

FAO Online Style Guide

Version 1.0

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Introduction

Consistency is an important way to make on-screen text clear and easy to read.

This Guide defines consistent Web writing recommendations, such as punctuation, spelling and presentation for FAO Web sites. It supplements the [FAO STYLE Guide](#) issued by the Editorial Group.

Abbreviations

- Don't use abbreviations, unless there is no room to spell out the words in full. Example: don't write 'mgmt', write 'management'.

Acronyms and initials

- You should not assume your audience knows what acronyms and initials represent. Write them out in full the first time you use them. Example: AG (Agriculture), GIEWS (Global Information Early Warning System).
- See also [FAOSTYLE](#) and [FAOTERM](#).

Ampersand (&)

- Use the word 'and' unless referring to a company or division name. Examples: Research & Development.

Bullet points

- Use bullet points more often than you would in print, because they help to break up the flow of text.
- Put any important information in a list format, even if it is only one bullet point.
- If the bulleted list is introduced by a phrase ending in a colon [:], start each bullet point in lower case. Otherwise, use initial capitals on each line.
- If the list items comprise long clauses, long phrases or sentences written on separate lines, use a full stop after each bulleted item.
- Don't use ending punctuation, such as commas or full-stops, for single words or short phrases in a list.
- Use the same format of verb each time in a bulleted list, eg Working... Feeding...
- Bulleted lists may or may not be indented - decide on one style and stick to it throughout the Web site.
- Examples of bullet points:

Web site contents

- Text
- Images
- Videos

- Publications

or:

FAO's activities comprise four main areas:

- putting information within reach.
- sharing policy expertise.
- providing a meeting place for nations.
- bringing knowledge to the field.

Capital letters

- Subject areas, unit titles and job titles are all lower case.
- Small words (in, at, of, and, on) never capitalized, even in titles.

CD-Rom

- Not CD-ROM

Click here

- Avoid expressions such as 'Click here to read more.'
- Write the sentence so that it's obvious to the user where the link is.
For example: 'More information can be found in the blog.'

Consistency

- Consistency is one of the most important components of good professional writing.
- Apply it to all aspects of a document, including spelling, capitalization, punctuation, use of bullets, etc.

Dates and times

- Use 25 July, not July 25 or 25th July.
- Avoid vague time references such 'online soon' and relative time references such as 'last year' or 'next year'.
- Use a hyphen when you mention period length.
Example: '2008-09' not '2008/9'.
- Use the 24-hour clock, not am and pm.

eg

- No full stops.
- Use a comma before it.
Example: 'There are many points of interest, eg museums, churches, parks and theatres.'

Email

- Not hyphenated.
- If an email address comes at the end of a sentence it should not be followed by a full stop, so as to avoid confusion about whether the full stop is part of the address.

etc.

- Use the abbreviation, never the full 'et cetera'.
- Put a full stop at the end and try to ensure it is the last word in a sentence.
- Always precede it with a comma: love, marriage, death, etc.

FAQ

- FAQ can be used to represent a set of 'frequently asked questions', even though most acronyms are singular. For instance, URL stands for 'uniform resource locator', not 'locators'.
So where 'URL' becomes 'URLs', 'FAQ' stays 'FAQ' whether it is singular or plural.

Forward slash (/)

- Use for web addresses - avoid using elsewhere.
- Don't use instead of 'or' (male/female) or 'to' (July/August).
- Don't put spaces either side of it.

Fractions

- A fraction that stands alone is spelled out and hyphenated.
Example: 'Two-thirds of the population...'
- A fraction attached to a whole number should be written in numerals.
Example: 2½.

Full stop (.)

- Take care not to use commas where a full stop and new sentence is more appropriate.
- Full stops are not used after abbreviations (FAO, Mrs).
- Online and in print, leave one blank space not two after a full stop, colon or semi-colon.

Headings and titles

- Headlines and sub-headings: use an initial capital for the first word only.
- Never use all capitals.
- Publication, journal, article titles etc: use initial capitals except for small words (in, at, of, etc).
Example: 'The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2008.'
- Online, put publication, journal and article titles in single quotation marks.

ie

- No full stops.
- Use a comma before it.
Example: 'We had really awful weather, ie heavy rain and strong winds.'

Initials

- Do not use full stops:
Example: PJ Harvey.
- Spaces could create some nasty line breaks with online text so add a non-breaking space between the initials and the surname in the html.
Example: PJ< Harvey.

Internet

- With capital 'I'.

-ise or ize

- Use the -ize in words such as organize, specialize and finalize. Exceptions are advertise, analyse, catalyse, hydrolyse, paralyse and supervise.
- See also [FAOSTYLE](#) for more examples.

Italics

- Avoid using italics online as they look bad on-screen.

Lists, numbered

- Use bulleted lists.
- Only use numbered lists when the order is important.
Example: an explanation of how to complete a process.

Log-on/log-in/log-off

- Use a hyphen for verbs: 'Log-in to the site using your password.'
- Use the closed-up word for nouns and adjectives: 'I have forgotten my login,' and 'I have forgotten my login password.'

Numbers

- Zero to nine are written as words and 10 onwards in figures, except when:
 - A sentence begins with a number (reword the sentence to avoid the problem).
 - The numbers have technical significance or need to stand out for quick comprehension, such as tables, statistics, money, times, ratios, academic grades etc.
 - In a range of two or more related numbers and at least one is higher than ten.
Example: the accommodation sleeps eight to twelve people.
- Where a number from one to nine is part of a phrase or title that you didn't create, stick with the convention.
Example: Key Stage 2.

No-one

- Write it with a hyphen.

Online/offline

- Spell these words closed.

Page

- Talk about a 'homepage' or a 'webpage' - one word, no hyphens.

Paragraphs

- When writing for the Web, include only one idea or statement per paragraph.
- Several short paragraphs are easier to read online than one long one.
- Use one line return between paragraphs, not two.

Part-time/full-time

- Two words, hyphenated.

Per cent

- When writing for the Web, use the symbol (%) not two words.
- Percentage remains one word.

Plug-in

- Hyphenate this word both as a noun and an adjective.

Quotation marks

- Use only single quotation marks around direct speech.
- If a speaker's text breaks onto a new paragraph, don't close the quotation marks at the end of the first paragraph.
However, do start a new paragraph with quotation marks as usual.
- Remove double quotation marks unless they are inside single quotation marks.
Example: 'So I said to him, "I don't think so" and he said...'
- Closing punctuation should go inside the quotation marks if it is part of the quotation, or outside the marks if it is separate.
Example: The woman was 'aware of the problem', but felt she could do nothing to fix it.
The comma appears after the quotation mark.

Real

- It is used as a brand name for streaming audio and video and is written as RealPlayer.
- Real-time is an adjective: 'The site offers real-time stock quotes.'

Site map

- Spell as two separate words - you would not talk about a 'countrymap'.

Telephone numbers

- Include the international dialing code if the site is external to FAO.
- Any numbers that are omitted when dialing internationally (but included when dialing locally) should be placed between brackets.
Example: +44(0)1492 633 043.

Trademarks (™)(®)

- Use trademarks wherever the name appears - it saves all sorts of legal hassles.
- To insert the symbol, go to Insert/Symbol in MS Word ensuring the font is set to 'symbol'.

Underlining

- When writing for online media, avoid using underlining for emphasis - it could be mistaken for a link.

Versions (software)

- When referring to subsequent versions/releases of software, use the adjective 'higher'.
Example: 'This site functions best with Netscape 4.0 or higher.'
- Do not use the word 'later'.

Ware words

- Always write them as one word: shareware, freeware, etc.

The Web

- Always write 'Web' - it is a proper noun.

Webmaster

- Write as one word.
- Write it in lower case at all times unless it starts a sentence.

Webpage

- One word.
- Never capitalize it inside a sentence.

Web site

- Always written as two words with an initial capital - Web site.

Web addresses

- Start with www and omit the http:// unless the address contains no www, and then write in full.
- There are no capital letters in URLs.
- If the Web address comes at the end of a sentence it should not be followed by a full stop.
This avoids any confusion about whether the full stop is part of the address.
- When writing a Web address in an online document, always make it into a hyperlink rather than plain text, so the link can easily be followed.