

Style guide

This document contains the editorial standards we will uphold when communicating to students externally. It is designed primarily for staff usage and will be used as the standard for online and printed communications. It works alongside the Brand Guidelines and Tone of Voice guidelines.

It is not our intention for this document to judge staff or student writing, but to provide direction for consistency across all communications. We have consulted a number of appropriate style guides across different organisations and media and feel confident this provides a modern and clear way of writing for students.

Contents

Acronyms	2
Formatting	3
Bullets and lists	3
Dates	3
Headings	3
Hyperlinks	3
Justification	4
Numbers	4
Paragraphs	4
Times	5
Grammar	5
Americanisms	5
Ampersands (&)	5
Apostrophes	5
Exclamation marks	6
Hyphenation (and dashes)	6
Oxford comma	6
Quotes	7
Single entities	7
Social Media	8
Handles	8
Hashtags	8
Terminology and verbs	9
Words	9

Capitalisation	10
Headings	11
The University's name	11

Acronyms

Acronyms are a barrier to clear communication. It is our approach to use them as little as possible.

The preferable approach is to spell out the acronym and then use an appropriate word to describe it later in the piece.

Examples:

The Central Executive Committee met on Friday. The Committee decided to approve the paper.

The Area Association Representative shared her thoughts. The Representative agreed with the proposal.

The Disabled Students Group organised a Facebook chat. The Group gained some extra members.

After taking advice from the Royal National Institute of Blind People and referring to Government websites, we do not space out acronyms (e.g. B B C) in the rare occasions they are used. We aim to only use very common acronyms which are recognisable to the general public – for example: BBC, OU and UK.

Very long acronyms such as the Open University Students Educational Trust can be referred to by an acronym after spelling out when first mentioned and the acronym in brackets afterwards.

Example

Open University Students Educational Trust (OUSET) helps to fund students. OUSET has changed many people's lives.

Formatting

Bullets and lists

Please use round bullet points or numbered lists e.g. 1. or 1)

Avoid using dashes or >

Add a full stop at the end of a list or bullet item for screenreaders.

The CAMEL email system does not allow the use bullets. Use a dash (-) instead.

Dates

We do not format dates with 'st', 'rd' or 'th'. This reduces the possible inconsistency caused by auto-formatting – for example: 1st and 1st.

Please use this format: Day, Date (number only) Year

Example

Monday, 3 May 2018

Also acceptable is:

3 May 2018

In cases of a lack of space, such as in a tweet, this is acceptable as an alternative.

03/05/18

We do not add apostrophes when referring to a decade – for example: “What's your favourite 80s record?”

Headings

Please refer to the “Capitalisation” section for guidance.

Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks should be underlined to show they are clickable. Avoid links like 'click here' or 'here'. Use active wording to encourage clickthroughs.

Example

For more information visit our website

Rather than:

You can click here for more information

For best results, important calls to action should be standalone links, and should also be active calls to action. Ideally, a button should be used rather than underlining these links. Contact the Digital Communications team for more guidance.

Examples

 Visit the PLEXUS website

 Find out more about the focus groups

Justification

Always left align all written documents. This may occasionally vary for design purposes.

Numbers

Please spell out numbers from one to ten. Use figures for 11 upwards.
Put a comma in numbers with more than three figures e.g. 5,400
Use first, second rather than 1st, 2nd.

Paragraphs

Do not indent paragraphs. At the end of a paragraph add a line break underneath before starting a new paragraph.

Times

Please use this format: 7am, 10:30pm

For a span of time use: 1pm–2pm (an en rule between the times where possible, with no spaces)

If appropriate, please use 12 noon or 12 midnight to avoid confusion.

To use an en rule, hold down 'Alt' on your keyboard and type 0150. Use the number-pad on the right-hand side of your keyboard to type in 0150. On Mac, hold 'option' + hyphen.

Grammar

Americanisms

We use British English spelling (e.g. colour) and grammar.

Please use 's' instead of 'z' in words like 'apologise'.

Ampersands (&)

In general write out 'and'. In some cases they may be used for design purposes, when trying to save space or on social media.

Apostrophes

Our organisation name does **not** have an apostrophe:

Open University Students Association

However, if talking about students' unions in general, the apostrophe is included.

If you are naming another university's student union, then check their website and follow their guidance regarding the apostrophe.

Examples

When giving examples use:

There were lots of events organised last year, e.g. Senate Reference Group.

Or

There were lots of events organised this year, for example – the Senate Reference Group.

Exclamation marks

Take care when using exclamation marks. Only use these in an informal context and don't use too many in one piece!

Hyphenation (and dashes)

We never use hyphenation in any document – which means the splitting of a word into a second line.

There is no need to hyphenate a common compound word, such as 'website' or 'email'.

Using dashes (with a space before and after) can make ideas and writing easier to comprehend.

Example

We have supported and developed a growing number of societies – now 25 in total, which now have over 5,000 members.

Or alternatively

We have supported and developed a growing number of societies – now 25 in total – which now have over 5,000 members.

Hyphens should, however, be used to form short compound adjectives, eg two-tonne vessel, three-year contract, 19th-century artist. Also, use hyphens where not using one would be ambiguous, e.g to distinguish "black-cab drivers come under attack" from "black cab-drivers come under attack".

Do not use hyphens after adverbs ending in -ly, e.g. a hotly disputed issue, a constantly evolving newspaper, genetically modified food, etc. Hyphens are needed with short and common adverbs, e.g. an ever-forgiving family.

Oxford comma

An example of an Oxford comma is a comma before the word 'and' in a list.

We don't use the Oxford comma in a list. We list as follows:

“He likes dogs, cats and turtles.”

Association communications will try to avoid using a comma before ‘and’ in general.

Quotes

Use a single quote to label items, such as website buttons.

Example

Press the ‘play’ button to start.

Click on the ‘meet-ups’ button for more information.

When quoting speech, if introducing the speaker use a colon and then a double speech mark: “..”

Example

Peter said: “I enjoyed the meeting, it was productive.”

Put the full stop inside the quotation unless it is a fragment of a complete quote:

Peter said the meeting was “productive”.

Single entities

Remember that organisations such as the Open University and the Students Association are single entities. Therefore, in copy they should be referred to as ‘it’ and ‘its’ rather than ‘they’ or ‘their’. This does not apply to sports teams.

Examples

The Students Association is based on the Milton Keynes campus. It is based in the Wilson Building.

The Open University is located in Milton Keynes. Its logo is a blue shield.

The Open University Cricket Club won their match by 100 runs.

Social Media

Handles

When referring to a Twitter handle, please follow the same capitalisation as shown on the handle e.g. @OpenUniversity, not @openuniversity. The same applies for other networks using handles.

Our Twitter handle is: @OUstudents

Hashtags

If creating a hashtag with multiple words, use capitals to help distinguish the words:

Examples

Correct #meetOUstudents, #SpotlightSunday

Avoid: #MeetOUStudents, #spotlightsunday

Our main hashtag is #OUstudents. Try to use this, rather than the singular #OUstudent to avoid the creation of a second major hashtag, to help brand visibility. Hashtags have a function, such as thematically linking posts or providing a humorous commentary to a post.

Networks

Please capitalise all social media networks e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest.

Note: YouTube has a capital 'T'.

This doesn't extend to social media actions such as 'tweet' or 'share' which are not capitalised.

Terminology and verbs

When possible, use social media terminology to describe social media activity.

Example

“Last week we tweeted about our Freshers programme.”

“We are planning to share a post from the Careers Service.”

Words

Here is an A-Z of common Association terms and how we spell and format them. See also the capitalisation and acronyms section for more guidance. Please also refer to the Inclusive Language Appendix for more guidance on terminology.

campus

Central Executive Committee

Central Representative

Conference

Deputy President

Digital Communications (the team name, ‘our digital communications’ is lower case).

Disabled Students Group

email

Facebook event

Freshers (capitalise when talking about the programme, lower case ‘a fresher’).

meet-up

National Student Survey

Nightline

OU Students Association (also fine to use ‘the Association’ or ‘the Students Association’ but not ‘OUSA’).

OU Students magazine (the name is ‘OU Students’ and ‘magazine is the clarifier’).

OU Students Shop

Open University Students Educational Trust

Peer Support

PLEXUS

podcast

President

representatives (formal use), but 'reps' is ok informally. Capitalise if an actual title
e.g. Central Representative.

Residential Schools

Student Charter

students

Through the Gate Peer Support

NUS extra card (NUS acronym can be used here).

radio show

society (unless it's the name of a society, e.g. Law Society).

Student Community (the team name, 'the student community' is lower case).

Student Support (the team name, 'supporting students' is lower case).

STUDIO

Vice President

website

Capitalisation

We only capitalise individual names of people, places, organisations or titles.

This means that we capitalise our post holders' titles, staff roles, society names and team names.

Examples

The Student Community team is responsible for the development of societies.

A new Chair of the History Society was announced last week.

We will also capitalise modules, courses, subjects, publications and song titles. There is no need to put these in quotes.

Headings

For headings, we do not capitalise any words apart from the first and those mentioned in the guidance above. Please do not use a full stop in a heading.

Example

Students Association announces Conference 2018 date

Training session for Learning Experience Reporters announced

The University's name

Use initial capitals when writing the University's title, The Open University. This includes an initial capital on 'The', but note lower-case use in, for example, 'the Open University module' or 'the Open University qualification', and so on. When referring to 'the University' use a capital 'U'.

If you wish to refer to the University by the abbreviation OU, always use the full title with the abbreviation in brackets at the first point of use.

If you have any questions about this guide or its application, please contact: oustudents-media@open.ac.uk.