



Keeping your stories shipshape

(a basic guide for layout of headlines, images and teaser text)

This style guide gives a few basic rules to make sure the story you are writing looks crisp and neat on the website... and if all the stories look crisp and neat, the whole site looks shipshape.

Headline writing

- Headlines should be in upper + lower case (capitals only for first letter and proper nouns)

for example: Little Ship Club excels in first East Coast 50
 not: Little Ship Club Excels in First East Coast 50

- The main head should be a maximum of 8 words, use the preview feature to see how it displays and rewrite if you've made it too long
- What is the point of the story? Are you asking people to take part in an event? Writing a report of a rally? Or something else? Make the point in the headline. A headline should look good and read well.

Main images

- The main image for your story will be automatically resized to fit the space allocated for its display in its short form (picture + teaser) and on the side bar.
- The picture will display best if the picture is roughly a square. If not square, a landscape picture will look best.
- Sometimes a picture will need more depth (if it is portrait shaped) so rewrite the text to fit – you may need to insert the break coding `<!--break-->` (see below, 'Breaking the story') later in the text than if you use a squarer picture
- Don't forget to write a description of the picture in the box called Alternate Text. Quite often this will be the same as the caption text, but it helps screen readers interpret the content on the site and it is important for accessibility.

Sidebar stories

- There are only 26 characters available for your sidebar headline, you need to be brief, try not to use them all!
- The sidebar teaser should be around 25 words long. When you post the story and preview it, make sure you rewrite the teaser to fit neatly if you have odd word breaks (such as one word on its own under a picture). If you need to use more than 25 words, make it at least 35 long to avoid this problem.
- Don't repeat the story headline in the sidebar teaser... make sure it is a short summary of the story itself
- The main picture you have posted to the story will be automatically resized for the sidebar. It will work best if it is roughly square. The picture is prominent on a sidebar story, so write short headlines and text.

On the left, the text for the 'Rod Carr' teaser finishes with just one word on the last line. Better to rephrase for a more even fit (right).

The 'Hydroptere' story contains a paragraph break and hyphens which make it look gappy. Better to rephrase and repunctuate (right) to reduce the white spaces.

Breaking the story

- The text of the story will automatically break when it is displayed in its short form. It looks best if there is sufficient text to fill the space to the right of the picture. This should be around 70 words, or 9 lines, depending on picture size.

The break tool is at the end of the WYSIWYG toolbar, when you use it you will get a red line and `<!--break-->` in the text

Remember to give a description of the picture in this box



Writing that won't tie you up in knots/1

(some simple rules for writing well on the web)

Introduction

This style guide will help you to write good copy that is:

- quick to read
- easy to understand
- accurate
- compelling
- consistent in its style.

Why we need this guide

The Club has a long, rich heritage, and has moved with the changing times. More than ever, we need to **communicate** with people from many walks of life, all over the world. We need to be **consistent** to maintain a strong **identity**. Even more importantly, we must ensure that our messages make a **positive impact** on readers.

Readers want to get to the point, quickly.

Research shows that on average visitors spend no more than 30 seconds on a website's home-page; if they can't find what they want quickly, they move on.

Your aim should be that readers grasp your basic message in 20 seconds. There are several proven techniques for achieving this.

● Think about the readers

Before you start writing think about who will read the information. What do they really want – or need – to know? How are you going to get your message through to them?

Knowing your audience will help you keep the information and the 'tone of voice' relevant to them.

● Tone of voice

We want to create an open, direct and friendly relationship with our readers. So we need to talk with them, not at them.

Using 'we' and 'you' will make your writing more familiar. Or use 'I' for a conversational tone. It's

OK to mix 'I' and 'we' in the same document – it sounds friendly, trustworthy and accessible.

Be yourself; use your own voice and do not try to be 'impressive'.

● Be concise

Sentences should convey a single idea that can be expressed in 15 words. 20 words in a sentence is a working maximum. Removing unnecessary words will get your point across better, without losing any meaning.

Keep paragraphs short too, and coherent. Do not try to address many different ideas in a single paragraph.

Here are some simple rules:

- summarise your point before going on to explain
- organise your thoughts into logical points
- use subheadings wherever possible
- add clarity by using dashes within sentences, bullet points or quotes.

Writing news

News stories use an 'inverted pyramid' structure, where the first sentence summarises the key point of the story. So, if the reader stopped after the first sentence, they would understand 'the headline'. Subsequent sentences provide more detail, in descending priority.

Accuracy matters

Use a spell checker with an English dictionary. Copy that contains mistakes will diminish the Club's credibility.

Use simple words

Do not baffle your readers! Avoid unnecessary jargon, and do not make up, misuse or confuse words.

See the next page for some common examples...



Writing that won't tie you up in knots/2

(some simple rules for writing well on the web)

Use a simple word

Do not use...	Use...
additionally	and, also
amongst	among
approximately	about
assist	help
based upon	based on
burned	burnt
commence	start, begin
concerning	about
the disabled	disabled person
driver's licence	driving licence
dyslexic	person with dyslexia
frequently	often
is able to	can
in excess of	more than
in close proximity to	near
on occasion	sometimes
permit	let
preventative	preventive
prior to	before
purchase	buy
regarding	about
require	need
spelled	spelt
spoiled	spoilt
towards	toward
utilise	use
whilst	while
with reference to	about, on

Use the active voice

Use of the active voice produces clear, strong copy. Even if you're not sure about the grammatical definition, you may have seen a message when using Microsoft Word's spell and grammar check that 'this sentence uses the passive voice'.

Here's an example:

'Sailing is enjoyed by many people.' Because the sentence uses the **passive** voice it's long and rather formal.

Compare that with the **active** voice: 'Many people enjoy sailing.' It results in a simple, concise sentence with direct impact.

It's easy to spot passive sentences as they use words from the verb 'to be', including been, being, is, was, were and are.

Always use active sentences in copy that asks people to do something, such as buying tickets.

Use emphasis to enhance meaning

Highlighting **key** words is a proven way of emphasising key **points** in copy. But it should be used sparingly. Never resort to CAPITALISING nor *italicising* complete words for emphasis; both styles make words difficult to read on screen.

Usability research shows that overuse of formatting techniques to emphasise meaning on web pages actually produces the opposite effect; readers dismiss overly 'highlighted' content as hype or advertising. They prefer clear, plain text.

Take responsibility

Always proofread, check facts and finalise your copy, whether or not anyone else reviews it before publication. Often it's worth coming back to your copy later, especially if you are trying to convey complex or sensitive ideas.

Once you've written your copy, take a break for a while. Away from it you may get ideas about what could be improved and how, and you'll come back fresh and ready to edit and finesse.

See over for style conventions and more...



Writing that won't tie you up in knots/3

(some simple rules for writing well on the web)

Style conventions

Abbreviations

- Do not use full stops between letters in upper or lower case abbreviations.

The LSC; RYA; USA; EU; ie (“that is”); eg (“for example”); etc (“and other things”)

Bulleted lists

The maximum length for readability is six items.

- Style 1: use an initial lower-case letter and end punctuation (semi-colons) for list items that run on from the sentence before the list and are not whole sentences.

- Style 2: use an initial capital and end punctuation (full stops) if the list items are full sentences.

Do not mix these two styles in the same list – use one or the other.

Capitalisation

Do not capitalise anything that is not a proper name:

- the Little Ship Club, the Met Office, the Government (meaning this government), the English Channel, The Frostbite Fast Cruise series, the Club office

- the committee, the honorary librarian, the north of England, the south-east, the training season, this year's photo competition

Date and time

- Dates and years: 12 December 2005; twenty-first century; '90s; 2004–05; 1993–95; 1998–2002

- Time: Use the 24 hour clock as far as possible to be consistent with maritime publications ie: 1400, 2300 etc.

Numbers and quantities

- Write out the numbers one to nine; use numerals for higher numbers.

- Do not mix written out numbers with numerals in the same sentence (eg they had three children aged five, eight and 11). Never start a sentence

with a numeral – rewrite the sentence or write the number out in full.

- 60 per cent (use “%” in tables or charts); 10 kg; £5m; 50p; £1.66; six million people

Personal pronouns

- Instead of s/he, he/she, his/her and her/him, use they, their and them.

Possessive apostrophes

- three weeks' holiday; one year's salary; Britain's opt-out

- It's/its: the nation held its breath; the Club balloted its members; it's a sunny day; who's a pretty boy then?

Quotations

Use double quotes for quoting text or direct speech, use single quotes for quotations within quotations. Introduce quoted text or speech with a colon or a comma.

- The racing rules state: “It is...”; She asked, “Why did he say ‘I do not know’ when he must have known?”

Spacing

Do not put two spaces after a full stop; use a single space.

See over for some common spelling errors and corrections...



Writing that won't tie you up in knots/4

(some simple rules for writing well on the web)

Spelling (some common errors and corrections)

- acknowledgement
- any more (two words)
- **cannot** (not can not)
- complementary (making complete) but
- complimentary (praising, flattering)
- **continual**...constantly or frequently occurring... but **continuous** ...unbroken, uninterrupted
- cooperate
- coordinate
- **discreet** (tactful) but **discrete** (separate, distinct)
- dyslexia not dyslexic
- email
- e-bulletin
- e-learning
- **enquire** (ask) but **inquiry** is a formal investigation
- fewer means smaller in number; less means smaller in quantity: fewer supporters, less support
- globalise
- **judgement** (a practical or moral deduction) but **judgment** a judge's or court's formal ruling
- internet
- **into** (enter into a contract, walk into a room), but **in to** for 'fold a piece of paper in to three'
- licence (noun) license (verb)
- lifelong
- more than not over for numbers of people
- OK
- online
- on-screen
- onto for walk onto a bridge but on to for move
- on to another subject
- organise not -ize
- part time hyphenate when used before the noun (thing) it is describing but leave open if after the noun, e.g. part-time worker but work part time
- per cent use % in tables and charts, use per cent in copy
- practice (noun) practise (verb)
- **principle**, a truth or moral, but **principal** (adj. and noun) chief or main
- website
- world wide web