



Grammar and style: communication and the University of Oxford Style Guide

Linda Loder

Freelance writing and editing services

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What we will cover

- Communication basics
- Introduction to the style guide
- Hints and tips



Getting it right

- Oxford is synonymous with quality (brand)
- Quality requires correctness...

Getting it right

- Oxford is synonymous with quality (brand)
- Quality requires correctness...



Getting it right

- Oxford is synonymous with quality (brand)
- Quality requires correctness...but also consistency across output



Licence to practise – a brief aside

Noun: practice; licence

Verb: practise; license

- Norman scribes introduced new spellings to Old English. Usually the French ones prevailed, but where the same word was used as both a noun and a verb by changing just one sound, the two spellings could be exploited to help differentiate them (advice, advise; device, devise)
- A 17th-century spelling authority decided to extend this to two other pairs: (practice, practise; licence, license) – even though there is no difference in pronunciation
- Dr Johnson upheld this usage; Noah Webster (US) did not
- A pointless distinction! But vital to get it right



Aim of communication:

Get the message across!

Communication requires clarity. To achieve clarity, beware of:

- Overcomplexity
 - 'Oxford syndrome'!
 - Simplicity = elegance
- Ambiguity
- Jargon



Communication – other considerations

- Tone

- Serious report – gravitas
- Magazine article – punchy

- Medium

- Digital? Print?
- The style guide applies to all

- Audience

- Oxford insiders or not?
Alumni, possibly from many years ago?
- Non-Oxford readers might need explanation (glossaries)



University of Oxford Style Guide

www.ox.ac.uk/public-affairs/style-guide

- Part of the University's branding toolkit – aiming for consistency in written output across the University
- Has lots of useful illustrative examples
- Reviewed regularly, ensuring that it properly reflects modern usage, and updated as required
- Available online as an interactive PDF – bookmark it and consult it regularly!
- Everyone who communicates on behalf of the University is representing the University



University of Oxford Style Guide – contents

www.ox.ac.uk/public-affairs/style-guide

- Introduction
- Abbreviations, contractions and acronyms
- Capitalisation
- Numbers
- Punctuation
- Names and titles
- Highlighting/emphasising text (bold and italic)
- Word usage and spelling
- Miscellaneous



University of Oxford Style Guide: examples

Commas:

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University of Oxford Style Guide: examples

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University of Oxford Style Guide: examples

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- *While Professor Brown's first love was theoretical physics, a brief encounter with an electron microscope during his undergraduate degree, would change this.*

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- *A threatening, but atmospheric natural light show in the sky above St Michael's Mount.*

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University of Oxford Style Guide: examples

Hyphens/en dashes

- *In general terms - including my colleagues and the people in my practice – I would say everyone should be a leader in this firm.*

University of Oxford Style Guide: examples

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Hyphen near beginning should be an n-dash

University of Oxford Style Guide: examples

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- *In general terms – including my colleagues and the people in my practice – I would say everyone should be a leader in this firm.*

Hyphen near beginning should be an n-dash

- *The firm had never before instituted such a large scale programme.*

University of Oxford Style Guide: examples

Hyphens/en dashes

- *In general terms – including my colleagues and the people in my practice – I would say everyone should be a leader in this firm.*

Hyphen near beginning should be an n-dash

- *The firm had never before instituted such a large-scale programme.*

Insert hyphen

University of Oxford Style Guide: examples

Hyphens/en dashes

- *The preference for harmonious conflict resolution could lead to conflict-avoidance and, by implication, inaction. In fact, when confronted with an unambiguous problem they were able to act decisively - though it is unclear how well they would have dealt with an ambiguous problem.*

University of Oxford Style Guide: examples

Hyphens/en dashes

- *The preference for harmonious conflict resolution could lead to conflict avoidance and, by implication, inaction. In fact, when confronted with an unambiguous problem they were able to act decisively – though it is unclear how well they would have dealt with an ambiguous problem.*

First hyphen not needed; second one should be an n-dash

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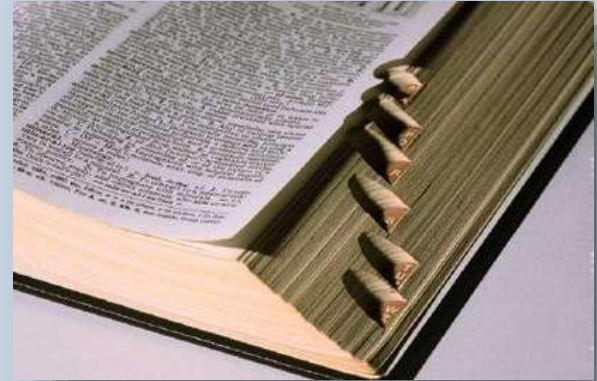
Other resources

www.ox.ac.uk/public-affairs/style-guide

University of Oxford Glossaries:

- Glossary of Oxford terms
 - Aegrotat, Planon
- Glossary of Oxford acronyms
 - PAD, PRAC, HEFCE
- Glossary of obsolete Oxford usages
 - Hebdomadal Council, OUCS

University of Oxford Style Guide quick reference A–Z



Checking it over (1)

- Identify preferred resources and USE them regularly
 - Style guide; glossaries; dictionary
[Bookmark!](#)
- Acronyms – check spelled in full on first occurrence only
 - Use ‘Find’ tool at the final stage, to make sure you have identified the first occurrence correctly, and not written in full anywhere else
- If tussling with a grammatical difficulty – there is always the option to [recast!](#)



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Checking it over (2)

- 'Cut and paste' errors
 - Repeated words; words missing; grammar needs adjusting to match a change. Look out for these – needs checking carefully at final stage
- Check lists against what they refer to (eg contents list against pages, making sure titles and page numbers agree)
 - Make hard copy of list (print if working on screen, or photocopy if working with hard copy)
 - Tick off as each item is checked – good, easily visible way to see how far you have got



Master Degrees

Supplication

The Senior Proctor reads the names of candidates who are supplicating for the degree of MA, as well as MSc, MLitt, MPhil, MSt, MTh, MBA, MFA, MPubPol, MBiochem, MCompSci, MChem, MEarthSci, MEng, MMath, MMath&Phys, MPhys, MPhys&Phil, BMus and BPhil. The proctors take votes, as with higher degrees, and the Senior Proctor announces that the leave of the House has been granted.

Candidates for the degree of MA

Presentation

College deans of degrees who have candidates are called upon by the bedel to present them to the Vice-Chancellor in the same manner as a professor presenting candidates for a higher degree.

Admission

Standing in front of the Junior Proctor in groups of about 30, candidates swear an oath (*Do fidem*) binding them to be loyal, obedient and faithful to the University and its interests, and to comport themselves circumspectly at elections to University offices.

MA candidates are admitted by the Vice-Chancellor, using the same formula as for the degrees of DD, DCL, DM and MCh. After admission, candidates leave the House by the door to their right to robe as MAs. Later in the proceedings they return in a procession of fours headed by a bedel. The new MAs bow or curtsy to the Vice-Chancellor, before leaving by the door to their right.

Candidates for the degrees of MSc, MLitt, MPhil, MSt, MTh, MBA, MFA, MPubPol, MBiochem, MChem, MCompSci, MCompSci&Phil, MEarthSci, MEng, MMath, MMath&Phil, MPhys, MPhys&Phil, BMus, BPhil

The candidates for these degrees are then presented in groups by the Senior Dean, charged by the Junior Proctor and admitted by the Vice-Chancellor (without kneeling).

The degrees currently conferred by the University are:

■ ■	DD	Doctor of Divinity • Scarlet cloth lined with black silk
■ ■	BD	Bachelor of Divinity • Black silk lined with a lightweight black silk
■ ■	DCL	Doctor of Civil Law • Scarlet cloth lined with scarlet silk
■ ■	BCL	Bachelor of Civil Law • Blue poplin, art silk or silk half-lined and edged with white fur fabric
■ ■	MJur	Magister Juris • Blue poplin, art silk or silk half-lined and edged with white fur fabric
■ ■	DM	Doctor of Medicine • Scarlet cloth lined with scarlet silk
■ ■	MCh	Master of Surgery • Black silk lined and bound with blue silk
■ ■	BM	Bachelor of Medicine • Blue poplin, art silk or silk half-lined and edged with white fur fabric
■ ■	DLitt	Doctor of Letters • Scarlet cloth lined with neutral grey silk
■ ■	DSc	Doctor of Science • Scarlet cloth lined with neutral grey silk
■ ■	DMus	Doctor of Music • Cream satin brocade of silk or art silk lined with cherry-coloured silk
■ ■	DPhil	Doctor of Philosophy • Scarlet cloth lined with navy blue silk
■ ■	DClinPsych	Doctor of Clinical Psychology • Blue silk or art silk edged and lined with scarlet silk or art silk
■ ■	DEng	Doctor of Engineering • Red silk or art silk edged with grey and lined with petrol blue silk
■ ■	MA	Master of Arts • Black silk lined with crimson or shot crimson silk or art silk
■ ■	MSc	Master of Science • Blue silk or art silk edged and lined with grey silk
■ ■	MLitt	Master of Letters • Blue silk or art silk edged and lined with grey silk
■ ■	MPhil	Master of Philosophy • Dark blue art silk or silk lined with white silk
■ ■	MSt	Master of Studies • Deep green silk or art silk lined with white silk or art silk
■ ■	MTh	Master of Theology • Black silk or art silk lined with magenta silk
■ ■	MBA	Master of Business Administration • Claret silk or art silk lined with dark grey silk
■ ■	MFA	Master of Fine Art • Gold silk or art silk edged and lined with white silk or art silk
■ ■	MPubPol	Master of Public Policy • Dark blue art silk or silk lined with silver silk
■ ■	BMus	Bachelor of Music • Lilac silk or art silk half lined and edged with white fur fabric
■ ■	BPhil	Bachelor of Philosophy • Dark blue art silk or silk lined with white silk
■ ■	MBiochem	Master of Biochemistry • Black poplin, art silk or silk trimmed with white fur fabric
■ ■	MChem	Master of Chemistry • Black poplin, art silk or silk trimmed with white fur fabric
■ ■	MCompSci	Master of Computer Science • Black poplin, art silk or silk trimmed with white fur fabric
■ ■	MCompSci&Phil	Master of Computer Science and Philosophy • Black poplin, art silk or silk trimmed with white fur fabric
■ ■	MEarthSci	Master of Earth Sciences • Black poplin, art silk or silk trimmed with white fur fabric
■ ■	MEng	Master of Engineering • Black poplin, art silk or silk trimmed with white fur fabric
■ ■	MMath&Phil	Master of Mathematics and Philosophy • Black poplin, art silk or silk trimmed with white fur fabric
■ ■	MMath&Comp	Master of Mathematics and Computer Science • Black poplin, art silk or silk trimmed with white fur fabric
■ ■	MMath	Master of Mathematics • Black poplin, art silk or silk trimmed with white fur fabric
■ ■	MPhys	Master of Physics • Black poplin, art silk or silk trimmed with white fur fabric
■ ■	MPhys&Phil	Master of Physics and Philosophy • Black poplin, art silk or silk trimmed with white fur fabric
■ ■	BA	Bachelor of Arts • Black poplin, art silk or silk trimmed with white fur fabric
■ ■	BFA	Bachelor of Fine Art • Black silk or art silk with a narrow band of gold silk inside
■ ■	BTh	Bachelor of Theology • Black silk or art silk with a narrow band of magenta silk inside

Checking it over (3)

- **Spacing check**
Use the pilcrow sign ¶ (on the 'Home' tab in Word, 'Paragraph' section) to show up formatting, and the 'Find' function to look for double spaces
- When working on screen, flowing the text in a different way can help to spot errors (View – **Full Screen Reading**)
- Do a dedicated **leaf through** to check running headers, footers and page numbers
- Do the same to check whether the **basic layout** is OK



Checking it over (4)

- Build up a good environment –
read one another's output

Why? – **Fresh eye**, acting as the final 'user' of the document.

Does it communicate clearly in terms of ideas and themes?

Does the eye stop at any point in the text? If so, adjust.



Way in which this should be done – **not critical or imposing personal style but co-operative**: 'Does it work?' – Important that both sides of the equation understand and work to that model.

Summary

- Oxford = quality – quality requires correctness and consistency across output
- The aim of communication is to get the message across clearly
 - Avoid overcomplexity, ambiguity and jargon
- Consult the style guide – many illustrative examples. Useful glossary also available.
- Use a checklist in the final stages of preparing a document





Thank you

Linda Loder
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