



Ministry
of Defence

Defence writing guide

JSP 101

Version 4.1

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JSP 101 Defence writing guide

Part 2: guidance

How to use this JSP

JSP 101 is intended to provide helpful advice to those writing in the Ministry of Defence and clarify the standards that Defence writing should adhere to. It is not a complete guide to writing in the English language. It will be reviewed at least annually.

JSP 101 is structured in two parts:

- a. Part 1 – Directive (including templates for all major Defence writing formats).
- b. Part 2 – Guidance.

Related JSPs	Title
JSP 440	Defence Manual of Security, Resilience and Business Continuity
JSP 604	Defence Manual of Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
JSP 655	Defence Investment Approvals
JSP 740	Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) for Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Further advice and feedback

The owner of this JSP is the Director of Corporate Effectiveness. For further information on any aspect of this guide, or to provide feedback on the content, please contact a member of the [team](#).

Summary of changes

Date of change	Version	Comments
12 Nov 2019	v4.1	Updated to include guidance on referencing, and information / data management.

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Introduction

Well-written communication is vital to the successful running of the Ministry of Defence. Written communication includes everything from blogs to operational briefs, and from sports club minutes to ministerial submissions.

The Ministry of Defence should follow the same writing principles, rules and guidance as the rest of government. This is laid out in the [Government style guide](#) and reproduced below, with a few additions and changes to take account of Defence business.

All authors should be open to making their written communications more accessible on request. If you have any accessibility needs or want to change the way written communication looks so it is easier for you to read, guidance is available at <https://www.gov.uk/help/accessibility>.

Written communication

Written communication is at the heart of what many of us do in the service of government.

Good communication is essential to make sure that the government's policies are understood and that we deliver effectively.

The purpose of this guide is to encourage clear, concise writing and consistent editorial practice. It identifies aspects of English usage that are among the most common causes of uncertainty and misunderstanding and sets out the style appropriate to government communications.

We use many types of communication in government to inform and advise internal and external audiences, including policy documents, ministerial briefings, blogs, emails, tweets, letters, speeches and so on. Some of these have their own rules (social media for example) and speeches offer opportunities to use language more creatively. We should always write with our audience in mind, using simple and engaging language that grabs their attention and keeps it.

Clear, pithy writing shows respect for your reader. It takes more effort to write concisely but if you take the trouble your audience will thank you.

When you come across examples of good, elegant, clear writing make a note of them or collect them as models for you and others to follow. Equally, examples of bad or confusing writing will remind you of what you need to avoid.

The Ministry of Defence is a corporate member of the [Plain English Campaign](#). This organisation campaigns against gobbledygook, jargon and misleading public information. They believe that everyone should have access to clear and concise information and provide a range of helpful tools, guides and training in support of this aim.

This guide is here to help you. Please use it but remember that it is only a guide. It is designed to set a framework within which you can feel confident to write in your own style.

First principles

We can start by setting out some fundamental principles of good written communication:

- think about who you are writing to and what you want to achieve;
- use plain English and avoid long or complicated words when short or easy ones are available;
- use active language, not passive. It is usually clearer, more direct and more concise and does not disguise who is doing what. For example, 'We will decide on your application once we have received your letter', not 'Once we have received your letter, a decision will be made on your application'; and 'We recommend that you...', not 'it is recommended that...';
- avoid technical language and jargon unless you are addressing a specialist audience and even then use it with care;
- use short sentences without multiple sub-clauses. Sentences should usually be no longer than 25 words; and
- you can usually remove a third to a half of what you write in a first draft.

Get someone to check what you have written, especially if it will be read outside government. Read back what you write. If it sounds awkward then the meaning is probably obscure and you are not communicating effectively. Broadly speaking it is best to write as you would speak.

If in doubt think about George Orwell's rules for good writing:

- never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print;
- never use a long word where a short one will do;
- if it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out;
- never use the passive when you can use the active; and
- never use a foreign phrase, a scientific or jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

Think how you would describe the issue you are writing about to a family member or friend. Too often we use technical terms that most people, including some of our own colleagues, do not understand. Our aim should be to open up government information so that everyone can understand it.

Finally, to emphasise that we need communicators who are confident enough to be themselves, Orwell's little-known sixth rule says, "break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous".

The guide

Acronyms, initialisms and abbreviations

An **acronym** is formed from the initial letters of other words and pronounced as a word. Examples are Defra, DExEU, NATO, FIFA.

Initialisms are formed in the same way as acronyms, but not pronounced as words. The individual letters are voiced. For example: FCO, DVLA, GDS, GP, ITV, ONS, URL.

If you are going to use an acronym or initialism, spell out the component words in full first, followed by the short form in brackets. For example: Department for Exiting the European Union (DExEU). Use just the short form for subsequent references. If you are only using an acronym or initialism once, avoid using it.

Do this for all written communications, even those aimed at specialists. Do not assume the intended audience is familiar with acronyms and technical language.

Exceptions are acronyms/initialisms widely understood and used by the general public, such as BBC, UN, VAT, EU, MP, which you do not need to spell out. MOD and NATO also fall into this category.

In general use upper case without full stops for acronyms/initialisms, so, UK not U.K.; DCLG not D.C.L.G. There are a few exceptions, for example Defra.

A useful list of Defence acronyms can be found [here](#). Consider using a glossary for long documents.

An **abbreviation** is a shortened form of a word, such as Dr, St (saint or street), but is pronounced the same. Where the last letter is the same as the last letter of the expanded form, for example Dr and St, a full stop is not needed.

Use 'an' before an **initialism** or acronym if the first letter starts with a vowel sound. For example, a NATO strategy but an NHS trust.

Plural forms of initialisms should not have an apostrophe: DVDs, GPs, URLs, early 2000s.

Capitals

Capitals should be used with discretion, unless for proper nouns. Title case (the use of capital letters throughout a title) should be avoided. For example, 'Minutes from the previous meeting', not 'Minutes From the Previous Meeting'.

In a second reference to a specific organisation use upper case where you are referring to it but not using its full name. So, 'the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs' becomes 'the Council', with an upper case C.

Travelling abroad you go through customs not Customs; and the seasons of the year do not have an initial capital.

Block capitals should be avoided, with just a few exceptions. Operation names, the names of Royal Navy ships and exercise names should be in capitals, so Operation YELLOWHAMMER, HMS WILDFIRE and Exercise COBRA WARRIOR. Other equipment should be in title case, for example, 'Foxhound', 'Typhoon', unless it is in the delivery

phase and is a defined project or programme, for example, 'Project MORPHEUS'. The only other exception is for short unit names, for example, '2 RIFLES'.

Collective nouns

These are either singular or plural, depending on whether the emphasis is on a single entity or its parts. For example, where the emphasis is on the single entity you can say 'the **range** of products is', or 'MOD is'. If the emphasis is on the collection of people or objects, then you can say 'a team of **advisers** have deployed', or 'the Executive Committee are debating'.

Use Armed Forces rather than Armed Services.

Contractions

Although you might use hasn't, can't, won't and so on in less formal communications such as a blog or email, they are inappropriate in formal correspondence or briefing. Use common sense.

Dates

The standard government style is 24 April 2013, not April 24 2013 or 24th April/April 24th. If you want to use an abbreviated style, 24 Apr 13 is acceptable, but be consistent throughout your document.

Numbers

Spell out the numbers one to ten unless they are part of a financial amount or a unit of measurement (£5 or 8 tonnes). Above ten use figures unless it produces an unbalanced result, mixing figures and words, such as 'the projects take between eight and 11 years to complete'. In this example, it would be better to say, 'between 8 and 11 years'.

Separate figures over 999 with commas to make them easier to distinguish: 1,000; 10,500; 105,000.

Spans or ranges should be spelled out. For example, from £3 billion to £5 billion rather than £3 billion-£5 billion. Use the defining unit at the start and end of the range, not £3 to £5 billion. Generally, spell out million and billion. Financial papers containing numerous figures would be an exception.

Military unit names should be written with Arabic numbers, for example '2 RIFLES' rather than 'two rifles'.

Punctuation

Commas tend to be used excessively. They should only be used to clarify and to avoid ambiguity. The use of commas between adjectives or in lists depends on whether they aid understanding or create unnecessary pauses. For example, 'successful well-established mutual' is a clear unambiguous phrase that does not need commas, but 'the departmental colours include red, blue, mid-blue, blue and turquoise, and green' would be thoroughly confusing without commas.

A useful exercise for placing commas is to read the sentence aloud and hear where the natural pauses fall. However, avoid using commas before conjunctions (although, and, because, but, if, or and so on) unless they help the sentence to flow.

Dashes can be overused and are often a sign of sloppy writing. If you use them for emphasis or parenthesis, use the 'en' rule ('–'), which you can find in special character sets, not the hyphen.

Hyphens should be used between an adjective or participle and noun when they are used together as an adjective, for example user-focused services, high-achieving media officer, top-quality writing; or when using numbers as adjectives, for example, 30-year rule. They are not necessary between an adverb and an adjective or verb qualifying a noun. For example, totally enclosed system, specially designed program or rigorously enforced spending controls. They can also be used to provide clarity, for example a 'cross party committee' is probably much more grumpy than a 'cross-party committee'.

Try not to use hyphens as parentheses. Use brackets or dashes.

Quotations. Generally avoid using *italics*. Use single quotation marks if referring to a document, scheme or initiative.

Use double quotation marks for direct quotations. Use single quotation marks within quotes and for terms and words used in an unusual way or context: 'the framework allows organisations to 'purchase' a digital delivery team.'

The rule is that commas and full stops always come after the unquote, except where a full sentence is being quoted. So, he described the policy as 'truly radical'; but 'the policy,' he said, 'is truly radical.'

In quotes running to two or more paragraphs open quotes for each new paragraph and close quotes only at the end of the quote.

Use the ellipsis symbol (...) in quoted material to indicate where text has been left out, with a space before and after the symbol (except at the beginning and end of a quote).

Semicolons can be used to connect two closely related sentences or to break up a list of categories. For example: postgraduate studies; nursing; midwifery and auxiliary medical studies; and health management studies.

A-Z of recommended usage

About	This should be used only with numbers rounded-off to tens or hundreds. Do not say 'about 572'.
Act	This should be capitalised when it refers to an Act of Parliament. The same applies to 'Bill' and 'White/Green Paper'.
Adviser / advisor	There is no general agreement on which of these should be used. 'Adviser' appears to be more common in the UK, and 'advisor' in the US. The Financial Times uses the former. Best advice is to choose one and be consistent.
Affect / effect	Generally, 'affect' is a verb and 'effect' a noun. When you affect something, you produce an effect on it. However, you can effect (that is, bring about) a change.
Allow / enable	'Enable' means to make able, not to make possible. So, the software enables the user to monitor use of the service; but the software allows use of the service to be monitored.
Ampersand	Should be used only as part of a formal title, such as Department for Work & Pensions, Health & Safety Executive, Tyne & Wear, and not instead of 'and'.
Bill	(see Act)
Billion	In the UK this means thousand million. If writing financial papers then the abbreviation is 'bn'.
Bullet points	<p>Treat bullet points as part of a sentence. They should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make sense running on from the start of that sentence and be preceded by a colon; • be in lower case with a semicolon at the end; • have 'or' or 'and' at the end of the penultimate bullet after the semicolon; and • the last bullet in the series should end with a full stop. <p>Try to avoid lists within lists, but where they are required use a different bullet mark to differentiate the different levels within the hierarchy. Bullets should be 'hanging' as this makes them easier to read.</p>
Civil Service	Use initial capitals when referring to the institution but lower case for 'civil servants'.
Colons	<p>Colons (:) are used in sentences to show that something is following, like a quotation, example, or list. Semicolons (;) are used to join two independent clauses, or two complete thoughts that could stand alone as complete sentences.</p> <p>When a colon is used in a headline, the next word should start with a lowercase letter</p>

Colour	Use black text on a white background unless someone requests something different to help them access your work. In graphics, choose only one or two colours to add emphasis and stick to the Defence Brand guidelines if you can.
Compare	This usually goes with 'to' or 'with'. Use 'compared to' if you are pointing out or implying a resemblance between two things regarded as essentially different. For example, 'the interview was compared to an argument in a school playground'. Use 'compared with' if you are contrasting things of the same order. For example, 'savings were £440 million in 2012/13, compared with £316 million in 2011/12'.
Co-operate and co-ordinate	The government style guide says that these take hyphens, but email, infrared, printout, readout, reopen, reuse and worldwide do not. NATO does not hyphenate 'cooperate' and 'coordinate'. Choose the appropriate version for the context you are writing in and be consistent.
Council / Councillor / Counsel	Uppercase for names and titles and lowercase in every other circumstance. Counsel means to give advice or is a legal term for a barrister.
Dates	Dates should be written '18 June 2015', without commas. If a span of time is involved, avoid hyphens or dashes and make it 'The pilot scheme will run from 1 to 30 April' or '1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014'. For financial years, use an oblique stroke, not a hyphen: '2012 / 13'.
Department	This normally takes a lower case 'd' unless a specific government department is being referred to by its official title.
Different from / to	The rights and wrongs of 'different from / to' and even (in American English) 'different than' are much-debated but we advise using 'different from' and 'similar to'.
Dots	A series of three dots, an ellipsis, can be used to indicate missing or omitted words in a quote (...).
Due to	'Because of' is often better.
Embassy / High Commission	The main UK diplomatic mission in a Commonwealth country is a high commission. Elsewhere, it is an embassy.
Emphasis	Bold is best, <u>underline</u> if you need a different kind of emphasis, and use <i>italics</i> only as a last resort. This is because most people find bold easiest to read, and italics the most difficult.
Fewer / fewer than	Use 'fewer' for numbers, but 'less' for quantity: 'fewer than 50 special advisers' but 'less than 75%'.
Font	Use Arial because it is one of the easiest fonts to read on screen. Use size 12 in normal writing; smaller font is acceptable in tables.

Gender neutrality	Avoid using gender when referring to a person generically. You can do this by rephrasing the sentence or, if this is not possible, by using 'they' or 'their'. For example, not 'When we hire the new CEO, his first duty will be to', but 'When we hire the new CEO, their first duty will be to', or 'The first duty of the new CEO, once hired, will be to'.
Geographical names	Make sure you use the right name for the right country or location to avoid causing international offence or causing uncertainty – follow the guidance of the UK Permanent Committee on Geographical Names .
Government	This normally takes a lower case g unless a specific government is being referred to. So, it is 'the UK Government', but 'successive governments', 'government data', 'the workings of government'.
Headers and footers	Security classifications should be placed centrally in both the header and footer of a document, in line with JSP 440. Handling instructions need only appear at the top. Page numbers should be on the bottom footer on the right to avoid increasing the size of the footer.
Headlines and headings	Use sentence case (so just a capital letter to begin the headline) in bold type.
However	It is acceptable to start a sentence with 'however'. However, if used to provide a link with the previous sentence it should be followed by a comma. If used to modify a clause no comma is required.
Hyperlinks	Hyperlinks should be clear about what they are linking to. They should be activated in documents (normally meaning they appear underlined and in a different font colour) and followed by a full stop if they are at the end of a sentence.
Initials	Use full stops after the initials of a person. Full stops are not necessary when initials are part of an acronym or in a signature block.
Information / data Management	Follow JSP 441 (Information, Knowledge, Digital and Data in Defence) for further information.
Justification	Text should be aligned to the left on the page. Exceptions are possible where text is being used as part of a graphic.
Language	Use UK English.
Less / less than	These should be used for amounts / quantity / units of measurement ('less investment', 'less than 75%'; 'less than 40 miles away'). (See More than / over .)
Long / short term	These terms are hyphenated if used as adjectives. For example, 'short-term benefit'.

Minister	Use upper case for a full title, such as 'Minister for the Cabinet Office', or when used with a name, such as 'Cabinet Office Minister Chris Skidmore'. When referring non-specifically to a minister or ministers, use lower case.
More than / over	Traditionally, 'more' than is considered appropriate before a number or quantity ('more than a billion hits on GOV.UK'; 'more than a metric tonne'), and 'over' in expressions of spatial relationship or age ('over the limit'; 'people over 50'). We suggest you follow this rule in more formal communications, though 'more than / over' are increasingly used interchangeably before numbers and amounts. (See Less / less than.)
Multi	This prefix, as in 'multidisciplinary' or 'multinational', does not have to be followed by a hyphen, but where it is followed by a vowel, you could use a hyphen for clarity. For example, 'multi-ethnic', 'multi-agency'. (Of course, you could always find a more user-friendly expression.)
Onto	Is one word, except when it means 'onwards' and 'towards', as in 'move on to the next point', or 'apprentices can go on to full-time employment'.
One nation	This term is all lower case, unless referring to the political standpoint supported by Benjamin Disraeli.
Page numbers	Should be applied to all documents of more than one page and should make clear how many pages there are in total, 'Page 9 of 14'. See 'Headers and footers'.
Paragraph numbering	<p>Should be applied to all formal documents. The standard is</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A paragraph that has a number, followed by a full stop and a tab space of 1 cm. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sub paragraph, indented another 1cm tab space. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Sub sub paragraph, indented another 1 cm tab space. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Sub sub sub paragraph, indented another 1cm <p>The text under each paragraph or subparagraph should not be further indented (or 'hanging'). See separate guidance on bullet points (page 8).</p>
Parliament	This takes a capital 'P', but 'parliamentary' is all lower case.
Per cent	Use 'per cent' not 'percent'. Use the symbol % with a number.
Prime Minister	Use 'Prime Minister Winston Churchill' and 'the Prime Minister'.
Program	This spelling is only correct when used in connection with computing – 'computer program', 'software program'.

Protective marking	Follow JSP 440 (Defence Manual of Security, Resilience and Business Continuity) and the Government Security Classification guidance. If a document is Official, it does not need a protective marking. See 'headers and footers'.
Referencing	Documents that are essential to the content of your document are to be referenced upfront. Where minor points or quotations are used, these are to be referenced with footnotes.
Regions	The regions are in lower case: midlands, south west, north east.
Registered trade marks	These indicate products from a particular manufacturer. There is no need to use trade mark symbols, except in technical publications to specify one particular product.
Roles or names	If in doubt, use both: Stephen Lovegrove, Permanent Secretary.
Seasons	The seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter, do not have an initial capital.
Spaces	Insert a single space after a full stop, not two or more. When using a slash to separate related items of information / data, use a space both before and after a slash.
Spelling	Avoid American spellings (for example, 'defence' not 'defense'; 'cypher' not 'cipher'; 'cancelled' not 'canceled'. For words ending '-ise' or '-yse', use either s or z ('organise / organize'; 'analyse / analyze'), but be consistent.
Tables and figures	Identify figures, diagrams and tables with a bold numbered caption, 'Figure 1', 'Table 2', and refer to them in the text. In tables, align the text and figures to present the information in the most readable way. If a table covers more than one page, repeat the column headings at the start of each new page.
That / which	'That' and 'which' create subtle differences of meaning. As a general rule, 'that' is used to introduce information essential to the meaning of a sentence. 'Which', preceded by a comma, is used to introduce additional information that could be omitted without affecting the meaning. For example: 'The services, which are digital, are new.' The words after 'which' add information about the services, they are all digital, not some other kind, and they are all new. However, in the sentence, 'The services that are digital are new,' we are only talking about digital services among others that are not digital, and only the digital ones are new.
Time	Generally, use the 24-hour format, for example 13:45.
UK	The UK is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Great Britain means England, Scotland and Wales. However, say British Embassy, not UK Embassy, and British

	citizen, unless referring specifically to someone from Northern Ireland.
Under way	This term is two words. For example, 'the project is under way'.
While	This should be used to indicate that something is happening at the same time as something else, not as an alternative to 'and'.

Formats

We use different kinds of documents for different purposes. Think about what is appropriate for the purpose you have in mind and avoid the temptation to write a full brief or submission when an email would do. You should use the templates in Part 1 where appropriate, which are as follows:

Format	Description
Agendas	Agendas are used to organise meetings, and minutes record the business transacted. It helps everyone if we are consistent in the way we format these documents, so use the formats in Part 1 of this JSP.
Briefs	We write briefs to impart information, including to ministers and senior officials. They are distinct from a submission because the structure is more flexible but in general you should include the reason for the brief, the significant points that the reader needs to know or to communicate to others i.e. ‘the lines to take’; and a short background section. The clue to their length is in the title.
Business case	A business case is designed to gain approval for the commitment of resources. It provides a standalone summary of the proposals or options including the evidence and analysis needed to support decision making. Detailed guidance on the structure and content of Business cases is contained in JSP 655 . The effort expended on developing a business case should be proportionate to the likely costs and benefits.
Email	There is no mandated format for email messages. Be clear what you want from recipients in the subject line and use the principles outlined in the rest of this document to make your emails clear, accurate and brief. We write emails for all sorts of reasons (including as formal records) but consider whether a conversation would be more effective and think about your distribution list to avoid cluttering people’s inboxes unnecessarily. Put content in emails rather than in attachments wherever possible to help your recipient(s).
Letter	A letter template is in Part 1 of this JSP. As with all writing, consider your audience and aim for clear, concise and accurate writing in a consistent format.

Format	Description
PowerPoint packs and presentations	<p>PowerPoint slides can be used in place of a written report or for projection on a screen if you are doing a presentation. While the other guidance in this JSP still applies, the following is also relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less is usually more: slides should look clean and white space will help things to stand out. • Be consistent between slides, using the same design and layout (for example fonts, font sizes, location of headings/page numbers and alignment of text). • If you have a design feature like a heavy line at the top, or a sidebar to help navigation, use it consistently. • Use colours sparingly, choosing one or two complementary colours in addition to black and white to help you get your message across. Avoid special effects or gradient fills. • Align objects, so that their edges look sharp and tight. When you have selected multiple objects, the ‘format’ tab under ‘drawing tools’ has an align feature that makes this easy. <p>The MOD Brand Guidelines should be consulted and followed when creating any communication or publication.</p>
Submission	<p>A submission is appropriate when you either need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seek a decision or agreement to a proposed course of action from a minister or a senior official (I recommend you agree), or • tell a minister or a senior official something formally (I recommend you note). <p>Use the mandated format in Part 1 of this JSP. A couple of pages is normally enough, with only the necessary background information included. Avoid repeating what they already know and ask if you’re not sure. Where you are seeking a decision or agreement, make sure you’ve considered the credible options, including ‘do nothing’. Unless the advice is sensitive it should be sent to the private office multi-user account and copied to the lead private secretary/assistant private secretary. By default, copy addressees should include all the other ministerial private offices, special advisers (SpAds), and Permanent Secretary private office multi-user accounts. Specific advice on ministerial submissions has been issued by the Chief of Staff to the Secretary of State.</p>

Annexes and appendices can be used to provide supporting information to the main document you are writing. Enclosures are similar but are standalone documents. Annexes are lettered but appendices should be numbered.

Weasel words, metaphors and digital content

Weasel words and inappropriate metaphors

Weasel words are vague or ambiguous words and expressions that have been drained of meaning through overuse. They add nothing to the reader's understanding and may even mislead.

The expression 'weasel words' is based on a traditional belief that weasels suck the yolk from birds' eggs, leaving only the empty shell.

Here is a selection of words and phrases that can be unhelpful, **unless they have a defined meaning that your audience understands** (for example using 'in order to' in military mission statements):

- dialogue (is not a synonym for speaking to people);
- facilitate (instead, say something specific about how you are helping);
- foster (unless it is children);
- going forward (why not just say, 'we will' do something);
- in order to / so as to (phrases like these are superfluous);
- initiate (why not just 'start?');
- key (unless it unlocks something. A subject/thing is not 'key' – it's probably 'important');
- land (as a verb – only use if you are talking about aircraft, or fish);
- leverage (unless in the financial sense);
- progress (as a verb);
- promote/promoting (as in 'promoting greater efficiency'; unless you are talking about an ad campaign or some other marketing promotion);
- slimming down (processes do not diet – we are probably removing x amount of paperwork or redundant practices);
- stakeholder;
- streamline;
- transforming (say what you are actually doing to change something); and
- utilise (use 'use').

This is a far from exhaustive list. We all have pet hates that we would include. The point is to think clearly about what information you want to get across and not to fall back on clichés and jargon.

Metaphors

Metaphor is an intrinsic part of the language. Most of the time we are not even aware we are using it. We know you cannot literally 'drive' reform in the way you drive a car or drive cattle, but we know what it means. Some policies or programmes are based on the power of metaphor, such as 'The Talent Action Plan – Removing the Barriers to Success'.

Metaphors can bring writing to life, enhance our understanding and underline meaning in effective ways. But what George Orwell called 'worn-out' metaphors ('thinking out of the box', 'going forward', 'park something', 'touch base') add nothing to our understanding. Others can actually obscure meaning. So, the advice is to use metaphors with care.

Creating digital content

Writing for the web is a particular discipline. The principles of clear writing apply, but you can find more advice on the [government digital service style guide](#).

You should also consider:

- **reading pattern** – when people scan web content, they trace an F-shaped reading pattern – make sure your important content and call to action is in the title, summary and first paragraph of the body copy;
- **title** – think of the search terms people will be using to find this content; make sure your title is meaningful and ‘front-loaded’ with significant words; Google only uses the first 65 characters for its search algorithms, so keep to this limit;
- **notes to editors in media releases** – include links in the text as you go along, rather than in ‘Notes to editors’; this section tends to alienate people outside the media and means important content (such as links to reports) is often lost at the end of items and appears without context; and
- **keep it short** – to hold the reader’s attention aim for sentences of fewer than 25 words and keep articles brief – many people will not read to the end of long pieces.