# UNU Office of Communications
# Editorial Style Guide

**(2nd discussion draft; 17 Sept. 2014)**

## Foreword

Since time immemorial (or for the past 30 years, at least), UNU Centre editors have relied on the *United Nations Editorial Manual* (UNEM) as their stylistic bible. UNEM, however, reflects "practices and policies that have evolved at Headquarters"; its focus is on ensuring a standardized format/style for documents issued by (or prepared for submission to) the UN Secretariat — not on ensuring the clear and concise presentation of scientific/practical information to a global mass audience. (I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say that more than half of the UNME's 520-plus pages are irrelevant for anyone not writing an official Secretariat document.)

Learning the quirks of "UN editorial style" can be a struggle; while UNEM is based on British style, it deviates in many aspects from current standard British usage (and some American predilections seem to have crept in). I hesitate to describe the UNEM style as "stodgy" or "outdated" — let's just say that, compared with modern trends, it is "conservative". And despite its length, UNEM is nevertheless silent on many of the "nuts and bolts" questions of punctuation, capitalization, etc. that arise in daily writing/editing tasks.

With that as background:

Here, for your consideration, is the "second discussion draft" of the proposed new *UNU Office of Communications Editorial Style Guide* (hereafter OCESG)

The first consideration was whether to adopt British or American style. While most of the editors now in the UNU Office of Communications prefer/are more comfortable with American style, given the global reach of UNU, and the reality that most UNU institutes are based in the European Union or in British Commonwealth nations, we have agreed that the logical choice is to adopt British style.

Within the rubric of "British English", though, an assortment of variations can be found. Rather than try to reinvent the wheel, we deemed that the best course would be to identify a reputable, widely used style guide to could serve as the basis for the OCESG. That task fell to me and, after looking through numerous candidates, my shortlist was (i) the *EU Publications Office Style Guide*, (ii) the *EC Director-General for Translation English Style Guide*, (iii) *The Economist Style Guide*, (iv) the *University of Oxford Style Guide*, and (v) the *Guardian and Observer Style Guide* (GOSG).

In the end, I settled on the online GOSG. Granted, it isn't particularly easy-to-use — the A-Z itemized format can make things hard to find unless you happen guess the right term, and it sometimes tries too hard to be "clever" in its explanations, to the detriment of clarity — but the GOSG won out for three main reasons:

1. The UNU-OC *Our World* web magazine is part of The Guardian Environment Network, so the editors already have some experience with this editorial style.

2. The content style guide of the gov.uk website, of which the OC staff are big fans, is based (with some modifications) on the GOSG.

3. Each of the shortlist style guides has its own quirks, but the GOSG seems less quirky than most, and its precepts strike me as more internally consistent. Overall, it seems best aligned with the UNU brand identity. (tl;dr version: I liked it the best.)

Which is not to say that GOSG is a perfect match "as is". Like the gov.uk website, we (the UNU-OC editorial team) have decided to diverge from the GOSG on some issues. (These are so noted herein).

Bill

## Introduction

The *UNU Office of Communication Editorial Style Guide* seeks to:

- serve as the essential resource for quick answers to common questions about UNU editorial style
- facilitate consistency of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and usage across UNU publications (so that readers are not distracted by disparate personal writing styles)
- present a "modern" image of UNU by reflecting contemporary language usage rather than perpetuating outdated, pedantic rules

- articulate a high-quality, coherent "editorial voice" that aligns with the UNU brand and enhances our external image
- streamline the editorial (writing and review) process by making our standards and style explicit

> Note: This bullet point style differs from that used in discussion draft 1. See the "Bullet points" entry under "Punctuation" section below.

OCESG is not intended as a comprehensive "all the rules of writing" compendium. Rather, it is a basic "go-to" reference that:

- answers typical "How do I handle this?" questions about writing for UNU
- clarifies some confusing or problematic points of usage
- offers general advice

Note also that this style guide is a "work in progress"; it will be revised and updated as new editorial questions arise, and as preferences and accepted usage within the UNU system evolve.

## General advice

**For questions about the mechanics of writing (usage, punctuation, capitalization, etc.) not covered in the guide, please refer to the *Guardian and Observer Style Guide*. See also the gov.uk Content Style Guide.**

**For questions of spelling, see the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (but please note the guidance in the "Spelling" and "Abbreviations" sections below.**

Write in a style that is clear, simple, and accessible. Our audience is worldwide, so use global ("British") rather than "American" English.

Remember that English is not the first language of many of our readers. Avoid colloquial or idiomatic words or phrases that may be unfamiliar to non-native-English speakers.

If you need to use a technical term, briefly explain it on first use.

Write conversationally: imagine that you're talking to a group of friends, not lecturing to a captive audience. Writing so that a general audience can understand isn't "dumbing down" the content — it's "opening up" and elucidating it.

Yes, presenting complex academic/scientific information in plain English may take some effort, but such effort by the writer and editor means less bewilderment for the readers.

In short: Use "plain English". It enables persons with lower level reading ability to understand content they might otherwise find perplexing, and it allows persons with higher level reading ability to understand your message as quickly as possible

Some general tips when writing for online publication (but applicable to all writing):

- use short sentences and paragraphs
- use simple, everyday words rather than complex words
- write in a style that is appropriate for your target audience
- write in a direct, conversational style, but don't use idioms, colloquialisms, or jargon
- be specific rather than general
- use active verbs

## Spelling

Follow standard British spelling, as prescribed by the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary (COED)*.

If the COED lists alternative spellings, use the preferred form — the one that is listed first (for example, judgement, NOT judgment; or programme, NOT program) — <u>except for words ending in "-ise/-ize"</u>.

Even when it is not the COED preferred form, use the "-ise" form rather than the "-ize" form, because (i) the "-ise" form is preferred by mass media and general publications, and (ii) this maintains consistency with words that always use the "ise" form (such as surprise, comprise, exercise). Exception: Do not alter the "official" spelling if ae entity uses the spelling "Organization" or "Globalization" as part of its official name.

> Note: This is the converse of UNEM style, which specifies that the "-ize" form rather than the "-ise" form is to be used.

*Some quick spelling tips*:

If you don't have access to the COED, an acceptable alternative is to set your MS Word (or other software) spellchecker to "English (UK)".

When adding "-able" to a word that ends with a final silent "-e", drop the "-e" (for example, debatable or conceivable) unless it would seem to affect the pronunciation of a preceding consonant (such as in changeable or traceable).

Take special care to distinguish between verb/noun/adjective homophones, such as advise (verb)/advice (noun), dependent (adj.)/dependant (noun), license (verb)/licence (noun), and practise (verb)/practice (noun).

Latinate "-um" neuter endings take an "-s" for the plural form; so, curriculums NOT curricula, forums NOT fora, addendums NOT addenda. (Exceptions: bacteria, media.)

## UNU-specific terminology

<u>Use</u> the definite article "the" with UNU organizational names:

- ✓ The conference will be held at the United Nations University.
- ✓ We visited the United Nations University in Tokyo.
- ✓ The UNU Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility is located in Barcelona"
- ✓ The Office of Communications manages the main website of the United Nations University.

<u>Do not use</u> the definite article "the" with UNU acronyms:

- ✓ The conference will be held at UNU.
- ✓ We visited UNU in Tokyo.
- ✓ UNU-GCM is located in Barcelona.
- ✓ The Office of Communications manages the main website of UNU.

(Note that this applies to the names and acronyms of other UN entities as well: for example, the programmes of UNESCO; in cooperation with WFP and WHO).

When the acronym functions as a modifier, use or non-use of "the" is dictated by the term being modified:

- ✓ <u>The</u> UNU <u>Charter</u> was amended on …
- ✓ To register to attend <u>the</u> UNU-INWEH <u>seminar</u> on 6 May…

<u>Use</u> a hyphen to separate the UNU element from the subunit element in an institute/programme acronym,: for example, UNU-INRA, UNU-WIDER, UNU-BIOLAC.

> Note:  In documents published prior to 1998, a slash was used as the separator (such as UNU/INRA, UNU/WIDER, UNU/BIOLAC). This form is no longer used.

<u>Do not use</u> a hyphen or dash in the full name of a UNU institute/programme:

- ✓ … by the UNU Institute for Natural Resources in Africa.
- ○ NOT … by the UNU–Institute for Natural Resources in Africa.
- ✓ The United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability is …
- ○ NOT the United Nations University - Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability is …

<u>Do not</u> use the name or acronym of a UNU institute or programme without the UNU element:

- ✓ The project was coordinated by the UNU World Institute for Development Economic Research.
- ○ NOT  The project was coordinated by the World Institute for Development Economic Research.
- ✓ This UNU-IAS seminar …
- ○ NOT This IAS seminar …

> **Note:** The preferred form is, for example, "the United Nations University International Institute for Global Health"; use of variations such as "the International Institute for Global Health of the United Nations University" or "the United Nations University's International Institute for Global Health" are discouraged.

Use an initial capital letter for "University" when referring to UNU. Use an initial capital letter for "Institute" and "Programme" (singular form) only when referring to a specific UNU system unit. Do not use capitalize the plural form, or when the reference is not to a specific unit:

- ✓ UNU-GCM was established in 2012. The mission of the Institute is …
- ✓ UNU-BIOLAC is located in Caracas. The Programme was established in …
- ✓ UNU has institutes and programmes in 15 countries.
- ✓ Each institute of the UNU system is …

Do not use initial capital letters when referring to a subdivision of a UNU institute or programme, or to a non-UNU organization:

- ✓ The academic units of UNU-FLORES are …
- ✓ UNU-INRA has five operating units.
- ✓ The Fukushima Global Programme is a UNU-IAS research and dissemination initiative. This aim of this programme is …
- ✓ The UNU-IAS Traditional Knowledge Initiative investigates threats to, and methods for maintaining, the resilience of traditional knowledge systems. This initiative carries out community-grounded research …
- ✓ UNEP was established in 1972. The headquarters of the programme is based in Nairobi.

## Country/geographical names

As a general rule, use the "official" UN spelling of Member States' names (see Member States of the United Nations). In particular, note the following:

- ✓ Côte D'Ivoire (NOT Ivory Coast)
- ✓ Republic of Korea (NOT Korea or South Korea)
- ✓ Timor-Leste (NOT East Timor)
- ✓ Viet Nam (NOT Vietnam)
- ✓ Chinese Taipei (NOT Taiwan or Republic of China)

For long country names, commonly recognized acronyms may also be used: for example, USA or US and UK (even on first use), or DPRK, DRC, and ROK (after being spelled out on first use).

## Abbreviations (acronyms, contractions, suspensions)

Refer to the COED for questions about how to punctuate specific terms. General guidelines for punctuating abbreviations are as follows:

Unless an abbreviation is universally recognized (such as USA, Mr, Dr) or is obvious in context (such as using UNU on the United Nations University website), it should be spelled out in full on

first use with the shortened form following in parentheses; for example: This law applies to both domestic firms and multinational corporations (MNCs).

**Acronyms** — Write an acronym, whether the result is pronounced as a word or as a series of letters, as a single string of uppercase letters with periods (full stops). For a plural acronym, add a lowercase "s" (without an apostrophe):

- ✓  UNU, UNESCO, UNICEF, USA, UK, CITES, NGOs, LDCs <span style="color:red">(NOT U.N.U., U.K., C.I.T.E.S.)</span>

**Contractions** — Write a contraction (an abbreviation formed by using the first and last letters of a word while omitting some or all of the intervening letters) without a period (full stop):

- ✓  Mr, Ms, Dr, eds, vols

**Suspensions** — Write a suspension (an abbreviation formed by omitting letters from the end of a words) with a period (full stop):

- ✓  Prof., Rev., ed., vol., ch.

**Academic degrees** — The abbreviation of academic degrees, as per COED, is an exception to the above rules; though they are properly suspensions, degree abbreviations should be written as a single string, lowercase for non-initial letters, no full stops:

- ✓  MSc, PhD, DPhil, MJur

**Latin abbreviations** —Some readers will not be familiar with these terms (i.e., e.g., et al., etc.). Whenever feasible, use the English long form: "for example" or "such as" rather than "e.g."; "that is" or "in other words" rather than "i.e."; "and others" rather than "et al."; "and so forth" or "and more" rather than "etc."

> Note: These rules for writing abbreviations have been changed based on feedback from discussion draft 1. The consensus was that the GOSG style of writing suspensions and Latin abbreviations without periods (full stops) is confusing and not aligned with the COED. As abbreviations are fundamentally a spelling issue, let's follow the COED instead of the GOSG. Also, let's follow the gov.uk advice of avoiding Latin abbreviations whenever possible.

> Note: The GOSG style specifies using all capitals if an acronym is pronounced as the individual letters (BBC, FBI, UNDP) but using an initial capital only if it is pronounced as a word (Nasa, Nato, Unicef). OC consensus is that this looks odd, particularly for UN entity acronyms. While I can't find a specific rule, gov.uk diverges from the GOSG and uses all caps for all organizational acronyms, so we will follow gov.uk on acronym usage.

## Numbers

Spell out numbers from one to nine, use digits for numbers 10 and greater. Where numbers in a range span this cut-off, use a consistent form (preferably digits):

- ✓ from 8 to 12 OR from eight to twelve (NOT eight to 12)
- ✓ between 3,500 and 4,000 housing units
- o NOT between 3,500 and 4 thousand housing units

**Fractions**: Use a hyphen when it is used as an adverb or adjective, but not when it is used as a noun:

- ✓ a two-thirds increase BUT an increase of two thirds

When giving a range of (or comparing) decimal statistics, use the same number of decimal places for each to ensure clarity; in particular, don't drop the final zero(s): for example, 3.00 to 6.72 (NOT 3 to 6.72).

To reduce the possibility of confusion, always express numbers of a range in full: for example, from $10 thousand to $50 thousand (NOT from $10 to $50 thousand).

Use a point (period) to separate whole numbers from decimals (6.8; 25.612). Use a comma to set off thousands/millions in whole numbers (6,800; 25,612; 25,612,500).

Use the % symbol (without a preceding space) for percentages written as digits; use "per cent" (two words, with a preceding space) for percentages written in word form: 3.8%; 25%; six per cent; twenty per cent. But, do not mix these two forms within a publication.

Use billion to mean 1,000 million, and trillion to mean 1,000 billion.

> *Note:* To clarify the intent of this rule — in "traditional" British usage, a billion was equivalent to a million million (1,000,000,000,000) while a billion was equivalent to a million billion (1,000,000,000,000,000,000).

If a number begins a sentence, spell it out in full:

- ✓ Twenty-five committee members voted in favour of the resolution.
- o NOT: 25 committee members voted in favour of the resolution.
- ✓ Sixty staff members attended the meeting.
- o NOT: 60 staff members attended the meeting.

## Currency

For monetary amounts:

- ✓ If using the ISO code, write as code, space, amount: EUR 3,000; USD 5.4 million.
- ✓ If using a symbol, write as symbol, amount (no space): €1,500; $150 million.

> Note: It was asked whether we should specify just one of the above forms to be consistent. If we did so, we probably would need to pick the former form since some currencies (rupee, peso, ringgit) that don't have a commonly recognized symbol.

If you write out the name of the currency, it comes after the amount and is lowercase: 500 euros; twenty pounds; 6 million dollars.

> Note: There was a "vote against" allowing the written form as potentially confusing (especially in the case of pounds). We should reach a consensus: yes or no?

## Dates and times

To avoid confusion regarding dates, always use the form "day month year" with no comma between the month and year: 21 April 2004; 4 July 1776; 18 Sept 2014.  (An all-numerical date such as "1/7/2011" would be read as January 7, 2011, by Americans and as 1 July 2011 by British.)

Use cardinal, not ordinal, numbers for dates: 4 July 1776, NOT 4th July 1776.

 Write time in the following form:  9:30 a.m., 12:01 p.m., 5:30 p.m., 12 noon, 12 midnight.

> Note : The GOSG says to use no space in times designations such as "1am", "6.30pm". But if we follow the COED for abbreviations, then instead of am and pm will use a.m. and p.m. In that case, retaining a space between the numeral and abbreviation probably makes sense.
>
> Also note that this follows the gov.uk style, which uses a colon (6:20) rather than the GOSG style of using a full stop (6.20).
>
> Question: Shall we allow both 12-hour (6:00 p.m., 9:30 p.m.) and 24-hour (18:00, 21:30) forms, or specify just one of them? (And if the latter, then which?)

## Capitalization

Jobs and titles: Use the capitalized form when referring to a specific person holding a specific position; write it all lowercase when referring the role in general:

- ✓ Prof. Kazuhiko Takeuchi was appointed senior vice-rector on 1 January 2013. He is one of three vice-rectors at UNU.
- ✓ The directors of UNU-WIDER and UNU-FLORES met with the Rector Malone last week.
- ✓ UNU was represented at the event by six directors and one vice-rector.
- ✓ Associate Research Fellow Mavrotas will lead the project. He will be assisted by several other UNU-CRIS associate research fellows.
- ✓ Prime Minister Abe said … (BUT The Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, said)
- ✓ Secretary of the Treasury Jacob Lew met today with Madeleine Albright, former US secretary of state.

> Note : The above has been changed since the first discussion draft, which did not properly comply with either GOSG or gov.uk..

Use initial capitals for the official name of a degree, but use all lowercase if the designation is descriptive:

- ✓ a  Master of Science in Public Policy and Human Development; a PhD in Sustainability Science (BUT a master of science degree; a doctorate in physics).

## Course/programme titles

Write official course or programme titles with initial capitals and without quotation marks or italics. Use lowercase form for shortened or unofficial names:

- ✓ Apply by 23 July for the MSc in Environmental Governance with Specialization in Biodiversity Programme.
- ✓ The Postgraduate Course in Climate, Energy and Food Security is an elective of the UNU-IAS MSc programme.
- ✓ The food security course is an elective of the Master of Science in Sustainability, Development and Peace programme.

## Quotations

A quotation that comprises one or more complete sentences should be introduced by a colon (not a comma) and begin with a capital letter. The final punctuation is placed inside the quotation marks when it coincides with the end of the sentence.

- ✓ In his report on the work of the Organization, the Secretary-General wrote:  "When it was created more than half a century ago, in the convulsive aftermath of world war, the United Nations reflected humanity's greatest hopes for a just and peaceful global community. It still embodies that dream."

An alternative is the journalistic-style quote, which breaks the quoted material with the identity of the speaker.

- ✓ "When it was created more than half a century ago, in the convulsive aftermath of world war," he wrote, "the United Nations reflected humanity's greatest hopes for a just and peaceful global community."
- ✓ "This launch of this project is an important milestone," said Rector Malone. "UNU research in this area will contribute greatly to global policy needs."

Use double quotation marks to start and end a quoted section; use single quotation marks for quoted words within that section. If a quotation forms an essential grammatical part of a sentence, it begins with a lower-case letter and the final punctuation is placed outside the quotation marks.

- ✓ Rule 60 specifies that "the phrase 'members present and voting' means members casting an affirmative or negative vote".

✓ The representative of Chile revised draft resolution by inserting, at the end of paragraph 4, the words "or at the highest level possible".

Direct quotations should reproduce the original text exactly, and should be carefully checked for accuracy. Only the following changes are permitted:

- change the initial letter to a capital or lowercase letter, if appropriate
- omit or alter the final punctuation, as necessary
- correct typographical and other clearly unintentional errors

## Punctuation

For bullet point lists:

- always use a lead-in line (ending with a colon)
- ensure that the bulleted items make sense running on from the lead-in line
- use lower case to start each bulleted item
- don't use punctuation (comma, semi colon or full stop) or "or"/"and" at the end of a bullet point item
- do not use a full stop after the last bullet point

> Note: In GOSG style, each bullet point begins with a capital letter and end with full stop. I suggest that we instead use the gov.uk style (as above); see "Bullet points and steps" on the gov.uk site.

**Hyphens**: Follow the form given in the COED. For words not listed in COED, write as one word wherever possible: for example, macroeconomic, multicultural, underrepresented (NOT macro-economic, multi-cultural, under-represented).

> NOTE: Although GOSG uses "thinktank" as one word, we will continue to use the two-word form ("think tank", no hyphen).

Use a hyphen for short compound adjectives and adverbs, but do not use a hyphen after adverbs ending in "-ly":

✓ a two-year programme, a well-established principle, an ill-prepared report
✓ a constantly evolving paradigm", genetically modified organism

For compound adjectives whose meaning is clear, no hyphen is needed, :

✓ civil rights movement, financial services sector

**Ellipses**: Use a space before and after ellipses (three dots with no spaces between them); do not add a full stop if the ellipses ends a sentence.

✓ She didn't want to go there ... But eventually, she did.

**Square brackets**: Use only in a quotation for an interpolation or explanatory note by the writer or editor:

✓ "In his speech, the prime minister thanked [Foreign Minister] Frederick Smith for organization the reception."

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## Other

Within a sentence, always list items (such as countries or organizations) in alphabetical order, unless it is evident from context that another sequence (for example, largest to smallest, or chronological) is being used.

Whenever possible, avoid the use of "spring", "summer", "autumn", and "winter", since these seasons occur at different times of the year in the northern and southern hemispheres.

Give a person's title, forename and surname on first mention. On subsequent mentions, use either surname only (preferred) or title and surname:

✓ Dr John Smith and Professor Susan Jones attended the ceremony, but Smith left early.
✓ Dr John Smith and Professor Susan Jones presented their joint research paper. Dr Smith said that it will be published as a book next month.

Use *italics* for names of periodicals, book titles, and film/play titles. Use quotations marks for articles, book chapters.

> Note: This diverges from the GOSG, which says: "Do not italicise or put in quotes titles of books, films, TV programmes, paintings, songs, albums or anything else."

For book and periodical names and article titles — and for top-level headlines — use initial capitals for all words except "a", "and", "at", "for", "from", "in", "of", "on", "the", and "to". (But use an initial capital for any of those if it is in the first word or follows a colon.

Is it "a" or "an" before "h"? Let pronunciation be your guide:

✓ Use "an" if the "h" is silent: an hour, an honour
✓ Use "a" if the "h" is aspirated: a hotel, a horse, a historic event

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## A final note

Items to be published on the unu.edu website (and other documents, upon request) are checked by the OC editorial team for both (i) linguistic matters (such as to rectify spelling and grammatical mistakes, and to clarify any imprecision or inconsistency of expression) and (ii)

presentational aspects (that is, to ensure compliance with UNU typographical/web rules and conventions).

Note, however, that the OC editors attempt to remain "impartial" with regard to the content and the author's intentions; they will not revise the text beyond the level required to ensure readability and coherence. Authors bear sole responsibility for the substance and veracity of their text.

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For more information, see <span style="color:orange">Writing for the Web</span> on the gov.uk website: in particular, the "Front-loadings", "Titles", and "7 golden rules for writing for the web" sections of that page.

> So, the fundamental queestion: what rules should be added to this style guide? Which can be covered by an "if your questions isn't answered here, see the GOSG" insturuction?