Byrds, but are never as good as either

power sharing

but hyphenate when used adjectivally, as in the power-sharing executive

powwow

avoid using as a term for a meeting unless specifically in reference to Native American custom

practice

noun; **practise** verb

practising homosexual

Do not use this expression, or the equally grotesque “active homosexual”; where it is necessary to discuss someone’s sex life, for example a story about gay clergy, it is possible to use other expressions, eg the Anglican church demands celibacy from gay clergy but permits the laity to have sexually active relationships

pre-

redundant in such newly fashionable words as pre-booked, pre-reserved, pre-ordered, and even pre-rehearsed

precede

go before; **proceed** go ahead

precipitate

sudden; **precipitous** steep

precis

singular and plural

predilection

not predeliction

pre-eminent**prefab, prefabricated****preindustrial****premier**

should be used only when constitutionally correct (eg leaders of Australian states or Canadian provinces), therefore not for Britain - do not use in headlines for British prime minister.

The Chinese traditionally give their prime minister the title of premier, eg Premier Wen Jiabao. Bermuda also has a premier rather than a prime minister

premiere

no accent

Premier League

(no longer FA Premier League or Premiership) in England; its equivalent in Scotland is the Scottish Premiership

premises

of buildings and logic

premium bonds**prenuptial**

or (if you must) **prenup**

prepayment meter**prepositions**

appeal against, protest against, over or at, not “appealed the sentence”, “protested the verdict”, etc.

Schoolchildren used to be told (by English teachers unduly influenced by Latin) that it was ungrammatical to end sentences with a preposition, a fallacy satirised by Churchill’s “this is the sort of English up with which I will not put” and HW Fowler’s “What did you bring me that book to be read to out of for?”

Take care after phrases following “to”: the subheading “to we Conservatives, Labour looks as if it’s heading back to the old horrors of the winter of discontent” drew numerous protests from readers pointing out that it should have been “to us Conservatives ... “ (The mistake was ours, not the shadow cabinet minister who wrote the piece)

prepubescent**pre-Raphaelite****prescribe, prescriptive**

do something; **proscribe, proscriptive** don’t: prescriptive grammarians love to tell you what to do and to proscribe things they disapprove of

presently

What exactly does this mean? I will tell you presently – soon – is the traditional British English usage, whereas in American English it means at present, and is usually redundant (“we are presently third in the table”). To avoid ambiguity, say *soon* when you mean soon, and don’t say anything when you mean now.

There is a similar problem with momentarily, which means for a moment or briefly in British English, and very soon to American (and some British) speakers. Best avoided

T

president

lc except in title: President Obama, but Barack Obama, the US president

president-elect**press, the**

singular: eg the British press is a shining example to the rest of the world

Press Complaints Commission

PCC on second mention

Press Gazette

formerly UK Press Gazette

pressure

Use put pressure on or pressed to mean apply pressure, ie not “the Baggies pressured [or pressurised] the Wolves defence”

prestigious

For centuries this meant deceptive, as in a conjuring trick (prestidigitation). The modern meaning is having prestige or status

Pret a Manger

food

prêt-à-porter

fashion

preteen**pretext**

by its nature false, so while it may or may not be true that Tony Blair went to war on a pretext, it is tautologous to say he did so on a false one

prevaricate

Can mean speaking or acting with intent to deceive as well as avoiding giving a direct answer or making a firm decision, so take care when accusing someone of doing it. Similar alternatives might include procrastinate (putting something off), equivocate (using ambiguous language to avoid speaking directly) or vacillate (being indecisive)

preventive

rather than preventative

prewar

but make clear which war you are talking about

PricewaterhouseCoopers

PwC after first mention; PwC Consulting, which for some reason was widely ridiculed for changing its name to Monday, was bought by IBM

pricey

not pricy

prima donna

plural prima donnas

prima facie

not italicised

primary care trusts

abolished in 2013 as part of the top-down reorganisation of the NHS that the Conservative party had promised would not happen; their work was taken over by clinical commissioning groups

primate

another word for archbishop; primate of All England: archbishop of Canterbury; primate of England: archbishop of York; but “the primate” on second reference

primates

higher members of the order Primates, essentially apes and humans

prime minister

David Cameron, the prime minister; not prime minister David Cameron or “prime minister Cameron”

primitive

should not be used to describe tribal people

[See Stone age](#)

Prince William

or the Prince of Wales at first mention; thereafter can be the prince or William

Prince's Trust**the Princess of Wales**

at first mention; thereafter can be referred to as the princess or Catherine. You can call her Kate in headlines

principal

first in importance; **principle** standard of conduct: “a vital principle, perhaps my principal rule in life, is to always split the infinitive”

principality

should not be used to describe Wales

prior to, previous to

the word you want is “before”

prise

apart, open (not prize)

prisoners

preferable term, but inmates is an acceptable alternative

prison officer

not warder, a term that the Prison Officers' Association regards as "degrading, insulting and historically inaccurate" (the Home Office changed it from warder in 1922), and not guard

Prison Service

but immigration service lc (it is properly called the Immigration and Nationality Directorate)

Pristina

the capital of Kosovo. No accents please

pristine

If you restore something to pristine splendour, you have returned it to its original state, not just given it a bit of a clean

private finance initiative

PFI on second mention

private member's bill

plural: private members' bills

privy council

but privy counsellor

prizefighter series

televised boxing tournament created by Barry Hearn

prize money**prizes**

Booker prize, Nobel prize, Whitbread prize, etc

prize winner

Two words for prize winners in general as well as when referring to a specific prize: The six prize winners included a Nobel peace prize winner, a Booker prize winner and a Whitbread prize winner

prize-winning

a prize-winning author, the Nobel peace prize-winning campaigner, etc

proactive

jargon word, best avoided

probe

a dental implement, not an inquiry or investigation

pro-choice

not pro-abortion

procrastinate

to delay or defer; often confused with prevaricate

Procter & Gamble**procurator fiscal**

Scottish public prosecutor; the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), in Scotland, more wide-ranging than the Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales, is responsible for the prosecution of crime, investigation of sudden or suspicious deaths, and investigation of complaints against the police

prodigal

means wasteful or extravagant, not a returned wanderer; the confusion arises from the biblical parable of the prodigal son, but he was prodigal because he wasted his inheritance, not because he wandered off.

Thus a prodigal striker is one who misses lots of chances to score goals, not one who has played for lots of clubs (who will also invariably be described as “much-travelled”)

profession

Strictly, to enter a profession you need a specific qualification, such as that acquired by a doctor, lawyer, social worker or teacher. As anyone with a mobile, a laptop and a bit of cheek can be a journalist, or at least claim to be one, journalism is not a profession but a trade, craft or racket. Much the same applies to politics

profile

a noun, not a verb

program

in Australia and the US, and for computer programs everywhere; otherwise

programme in the UK: “I saw a fascinating TV programme about computer programs”

prohibition

lc for US prohibition (1920-33), a result of the 18th Amendment

pro-life

should not be used to mean anti-abortion

prolific

means abundant or fruitful, so a “prolific striker” scores lots of goals; it is a positive attribute, and phrases such as “one of Britain’s most prolific paedophiles” (which used) strikes completely the wrong tone

Proms

concerts

proms

seafronts

prone

face down; **supine** face up

pronouns

Some people use they/them/their rather than he/she etc. This should be respected at the same time as avoiding creating confusion for the reader.

One option is to mention that the person uses the singular they. For example: ‘Jones, who uses they, said ...’. Alternatively, although they and their are sometimes used in the singular in speech, it may be clearer to rewrite or repeat the person’s name if the use of they/them/their is not explained. For example, “They said the show was brilliant” can simply become “Jones said the show was brilliant”

proofreader, proofreading**propeller****prophecy**

noun; prophesy verb

prophet

the prophet Muhammad

pros and cons**prosecco****prostitution**

(see sex worker)

protagonist

The person who drives the action, from the ancient Greek meaning “first actor”. Not the same as adversary or rival, so strictly you can’t have “two protagonists”

protege

male and female, no accents

protest

against, over or about – not, for example, “protest the election result”, which has appeared on our front page

Protestant**protester**

not protestor

proven

proved is the past tense of prove; beware the creeping “proven”, a term in Scottish law (“not proven”) and in certain English idioms, eg “proven record”

province

should not be used to describe Northern Ireland. Ulster is one of the four provinces of Ireland, comprising nine counties - six in Northern Ireland, and three in the Republic of Ireland (Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan)

proviso

plural provisos

Ps and Qs**psychopathic/psychotic**

A psychopath is a person with a personality disorder characterised by a tendency to commit antisocial and sometimes violent acts, and an inability to feel guilty about them; a person with psychosis has a mental disorder in which their contact with reality is highly distorted

publicly

not publically

public-private partnership

PPP on second mention

Public Record Office

merged with the Historical Manuscripts Commission in 2003 to form the National Archives

public schools

are actually private schools, so that is what we should call them

Puffa

TM; say padded or quilted jacket

pundit

self-appointed expert

Punjabi

for the language, rather than Panjabi

purchase

as a noun, perhaps, but the verb is buy

puree

no accent

purler

as in “an absolute purler” (not pearler)

purposely

on purpose; **purposefully** with determination

put

athletics; putt golf

Pwllheli**P-word**

this racist term is 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. Given the term is not universal, ensure there is adequate context for readers to understand

Pyeongchang

venue for the 2018 Winter Olympics. Not PyeongChang, the spelling adopted by the South Korean government as a rebranding exercise just for the Games

pygmy

a word thought to be derived from Greek to describe something that is small, it has been applied as an umbrella term for people from ethnic groups in central Africa and elsewhere, and also to describe small species of plants and animals. Please do not use it as a pejorative in phrases such as “moral pygmies”. If referring to the ethnic groups it is preferable to use their individual names, such as the Mbuti

pyjamas

not pajamas

pyrrhic

A pyrrhic victory is not a hollow one, as often assumed, but one achieved at great cost. King Pyrrhus of Epirus defeated the Romans twice, in 280BC and 279BC, but suffered such heavy losses that he said one more such victory would undo him

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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