Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark

MFA STYLE GUIDE

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING IN ENGLISH FOR THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF DENMARK

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words, concise, empty jargon, hyphen, spelling, media, grammar, British clichés, style, comma, message, ?, dash, policy, well-written, correct,

SECTION 1: MFA STYLE

Clear, effective, and correctly written communication is central to good civil service.

Well-delivered English communication is also essential to:

- ensuring that the MFA's policies are understood by an international audience;
- enabling smooth communication between missions abroad and HQ; and to
- assuring terminological consistency in all the ministry's dealings.

Once a recognisable writing style is established, this can also become a branding tool and a marketing mechanism.

MFA Style is correct, courteous, and contemporary. But first and foremost, it is strategic. Know your terminology and use it consistently; always suit your language (level of formality, etc.) to the specific kind of text you are producing, and never underestimate the importance of your receiver.
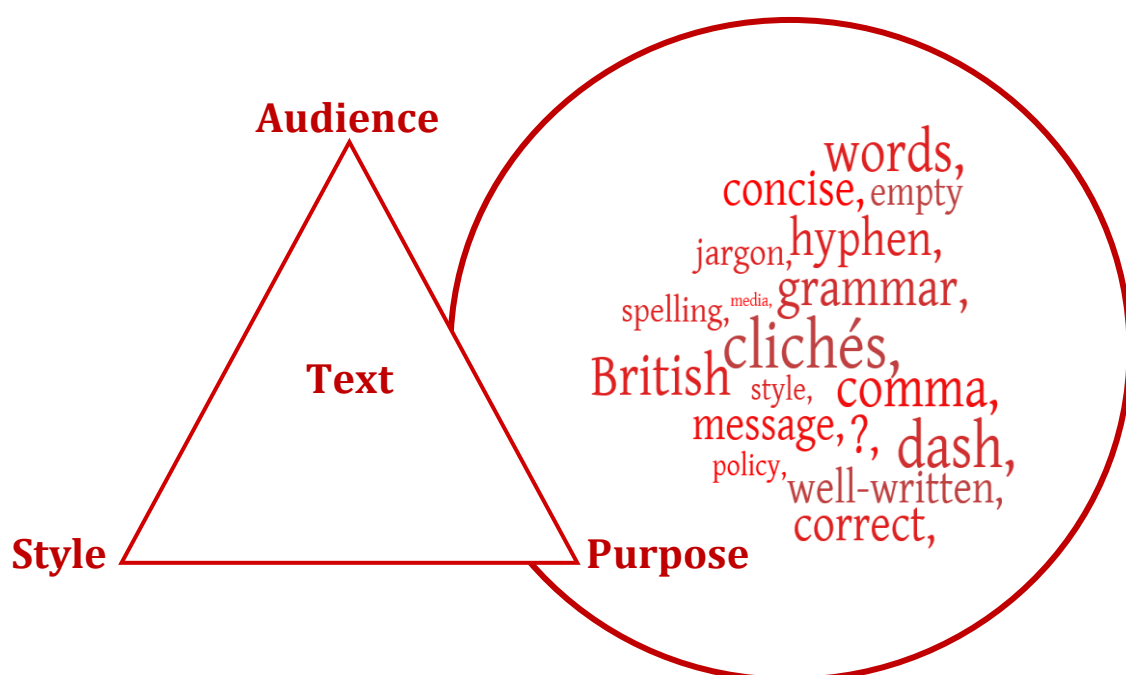

WRITING FOR THE MFA

The purpose of this guide is to encourage clear, concise writing and consistent editorial practice across the entire Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark. The guide identifies aspects of English usage that cause the most common uncertainties and misunderstandings for Danes and native speakers alike, and sets out the style appropriate to the MFA's portfolio in particular, and to civil service in general.

We produce many types of written communication in the MFA, aimed both at internal and external receivers. Written products include a range of policy papers, ministerial briefings, memos, *note verbales*, cables, guidelines, minutes, contracts, framework agreements, letters, emails, news items, blogs, tweets, SoMe posts, speeches, and so on. Some of these have their own rules (social media, for example; or speeches, which abide by rules of oral composition as much as they rely on written rules). This guide will help you write appropriately, correctly, strategically, and (hopefully) creatively for the MFA.

THE AUDIENCE AND YOU

Always write with your audience in mind, using simple and engaging language that commands attention and keeps it. Clear and correct writing shows respect for your reader/receiver. It takes more effort to write well, but if you take the trouble to do so, your audience will thank you. This guide is here to help you navigate a wide range of aspects of written English. Familiarise yourself with the guide; use it as a practical reference work. The idea is to make you feel confident enough to add your own style to the rules and recommendations below.

Audience

Text

Style   **Purpose**

words, concise, empty jargon, hyphen, spelling, media, grammar, British clichés, style, comma, message, ?, dash, policy, well-written, correct,

SECTION 2: FIRST PRINCIPLES

We can start by setting out some fundamental principles of good written communication – in any language:

1. use plain language and avoid long or complicated words when short or easy ones are available;

2. suit the message to the medium and *vice versa;*

3. whenever possible, use active language, not passive. Active language is usually clearer, more direct, and does not disguise who is doing what. For example: *We will make a decision on your application once we have received your letter*, not *Once we have received your letter, a decision will be made on your application*; *We recommend that you*…, not *It is recommended that…* Government communication may require passive constructions from time to time. Always feel free to strive for the alternative;

4. avoid technical language and jargon unless you are addressing a specialist audience and even then, use it with care;

5. use short sentences without multiple sub-clauses or too many adverbials;

6. you can usually remove a third to a half of what you write in a first draft;

7. get a colleague to check what you have written, especially if it will be read outside the ministry. Read back 'aloud' what you write. If it sounds wrong or clumsy, then the meaning is probably obscure or difficult to follow, which means you are not communicating effectively.

IF IN DOUBT, CONSULT GEORGE ORWELL'S FIVE GOLDEN RULES FOR GOOD WRITING:

1. never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print (i.e., do not use clichés);

2. never use a long word where a short one will do;

3. if it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out;

4. never use the passive when you can use the active; and

5. never use a foreign phrase, a scientific or jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

If relevant and within your mandate, think how you would describe the issue you are writing about to a family member or friend. Too often, we use technical terms that most people, including some of our own colleagues, do not understand.

Our aim should be to open up government information — when possible — so that everyone can understand it. You will find a list of additional sources and guides to good writing at the end of this guide.

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SECTION 3: THE STYLE GUIDE

SPELLING

The MFA uses **British English spelling** in all written communication. Only use American spelling when quoting directly from American texts. NB: If you are writing about US bodies or institutions, these may retain their original spellings, e.g. *Department of Defense*.

Set your spell checker to British English (in Danish: '*Engelsk Storbritannien'*) in Word, Outlook, UMbrella, etc., and if in doubt, check the Oxford dictionaries at https://www.lexico.com/en. Follow the first spelling given.

SPELLING CONVENTIONS

- Always follow **standard British usage**, i.e. *programme* not *program* (unless we are talking about software/IT)*; centre* not *center*, etc. (See also p. 21).

- Words ending in *-ise/-ize*: use *-ise*. Both spellings are correct in British English, but the *-ise* form is now much more common in the media and open publications.

- The *-yse* form for such words as *paralyse* and *analyse* is the only correct spelling in British English.

- Double consonants: words that end in *-l* take a double *l* after a short vowel when adding *-ing* or *-ed* to verbs and when adding *-er* to make nouns from verbs: *travel* → *travelling, travelled, traveller*; *level* → *levelling, levelled, leveller*.

- Follow British usage of **s** inside nouns like *organisation, mobilisation*, etc.

- Note that **per cent** is written as **two words** in British English*.* Use *per cent* whenever the number is also spelled out in words: *twenty per cent.* With figures, you may use the percentage sign: *%*. **Always be consistent** (See also p. 26).

- Confusion between English words: look out for errors involving the pairs below:
    dependent (adj. or noun) — dependant (noun only)
    license (verb) — licence (noun)
    practise (verb) — practice (noun)
    principal (adj. or noun) — principle (noun)
    stationary (adj.) — stationery (noun)
    all together (=in a body) — altogether (=entirely);
    discreet (=under the radar, careful) — discrete (=individual or detached).

- Tricky plural forms:
    addendum — addenda
    appendix — appendices
    consortium — consortia
    crisis — crises

criterion — criteria
formula — formulas (politics) or formulae (science)
forum — forums or fora
index — indexes (books) or indices (science, economics)
medium — media (press, communications, IT)
memorandum — memorandums or memoranda
moratorium — moratoriums or moratoria
phenomenon — phenomena
referendum — referendums or referenda.

ABBREVIATIONS

The reason for using abbreviated forms should always be **to help the reader**. Do <u>not</u> assume the intended audience is familiar with specialist or technical acronyms or internal MFA abbreviations, acronyms, or initialisms.

When an abbreviation is not familiar to readers, write out the full term first, followed by the abbreviation in brackets: *The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC).* Hereafter, you can use the abbreviation, *IPPC*, for later references.

'Normal' abbreviations/acronyms/initialisms that are widely understood and used, such as *i.e.*, *e.g.*, *IT*, *PC*, *EU*, *MP*, *NB*, *PM*, etc., do of course not need spelling out.

Abbreviations are shortened forms, such as *Mr*, *Mrs*, *Dr*, *St* (saint or street), but are <u>pronounced</u> the same as the full word. Full stops after the abbreviation are <u>not</u> needed if the abbreviation ends in the same letter as the full word (*Dr* or *St* are without a full stop, whereas truncated forms such as *org.* takes a full stop at the end like: *Jan., Feb., Sun., Co., fig., etc., cf., chap., dict., ibid.,* etc.).

Acronyms are formed from the initial letters of other words and <u>pronounced as a word</u>. Examples are *NATO* or *UNESCO.*   Acronyms are usually in capital letters and without full stops. (*Danida* – in lower case – is an exception). Acronyms do **not take 'the'** in front of them!

Initialisms are formed the same way as acronyms, but not pronounced as words. Instead, the individual letters are pronounced: *MFA, WTO, UN, EU, GPS, URL, MPC*. Most acronyms are in capital letters without full stops (*PhD* is an exception).

Use *'the'* in front of most initialisms when used as nouns: *the MFA, the UN, the EU,* etc. **Use a/an if they are used as adjectives**: *an EU directive, a UN report, a NATO strategy, an MPC delivery, an MFA representative*, etc.

Initialisms that abbreviate the **names of countries do <u>not</u> take full stops**: *the US, the UK, UK trade interests*, *US troops*, etc.

Plural forms of abbreviations and initialisms **do not add an apostrophe**. They simply add a lower-case **-s**: *SDGs, MPs, URLs, MPCs, PhDs.*

For useful lists of EU and UN acronyms/initialisms see: [EU Abbreviations and Acronyms](#) / [UN Acronyms](#). For English translations of MFA initialisms (departments and units, etc.) see the MFA [organigram](#).

Latin abbreviations

Note that *e.g.* and *i.e.* are never capitalised (even at the beginning of footnotes) and they are separated by full stops (although *The Economist* now writes *eg* and *ie …*).

Use a comma, colon, or dash before *e.g.* and *i.e.*, but no comma, colon, or dash after them. If a list begins with *e.g.* do not end it with *etc.*

Other common Latin abbreviations include: *cf., et al., etc., f., ff. i.a.,* and *NB*.
Note that *am* and *pm* and *NB* do not take full stops.

The Latin *ca.* is rarely used in English. Instead, use *approx.*, which is short for *approximately.*

Inter alia should be used sparingly, and only in legal context material.

CONTRACTIONS

Use common sense. Although you might use *hasn't*, *can't*, *won't* and so on in more informal communications such as Skype chats, blogs, certain news items, or some emails, they are inappropriate in formal correspondence, formal publications, policy papers, and in most written briefing contexts (memoranda; cables; verbal notes) In speech manuscripts, use contractions only if agreed with the speaker.

HYPHENS AND COMPOUND WORDS

Use hyphens sparingly but to good purpose. Do not use hyphens as parentheses. Use brackets "( )" or dashes "—" instead.

Hyphens in adjectives

Use hyphens in compound adjectives that come before a noun, for example: *user-focused services, high-ranking government official, well-established procedure, user-friendly software, two-day meeting, long-term effects, cooling-off period.* Also: *policy-related issue, crime-fighting unit, data-driven analysis*, and *30-year rule, two-year ban* (numbers as adjectives).

The above rule applies only when the compound adjectives pre-modify a noun. Compare: *long-term effects*, but *policy for the long term; large-scale redundancies*, but *production on a large scale; low-interest loans*, but *loans with low interest; flood-control measures*, but *measures for flood control.*

Hyphens are not used between an adverb and an adjective or verb qualifying a noun. For example: *totally enclosed system, specially designed protocol*. Never: *totally-enclosed, specially-designed.*

Hyphens in verbs

Sometimes hyphens are absolutely necessary to clarify the sense: *re-cover — recover; re-creation — recreation; re-form — reform; re-count — recount.* Use your common sense.

Hyphens and prefixes

Prefixes are usually hyphenated in most 'modern' words: *anti-smoking campaign, co-sponsor, ex-army, non-resident, quasi-autonomous*, etc.

If prefixes are of Latin or Greek origin, however, they tend to drop the hyphen as they become established: *antibody, codetermination, codecision, cofinancing, cooperation, subcommittee.* Others are more resistant to losing the hyphen: *end-user, end-phase, end-product.*

Prefixes before proper names are always hyphenated: *pro-American, intra-EU, Pan-Arabism, trans-European.*

Hyphens and nouns

Most **compound nouns** in English are written as **two separate words**: *action plan, lunch meeting, development policy, policy paper, trade agreement, trade promotion, style guide,* etc.

Some compounds have developed into single words (via a hyphenated version): *data base, data-base, database*. If in doubt, check at Oxford dictionaries: https://www.lexico.com/en.

Nouns from phrasal verbs can be hyphenated or written as single words. The situation is fluid: *handout, takeover, comeback* but *follow-up, run-up, spin-off.* Check at Oxford dictionaries: https://www.lexico.com/en.

'Optical' Hyphens

Use hyphens between two consonants or two vowels: *aero-elastic, anti-intellectual, part-time, re-election, re-entry, re-examine*. They may however be omitted in frequently used words: *bookkeeping*, *cooperation*, *coordination*, *macroeconomic*, *microeconomic.*

Hyphens in Numbers

Numbers take hyphens when they are spelled out. Fractions take hyphens when used attributively, but not when used as nouns: *twenty-eight, two-thirds completed* but *an increase of two thirds.*

Coordinated compound words – where does the hyphen go?

Hyphenated compounds may be coordinated as follows: *in- and out-going visits*, *gamma- and beta-emitters, acid- and heat-resistant,* etc. Alternatively, they may be fully written out: *macrostructural and microstructural changes, ingoing and outgoing visits*, etc.

PUNCTUATION

COMMA

Commas tend to be used excessively. They should only be used to clarify and avoid ambiguity. Remember, a good English sentence does not rely on commas to make sense.

A useful exercise for placing commas is to read the sentence aloud and hear where the natural pauses fall.

- Do **not put a comma before 'that'**. (Unless an adverbial element has been inserted in front of it, in which case this adverbial comes with its own commas. For example: *Consequently**,** that became the solution; We find, however**,** that country x is still eligible for sector support.*

- If you start your sentence with a **main clause** – followed by a sub-clause: **no comma**: *I will meet you tomorrow if I can leave the office early.*
  If you start your sentence with a **sub-clause** – followed by a main clause, you **must add a comma** after the sub-clause: *If I can leave the office early**,** I will meet you….*

- In **defining relative** clauses there is **no comma** before *who, that*, or *which* in the relative clause. For example: *the translations that have been revised can be sent off now* (meaning only the revised ones). In **non-defining relative clauses** (parenthetical non-essential clauses) you must **add commas** to the relative clause. For example: *The translations, which have been revised, can now be sent out* (meaning they have all been revised, and you are just throwing in this information for good measure).

- Comma **between two main clauses**: use a comma to separate two **long** clauses linked by *and*, *but*, or *or*: *The committee on digital innovation agreed to partially sponsor the conference**,** but could not agree on how much to donate.* If the clauses on either side of the *and*, *but*, or *or* are **short**, you can leave out the comma: *she left and he stayed.*

- **Front adverbials, introductory phrases**, and **'tag phrases':** if a phrase is intended to complement or introduce information in a sentence and has a separate emphasis of its own, it is **set off by a comma**. If a phrase is tagged onto a sentence at the end, you put a **comma before the tag**: *Mindful of the need to act swiftly**,** the ministry is willing to reassess the case; The event has only just been advertised**,** as you know.*

- **Time adverbials** and other **single-word adverbials** at the **front of sentences**: you can use either *In 2023**,** the committee took three decisions* or *In 2023 the committee took three decisions.* We recommend the former.

- **Lists** / items in a **series**: add a comma for each item listed if the listed items <u>differ</u> substantially in meaning. List commas (between adjectives, etc.) must aid understanding and not create unnecessary pauses. For example: *A successful well-established mutual relationship* is a clear unambiguous phrase that does not need

commas, but *The departmental colours include red, blue, mid-blue, blue and turquoise, and green…* would be thoroughly confusing without commas.

An additional comma ('the **Oxford Comma**') should be inserted in lists before the final 'and' (or 'or') for emphasis or for clarification: *sugar, beef, veal, and milk products.* Please use the **Oxford Comma** when writing for the MFA.

A **comma also comes before *etc.*** in a series: *sugar, beef, milk products, etc.* but not if no series is involved: *They discussed milk products etc., then moved on to sugar.*

FULL STOP

- No further full stop is required if a sentence ends with an abbreviation that takes a full stop (e.g. 'etc.') or with a quotation complete in itself that ends in a full stop, a question mark, or an exclamation mark before the final quotes: *Charlemagne said 'To know another language is to have a second soul.'*

- Full stops as omission marks (ellipsis): always use three points, preceded by a space. In Word, use Alt + Ctrl + (full stop) to insert ellipsis points. The points are not enclosed in brackets, e.g. *Promoting good governance and fighting corruption … constituted two other special priorities for the Government in 2023.* If a sentence ends with ellipsis points, no fourth full stop should be added. If any other punctuation mark follows, there is no space before it.

COLON

- Colons are most often used to indicate that an expansion, qualification, or explanation is about to follow (e.g. a list of items in running text). The part before the colon must be a full sentence in its own right, but the second need not be.

- Do not use colons at the end of headings.

- Colons do not require the next word to start with a capital.

SEMICOLON

- Semicolons can be used to connect two sentences or to break up a list of categories. For example*: postgraduate studies; political science; international law and marketing studies; and HR-management studies*.
- Use a semicolon rather than a comma to combine two sentences into one without a linking conjunction: *The committee dealing with development aid agreed on a final text; however, the issue of girls' access to education was not considered.* You may also use semicolons instead of commas to separate items in a series, especially long items, or phrases that themselves contain commas.

DASHES

- Dashes can be overused and are often a sign of sloppy writing. If you use them for emphasis or parenthesis, make sure you use the *em* dash '—', In Microsoft Word, the keyboard shortcut for the *em* dash is Alt + Ctrl + - (on the numeric keypad)

- Used correctly, '—' dashes may be used to punctuate a sentence instead of commas or round brackets .They increase the contrast or emphasis of the text thus set off. Sometimes, they are particularly useful in speeches. However, use no more than one in a sentence, or — if used with inserted phrases — a set of paired dashes.

- The short dash '–' (also known as '*en*') should mainly be used to join coordinate or contrasting pairs (*the London–Paris route, the height–depth ratio*). In Microsoft Word, the keyboard shortcut for the *en* dash is Ctrl + - (on the numeric keypad).

QUESTION MARK

- Put question marks after real questions where an answer is expected.
- No question mark is needed after a request or instruction put as a question for courtesy: *Would you please sign and return the attached form*.

APOSTROPHE

- **Possessive of nouns** (genitive): the possessive form of **singular** nouns is formed by adding an **apostrophe** followed by an **–s**: *Danida's*. To form a **plural** possessive, simply add an apostrophe to the plural -s already there: *ministers' credentials, the managers' offices, etc.* Irregular plural forms like *children* and *women* add **-'s**: *Women's group.*
- **Do <u>not</u> use apostrophes in possessive pronouns**: *its, ours, theirs,* and *yours (*and be extra careful with *its. The correct possessive form is 'its'. It's = 'it is'!*).
- **Nouns ending in -s**, including proper names and abbreviations, form their singular possessive with **-'s**, just like nouns ending in other letters: *an actress's pay; Mr Jones's paper; St James's Park.*
- Do <u>not</u> add apostrophes to plurals of abbreviations*.* Plurals of abbreviations do not take an apostrophe: *MDGs, SMEs, UNSDGs*, etc.
- Do <u>not</u> add apostrophes to plurals of figures. Plurals of figures do not take an apostrophe: *Pilots of 747s undergo special training; It happened in the 1990s.*

QUOTATION MARKS

- Use double quotation marks for direct quotations. Use single quotation marks within quotes and for terms and words used in an unusual way or context: *the framework allows organisations to 'purchase' a digital delivery team*.
- Use the ellipsis symbol, *(...),* in quoted material to indicate where text has been left out, with a space before and after the symbol (except at the beginning and end of a quote).

CAPITAL LETTERS

Use capital letters / upper case when appropriate. Do not overuse.

- The titles and names of persons, bodies, programmes, legal acts, official documents, etc. are normally capitalised: *the Danish Board for International Development Cooperation, the Secretary-General of …, the Danish Institute for International Studies, the Danish Business Authority, the Home Rule Act of the Faroe Islands*, etc*.* For international organisations, follow their own practice, e.g. *the World Health Organization.*

- In a second reference to an organisation, use lower case where you are referring to it but not using its full name. That is, after having written the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark*, you can write *the **m**inistry* — with a lower-case **m** — later in your text. Exceptions include: *Act, Bill, European Union, Parliament*, which stay capitalised.

- Do <u>not</u> use capitals for *spring, summer, autumn, winter.*

- Use capitals for weekdays, months, and feast-days (*Monday, March, Ascension Day, Constitution Day, Easter Sunday, Whitsunday, Christmas Day,* etc.).

- Geographical locations are capitalised: *Denmark, Nuuk, Rome, Sahel, Silicon Valley*.

- Geographical directions: we do not use capitals for *north, north-west, north-western*, etc. unless they are part of an administrative or political unit or regional entity. Compare: *South Africa, Northern Ireland,* but *southern Africa, northern France.* Note, however, *Central and Eastern European countries* (capitalised because the connotations are more political than geographic)*.*

NUMBERS, DATES, FIGURES

DATES
- **The correct MFA style for writing dates** is ***24 April 2025*** (Day Month Year).
  Do <u>not</u> use *April 24 2025, April 24th 2025, the 24th of April 2025, 04 24 2025, 24. april* 2025, or other variations.

- When referring to decades, write: *the 1990s, the 2010s* (<u>no apostrophe</u>).

- Note the following patterns: *from 1990 to 1995* (<u>not</u> *from 1990–95*); *between 1990 and 1995* (<u>not</u> *between 1990–95*); *1990 to 1995 inclusive* (<u>not</u> *1990–95 inclusive*).

NUMBERS
- As a general rule, write **low numbers** (up to *nine* inclusive) in **words** and **large numbers** (*10* and above) in **figures**. If the passage contains both kinds, use either figures or words for all the numbers.

- Ordinal numbers are written thus: *first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth* (one to nine inclusive written in full), but: *10th, 11th, … 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th*, etc.

- Always use figures with units of measurement written as symbols or abbreviations: *EUR 50, 250 kW, 205 µg, 5 °C.* Alternatively, write it out in full: *fifty euros, two hundred and fifty kilowatts, two hundred and five micrograms, five degrees Celsius.*

- The **thousands separator** in English is a **comma**. Separate figures over 999 with commas to make them easier to distinguish: *1,000; 10,500; 105,000*, etc. The **decimal separator** is a **point**: *10,500.75.*

- Spans or ranges should be spelled out. For example: *from £3 billion to £5 billion* rather than *£3 billion-£5 billion*. Use the defining unit at the start and end of the range, not *£3 to £5 billion*. (Generally, spell out *million* and *billion*. Financial papers containing numerous figures would be an exception).

WRITING OUT NUMBERS

- <u>Write them out in full</u>, without mixing letters and figures: *a three-year period, a five-door car.* (Note, however, that some fixed phrases do allow a mix, e.g. *40-hour week*, *24-hour clock*, *4-wheel drive*).
- Use *billion* to designate *thousand million* (rather than *million million*). Leading British newspapers and journals (such as *The Financial Times* and *The Economist*) have adopted the convention.
- If you want to abbreviate *million* and *billion*, do <u>not</u> use *mio.* or *bio.* The letters *m* and *bn* can be used for sums of money to avoid frequent repetitions of *million, billion*; this applies particularly in tables where space is limited.

FRACTIONS

- <u>Write them out</u> and use hyphens in fractions used as adverbs or adjectives: *a two-thirds increase, two-thirds completed, etc.* Do not use a hyphen if they are nouns: *an increase of two thirds.*

RANGES OF NUMBERS

<u>Write them out</u>. When a range is written out, repeat symbols and multiples (i.e. *thousand*, *million*, etc.): *from EUR 20 million to EUR 30 million, between 10 °C and 70 °C.*

NAMES OF GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

When referring to **Danish government ministers** in writing, write *Minister **for**…* but *Ministry **of**…* Abbreviated forms may be used in informal texts (e.g. *the Foreign Minister* instead of *the Minister for Foreign Affairs*).

You can access MFA ministerial titles in English [here](), and a list of English titles for all other Danish ministers/ministries [here](). Other countries' ministerial titles vary. Always check and use the appropriate forms (cf. *Secretary of State; Chancellor of the Exchequer; the Department for Work and Pensions; The Foreign and Commonwealth Office; The State Department*, etc.).

FORMS OF ADDRESS:

Presidents: written salutation if addressing: *President*, or *Mister/Madam President* (in the US), or *Excellency, … .* Within letter text: y*our Excellency* or *you*.

Emperor/Empress: written salutation if addressing: *Your dignified Majesty*,… Within letter text, the first address is *your Majesty*, followed by other appropriate forms of address.

King/Queen: written salutation if addressing: *Your Majesty*, … Within letter text: *your Majesty*. If referring to/writing about: HM King x/HM Queen x

The Pope: written salutation: *Your Holiness*, … Within letter text: *your Holiness*.

Prince/Princess (Sovereign Monarchs): written salutation: *Your Royal/Serene Highness*, or *Sir/Madam*, … Within letter text, use as first address: y*our Royal/Serene Highness,* and subsequently other appropriate forms of address. If referring to/writing about: HRH Prince x/Princess x

Heads of Government: written salutation: *Dear Prime Minister/Chancellor*, or *Excellency, …* Within letter text: *you*. Complimentary close: *Yours faithfully, …*

Ministers: written salutation: *Sir/Madam*, or *Dear Minister,…* NB: for UK Foreign Affairs write *Dear Foreign Secretary*, for US Foreign Affairs write *Dear Secretary of State*, or *Excellency, … .* Within letter text: *you*. Complimentary close: *yours faithfully*, or very formal: *I remain, Sir/Madam/your Excellency, yours faithfully, …*

President of a European Institution: written salutation: Dear President, … . Within letter text: *you*. Complimentary close: *Yours faithfully*, or *Yours sincerely*, …

(First) Vice-President/Member of the European Commission: *Dear (First) Vice-President/Commissioner,* … Within letter text: *you*. Complimentary close: *Yours faithfully*, or *Yours sincerely, …*

Vice-President/Member of the European Parliament: written salutation: *Dear Vice-President*, or *Dear Mr/Ms [name and surname],* … Within letter text: *you*. Complimentary close: *Yours faithfully,* or *Yours sincerely*, …

Ambassadors, Heads of Mission and Permanent Representatives: written salutation: *Dear Ambassador*, or *Excellency*, … Within letter text: *you*. Complimentary close: *Yours faithfully*, or *Yours sincerely, …*

When communicating with (Danish) ambassadors internally within the MFA, these are <u>not</u> usually referred to as *Excellency*.

In <u>very formal</u> contexts, communications starting with *Dear* should finish with *yours sincerely*. Communications starting with *Sir/Madame/Excellency* etc. should finish with *yours faithfully*. In all other contexts, you may sign off emails starting with *Dear* using a variety of semi-formal greetings: *Kind regards, Best regards, Best wishes; Regards, Best,* etc.

NAMES OF COUNTRIES AND CITIES

For the English names of countries and official anglicised versions of city names, see the European Commission's [Country Compendium](#).

NAMES OF BODIES

- If a body, for example an international organisation, has an official name in English, always use that.

- If the body includes *the* in its title, do <u>not</u> capitalise the -t in *the* inside running text. Only use a capital T if the title comes at the beginning of a sentence/in a document header/in an email signature, or similar. For example: *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Trade Council*; but: *… It shall be the responsibility of <u>t</u>he Trade Council (hereafter TC) to convene stakeholder meetings …; Inside <u>t</u>he Ministry of Foreign Affairs you will find a reception area …*

- If a Danish institution has an official English name, always use that. Either by writing the Danish title first, followed by the English version in brackets or *vice versa*: *Dansk Industri (the Confederation of Danish Industry); the Danish Tax Agency (SKAT)*, etc.

GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

- *Use **she/he** or **he/she** when appropriate. You may also use the plural forms **they/them/their/theirs**, which is becoming more and more common in British English. It is acceptable to use the plural pronouns like so: *the person collected their papers after the meeting; President Obama used their time in office well.*

- Noun forms and gender: use your judgment in choosing noun forms to emphasise or deemphasise gender, e.g. *Chairman*, *Chairwoman* or *Chair.* For certain occupations, a substitute for a gender-specific term is now commonly used to refer to persons working in those occupations, e.g. we now write *firefighters* instead of *firemen* and *police officer* instead of *policeman* or *policewoman*.

AN A-Z OF GRAMMAR

Adjective or Adverb?

Adjectives always describe/modify a **noun**: *a serious answer, an important meeting, red tape.*

Adverbs modify **verbs**, other **adjectives**, other **adverbs**, or whole **sentences**:
- He *answered seriously* (adverb + verb)
- They won by a *seriously narrow* margin (adverb + adjective)
- He drives *seriously recklessly* on the motorway (adverb + adverb)
- *Seriously, do you expect me to believe this?* (adverb + sentence)

NB: Many adverbs end in *-ly*, but many do not (e.g. *fast, well, however, therefore*, …).

Agreement between the subject and the verb

Identify your subject. If it is singular, the verb must be singular too. If it is plural, the verb must be plural.

NB: Constructions with *either/or; neither/nor; everybody/everyone; somebody/someone; anybody/anyone* take singular verbs. The phrase *'the number of'* takes singular whereas *'a number of'* takes a plural verb.

Collective nouns – singular or plural verbs?

Collective nouns can be **either singular or plural,** depending on whether the **emphasis is on a single entity or its parts** (cf. *audience, committee, council, department, division, government, jury, panel, team,* etc.). Use the singular when the emphasis is on the whole entity: *The Government is considering the matter; The Security Council meets today*. Use the plural when the emphasis is on the individual members: *The Government are voting on the matter today; the Jury find reason to believe that he acted in good faith*.

- Countries and organisations with a plural name take the singular: *The United States **is** reconsidering its position; The United Nations **was** unable to reach agreement.*

- Use a singular verb when a multiple subject clearly forms a whole: *Checking and stamping the forms **is** the job of the customs authorities.*

- Words ending in *-**ics***: These are singular when used to denote a scientific discipline or body of knowledge (mathematics, statistics, economics) but plural in all other contexts: *Economics **is** commonly regarded as a soft science. The economics of the new process **were** studied in depth*.

Continuous Tenses

Use them to the right effect:

The present continuous
He is drinking coffee;
I am looking forward to our meeting
(an extended, ongoing activity;
signals involvement)

The present simple
He drinks coffee every morning
I look forward to our meeting
(a factual finite observation; can signal
distance)

The past continuous
I was trying to ring you yesterday
I was hoping we could come to an agreement
(extending the activity in time,
signalling openness)

The past simple
I tried to ring you yesterday
I hoped we could come to an agreement
(finite action concluded in the past;
can signal unwillingness to cooperate)

False Comparatives

Only use the comparative if you are actually comparing something to something else:
The old building was larger than the new one. Do not write *He founded a larger company*
(larger than what?). Instead, use *large company*, or, if you want to indicate a relative scale, use
an adverb: *He founded a relatively large company.*

Mandatory Verb Patterns

Verb + -*ing* on second verb

*Admit, avoid, consider, deny, dislike, enjoy, feel like, finish, give up, (can't) help, imagine, involve,
keep (on), mind, miss, practise, put off, risk, (can't) stand*, etc*.* demand an –ing form on a
following verb. For example: *I admit losing, we consider engaging*, etc.

Verb + to (infinitive) + second verb

*Afford, agree, arrange, ask, begin, choose, continue, decide, demand, fail, hate, help, hope, intend,
like, learn, love, plan, prefer, pretend, promise, forget, manage, mean (= intend), need, offer,
refuse, remember, start, try, want*, etc. For example: *I can afford **to attend**, I agree **to meet**,* etc.

NB: some verbs can take both *+ to* and *+ -ing*, and sometimes with a change in meaning.
Verb + 'someone' (indirect object)

Advice, assure, convince, inform, persuade, promise, remind, tell, warn, etc. For example: *I can
assure **you** that…; inform **you** that …, warn **the local population** that a crisis is imminent,* etc.

Verb + that clause
These common verbs are frequently followed by 'that clauses':
*Accept, admit, agree, announce, assume, believe, check, claim, comment, complain, confirm,
consider, decide, discover, doubt, expect, explain, feel, find (out), forget, guess, hear, hope,
imagine, insist, know, mean, mention, notice, pretend, promise, prove, realise, reckon, remark,
repeat, reply, remember, say, see, show, state, suggest, suppose, think, understand*, etc.

Verb + preposition + -*ing* on a following verb

Agree on; look forward to; depend on; focus on; rely on; succeed in; concentrate on, etc. For
example: *I look forward to working, seeing, talking, discussing, delivering, cooperating,* etc.

AN A–Z OF RECOMMENDED MFA USAGE (VOCABULARY AND FORMALIA)

Act
This should be **capitalised** when it refers to an Act of Parliament, e.g. *The Data Protection Act*. The same applies to Bills and White/Green Papers, Directives, and Treaties.

Adviser / advisor

We recommend that you use ***adviser***, which is common in the UK. (*The Financial Times* uses *adviser*).

Affect / effect
Generally, *affect* is a verb and *effect* a noun: *When you **affect** something, you have an influence on something else. Afterwards, you can measure **the effect** of what you did.* (NB: *effect* also exists as a verb, i.e. *you can **effect** (that is, bring about) a change*!).

Enable / allow
Enable means to *make able* (not *to permit, make possible, or authorise*). Objects enable. People permit. For example: *The instructor allowed me to borrow the Adobe manual*; but *the software enabled me to edit the PDF files.*

Bill
(see Act)

Billion
In British English, a billion means *a thousand million*. Spell out *billion*.

Brief / Short
Use *brief* in expressions of time/duration (*Mr Jones made a brief comment*). *Short* can also be used to indicate duration, but may mean many things; it is often related to height, for example.

Bullet points
Treat bullet points as part of a sentence (i.e. easy to read). They should:

• make sense running on from the start of that sentence and be preceded by a colon
• be in lower case with either a semicolon or a blank space at the end
• have *or* or *and* at the end of the penultimate bullet after a semicolon; and
• the last bullet in the series should always end with a full stop.

Compare to / with
Use ***compared to*** if you are pointing out or implying a resemblance between two things regarded as essentially different. For example: *Yesterday's debate in Parliament was compared to an argument in a schoolyard.*

Use ***compared with*** if you are contrasting things of the same order. For example: *NET earnings were DKK 440 million in 2017/18, compared with DKK 316 million the year before.*

Co-operate and co-ordinate
As verbs, these take hyphens (because it helps the reader read/pronounce the words).
The noun forms **cooperation** and **coordination** are without hyphens.

Currencies

When the monetary unit is accompanied by an amount, use either the ISO code *DKK*, *GBP*, *USD* or the currency symbol. The ISO code is compulsory in all legal texts. In all other texts, the currency symbol (€, $, etc.) can be used.   Both ISO codes and symbols come <u>before</u> the amount: *DKK 25 million; GBP 5000, $600,000, £100,* etc. The ISO code has a space before the amount. There is no space between the sign and the amount.

NB: You may need to spell out a currency. If so, the currency comes <u>after</u> the amount. Please note that the Danish currency is *Danish Kroner*, <u>never</u> *Danish Crowns.*
Also note that the plural of *euro* is *euro* (not: *euros*).

Dates
Dates should be written *21 January 2025*, without commas (see also p. 15). If a span of time is involved, avoid hyphens or dashes. Write instead: *the scheme will run from 1 to 30 April* or *1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025*. For financial years, use a forward slash: *2024/25.*

Department
This normally takes a lower-case **d** unless a specific department is being referred to by its official title. I.e. the *HR **D**epartment* – but: *the policy of the **d**epartment is …* NB: Other countries' ministries may go by the name of Department; e.g. the *State Department*, the *Department for Work and Pensions*. If referring to an official title, always capitalise the D.

Different from / to
We advise using **different *from***.

Due to
It is often better to use ***because***.

Duty travel / business travel

Use *duty travel*, *official travel,* or *business travel* (CWT term). NB: do <u>not write travels</u> in the plural. The noun *travel* is not usually countable in English. Instead you my use duty trip/trips.

Effective / efficient
Use ***effective*** to refer to a well-functioning result or outcome. For example: *an effective speech*; *an effective agreement.* Use ***efficient*** to refer to something that is expedient and involves *minimum waste, expense, or unnecessary effort*. For example: *An efficient engine uses less fuel.*

Email
Spell *email* in one word (this is now the most commonly used UK form)
Fewer / fewer than or less / less than
Use *fewer* for numbers, but *less* for quantity: *fewer than 50 special advisers, fewer government websites than in 2022*, but *less than 75%* and *less than 50 tonnes.*

Gender neutrality

Try to be gender neutral. Instead of *he/she*, you can use *they/them/their/theirs* as a gender-neutral pronoun. For example, instead of writing *When we hire the new COO, his first duty will be to…*, write: *When we hire the new COO, **their** first duty will be to …*; or rephrase the sentence: *The first duty of the new COO, once hired, will be to …*   We likewise recommend that you use *spokesperson* and *chairperson*, not *spokesman/ spokeswoman* and *chairman/chairwoman*.

Government

This normally takes a lower-case **g** unless a specific government is being referred to. So, it is *the Danish/German/French **G**overnment*, but *successive governments, government data, the workings of government*, etc.

Headings, titles, and subtitles

We recommend that you use '**sentence case**' for titles and subtitles in papers and reports, i.e. **use a capital letter** only on the **first word**, on any **proper nouns/acronyms**, and on any **adjectives formed from proper nouns**: *Economic and budgetary outlook for 2022; Handbook on European law relating to asylum, borders, and immigration*, etc.

The same goes for full titles of chapters in reports: *Denmark's development policy vision, strategic aims, and priorities*), newspaper articles, and online news items on the MFA's Intranet, UMbrella: *New platform to improve cultural and social onboarding for posted staff*.

If you use '**title case**', where all headwords are capitalised, be advised that this may come across as a bit old-fashioned.

However

It is okay to start a sentence with *however*. *However,* if used to provide a link with the previous sentence it should be followed by a comma. If used to modify a whole clause, the comma goes at the end of the sub-clause: *However much you insist, there will always be debate*.

Italics

Use Italics for foreign words or expressions quoted in English text. Italics can also be used for emphasis (like in this Style Guide, which used Italics to highlight examples).

Less / less than

Less and *less than* are used for **amounts/quantity/units of measurement**. For example: *less investment, less than 75%; less than 40 miles away*. (See More than / over).

Long term / short term

These are always hyphenated if used as **adjectives**. For example: *short-term benefit, long-term effects,* etc.

Minister

Use upper case for a full title, such as *the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Development Cooperation*. When referring non-specifically to a minister or ministers, just use lower case. The same applies to *Secretary* for those countries that use this title for ministers.

More than / over
Traditionally, ***more than*** is considered appropriate before a number or quantity (*more than 9000 hits on the web page*; *more than a tonne*), and ***over*** in expressions of spatial relationship or age (*over the limit*; *people over 50*). We suggest you follow this rule in more formal communications, though *more than/over* are increasingly used interchangeably before numbers and amounts. (See Less / less than).

Multi
This prefix, as in *multidisciplinary* or *multinational*, does not have to be followed by a hyphen, but where it is followed by a vowel, you could use a hyphen for clarity. For example: *multi-ethnic*, *multi-agency*. (Of course, you could always find a more user-friendly expression).

Parliament
This takes a **capital P**, but **p**arliamentary is all lower case.

Per cent
Use ***per cent*** (not: *percent* or *pct.*). If you use the **%** sign, there is **no space** between the number and the sign. Whichever format you decide to apply, **be consistent.**

Prime Minister
Use *Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, the Prime Minister's Office, Prime Minister's Question Time,* etc.

Programme / Program
'Program' is only correct when used in connection with computing (*computer program*, *software program*). In all other contexts, the correct spelling is *programme*.

Seasons
The seasons *spring*, *summer*, *autumn* and *winter* do <u>not have an initial capital</u>.

Secretary-General vs. General Secretary
Secretary-General is the preferred term for most international organisations, whereas national organisations (political parties, unions, etc.) may choose to use *General Secretary*. It is up to the organisation which form to use so make sure you check and use the right term. (*The Secretary-General of the United Nations*; *the Secretary-General of Save the Children*; *the Secretary-General of Plan Bornefonden*; but *the General Secretary of the Labour Party (UK)*.

Spokesperson
Use *spokesperson* rather than *spokesman* or *spokeswoman*. (See also Gender neutrality).

Small and little
Small simply refers to size. It is the opposite of *big* or *large*. *Little* usually refers not only to size, but can also express duration and/or an emotional aspect.

Spaces
Insert a single space after a full stop, not two or more.

Spelling (British English)

Remember, unless quoting directly from an American-spelling source, you should use the MFA's official spelling convention, which is **British English**.

For example: *defence* not *defense; cypher* not *cipher; cancelled* not *canceled; centre* not *center; rumour* not *rumor; storey – of a building –* not *story; manoeuvre* not *maneuver; fibre* not *fiber; encyclopaedic* not *encyclopedic; dialogue* not *dialog*.

That / which

That and *which* can represent subtly different style choices, but they can also generate differences in meaning when used in relative clauses:

In relative clauses, *that* is used to introduce information **essential** to the meaning of a sentence, whereas *which*, preceded by a **comma**, is used to introduce non-essential parenthetical information that could be omitted without affecting the meaning (See also p.12).

For example: *the services, which are digital, are new*. (Here, the words after *which* add information about the services, they are <u>all </u>digital, not some other format, and they are <u>all</u> new). However, in the sentence *The services that are digital are new* we are only talking about digital services among others that are not digital, and <u>only the digital ones are new</u>.

Therefore

Therefore is often a good alternative to *thus*, *hence*, *consequently*, or *as a consequence*.

Time

We recommend that you use the 24-hour format: *06:30* and *18:30*. You may also use the British *ante-meridiem / post-meridiem* format: 6.30am and 6.30pm (NB: if you choose to use am/pm, these are lower-case, without full stops).

While / Whilst

While/whilst should be used to indicate that something is happening at the same time as something else, not as an alternative to *and*. NB: *whilst* is considered fairly formal.

AN A-Z OF MFA LEXICAL TERMS

Foreign Service, the

This term is capitalised and refers to <u>the entire organisation of the MFA</u>, including *the Foreign Service at home and* the *Foreign Service abroad; the service at home,* and *the service abroad*. In Danish: *Udenrigstjenesten*.

Global Mobility Obligation

Is the correct British-English term for the contractual obligation of an MFA employee to go to any appropriate post in the service at home or abroad to which they are appointed. Capitalised when used as a heading, otherwise written with small initial letters inside text. In Danish: *forflyttelsespligt*.

Head of Mission (HoM) / Deputy Head of Mission (DHoM)
Are the correct terms for the senior diplomat, usually an ambassador, and the number-two diplomat / second-in-command at an MFA mission abroad/embassy.

Head of Section
Is a term used internally in the Danish MFA to cover, mostly, early-career academic generalists and specialists, who are tasked with a certain section or field of responsibility in any given unit. In Danish: *fuldmægtig*. Other Foreign Services might use terms like *Foreign Service Officer*, *Desk Officer (for* [area]), *Policy Lead (for* [area]), etc. for the same job function. See also this dynamic [list](#) of MFA functions and titles on UMbrella.

Head of Unit / Deputy Head of Unit
Are the correct terms for the manager or deputy manager of a unit/department in the MFA.

Mission / Embassy / Consulate General / Trade Office
In English, the word ***mission*** corresponds to the Danish word ***repræsentation***.

The English word *representation* is only used in the following three examples of multi-lateral mission:

The Permanent Representation to the EU
The Permanent Representation to NATO
The Permanent Representation to the European Council

(Note also: the Permanent *Delegation* to the OECD and UNESCO; The *Permanent Mission* to the UN; the Danish *Representative Office* in Ramallah, Palestine, and so forth).

Danish bi-lateral missions abroad currently include: embassies, consulates general, mission/representative offices, innovation centres, trade offices. (All of these may be generally referred to as *missions* or *missions abroad*).

Posting allowance
Allowance granted in connection with postings abroad (in Danish: *udetillæg*)

Presidency of the Council of the EU
Use capital initial letters of headwords in titles. You may use simply *the presidency of the EU* (no capital letter in presidency, as you are referring to a function) inside running text, e.g.: *Member states holding the presidency work together closely in groups of three, called 'trios'*. If referring only to the *Council*, use capital C.

The service at home / the service abroad
Written in small letters (or, optionally, with capital initial letters) when inside running text, these are the only correct translations for the Danish terms '*hjemmetjeneste*' and '*udetjeneste*'.

EMPTY WORDS OR "WEASEL WORDS"

BEWARE of vague, 'empty', or ambiguous words and expressions that have been drained of meaning through overuse in the media, by politicians or civil servants, and/or by the public. Vague terms add nothing to the reader's understanding and may even mislead.

Think twice before automatically writing:

- dialogue (is not a synonym for speaking to people)

- facilitate (instead, say something specific about how you are helping)

- foster (unless it is children)

- going forward (why not just say *we will do something*)

- in order to / so as to (phrases like these are superfluous)

- initiate (why not just use *start*?)

- key (unless it unlocks something. A subject/thing is not key – it's probably important)

- leverage (unless in the financial sense)

- progress (as a verb)

- stakeholder

- transform (say what you are actually doing to change something); and

- utilise (use *use*).

The point is not that you are not allowed to use these words in MFA texts; the point is to **think carefully about what information you want to get across and not to fall back on clichés** and jargon. See further: the UK Government Communication Service.

ABOUT METAPHORS

Images and metaphors are an intrinsic part of the language. Most of the time we are not even aware that we are using this feature. We know you cannot literally 'drive' reform in the way you drive a car or drive cattle, but we know what it means. Some policies or programmes are based on the power of metaphor, such as e.g. *Removing the Barriers to Success*.

Metaphors can bring writing to life, enhance understanding and underline meaning in effective ways. But what George Orwell called 'worn-out' metaphors (*thinking out of the box;*,

leave something on the backburner; going forward; park something; touch base) add nothing to our understanding. Others can actually obscure meaning. Therefore, the advice is to use metaphors with care.

CREATING DIGITAL CONTENT

Writing for the web is a particular discipline. The principles of clear writing apply, but you can seek additional MFA guidance [here](), and find detailed information on writing for social media [here]().

WRITING FOR PUBLICATION ON UMBRELLA

As a rule of thumb, all essential information on UMbrella, the MFA's Intranet, is in English. When writing for UMbrella, please use this style guide and carefully proofread your text before publication. Remember, all of the MFA will potentially be reading your text. If you would like additional help with proofreading, try asking a colleague, or feel free to contact the MFA Academy's [English language specialist]().

MFA VISUAL IDENTITY

For certain types of writing, you may be required to apply the MFA's visual identity. You can access the visual identity kit [here]().

PLANNING FOR READING

Each message and each medium will have their own 'rules'. Have a design and a strategy in mind for **how** you would like your reader/receiver to react. Suiting your message to your medium, always consider levels of formality, levels of politeness, and any other factors that you know will cause a reaction in your receiver. Also consider:

• reading pattern – when people scan web content, they trace an F-shaped reading pattern – make sure your key content and call to action is in the title, summary and first paragraph of the body copy;

• title – think of the search terms people will be using to find this content; make sure your title is meaningful and 'front-loaded' with key words; Google only uses the first 65 characters for its search algorithms, so keep to this limit;

• notes to editors in media or press releases – include links in your text as you go along, rather than in a 'Notes to editors'; this section tends to alienate people outside the media and means important content (such as links to reports) is often lost at the end of items and appears without context; and

• keep it short – to hold the reader's attention aim for sentences of fewer than 25 words and keep news items brief – many people will not read to the end of long pieces.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES AND REFERENCE

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