

Style specifics

Last Updated: 16/11/2020

In this guide

[Capital letters](#)

[Acronyms and abbreviations](#)

[Preferred spellings](#)

[Words and phrases to avoid or take care with](#)

[Contractions](#)

[Numbers](#)

[Times and dates](#)

[URLs](#)

Capital letters

[Back to top](#)

Avoid capital letters where they're not needed, and don't use them if you're in doubt. Email addresses are all in lower case.

We do capitalise 'the Code' (but not 'the') and 'our Council'. This is to give these two fundamentally important things appropriate emphasis.

Job titles

Job titles take initial capitals ('Director of Professional Regulation'), but job roles do not (such as 'the directors met...', 'the nurses spoke to their manager').

The head of our organisation is always 'Chief Executive and Registrar' never just 'Chief Executive' or 'CEO'. However, you can refer to the role of 'Registrar' independently when talking about fitness to practise and registrations processes.

Titles of forms, events, projects or processes

These are usually written in lower case. For example, refer to the 'revalidation project', our 'fit for purpose review', and 'annual performance reviews' and so on.

However, if the title is a unique phrase or could create confusion it should be capitalised. An example of where it would be better to capitalise for clarity would be the 'Rising Together mentoring scheme'.

Titles of legislation

Acts of Parliament and other pieces of legislation take initial capitals for each word but not italics, and should always include the year. So, for example: "The NMC was established under the Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001. The order sets out our powers..."

Titles of publications

Use an initial capital letter followed by all lower case. Use a colon before subtitles, then a second initial capital. For example, Raising concerns: Guidance for nurses and midwives (NMC, 2010). Write the author and year of

publication in brackets. If the first word in a publication is 'A' or 'The', then capitalise the second word as well.

Avoid using NMC in the title of a document. For example this is our House style guide, not the NMC house style guide. For subsequent references to the publication, you can use a shortened version of the title, without capital letters or italics, for example "this guide should be referred to when writing any publication".

Organisations

Organisation names usually have initial capitals, for example the 'Nursing and Midwifery Council' or the 'Department of Health and Social Care'. Political parties, for example the 'Labour Party', use initial capitals, and always use an initial capital for 'Parliament'.

When referring specifically to 'the Government' (for example, when the Government decides its policy'), use a capital 'G'. However, when referring to government in general (for example, 'national and local government'), or as an adjective (for example, 'many government departments'), use a lower case 'g'.

Acronyms and abbreviations

[Back to top](#)

Avoid acronyms and abbreviations if they just add to the jargon.

If an acronym will be useful to avoid repeating a frequently written phrase, write the name in full the first time, followed by the acronym. For example, 'Royal College of Nursing (RCN)'. However, do not define an acronym in this way in a heading. Write 'Royal College of Nursing' in the heading, then 'Royal College of Nursing (RCN)' the first time you use it in the text below the heading.

If you won't be using the name again in the document, there's no need to include the acronym too. For example, if you're writing a short paragraph and will only mention Department of Health and Social Care once, don't write Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) -- simply write Department of Health and Social Care.

If you say the acronym as a word, spell it as one, with an initial capital, such as 'Trim', 'Pin' and so on.

Don't use a full-stop after abbreviations (Dr, Mrs, Mr) or after times, weights and measurements.

Don't use ampersands when writing text, except in NMC logo.

Preferred spellings

[Back to top](#)

- Registrable not registerable.
- Adviser not advisor.
- Email not e-mail.
- Fetus or fetal, rather than foetus or foetal.
- Directors group not Directors' group.
- Benefiting and benefited not benefitting or benefitted
- Use -ise ending to words, not -ize. For example, 'organisation', not 'organization'.
- 'Paediatrics' and 'paediatrician', not 'pediatrics'.
- Use 'judgement'; and 'acknowledgment'.
- 'Percent' should be written in full when used in body text, however '%' can be used in graphs, charts and tables.
- An attachment to a paper is an 'annexe', not an 'annex' or 'appendix'.

Words and phrases to avoid or take care with

[Back to top](#)

- The word 'patient' should only be used in specific circumstances. Generally it's better to use phrases like 'members of the public' or 'people who use services'. This is particularly important when talking about midwifery, as there are far fewer 'patients' in that setting.
- Service users - while it's fine to say 'people who use services' it's not fine to say 'service users'. It takes away from the fact they're people first.
- 'Putting people at the heart' - no-one wants to be 'put' anywhere. They want to be at the centre like it's a natural thing. So it's fine to say, 'People are at the heart of everything we do' but not, 'We put people at the heart of everything we do'.

- When talking about settings where nurses work, we should always refer to 'social care' too. For example, refer to 'Health and social care professionals' not just 'Healthcare professionals'.
- FtP - this was an acronym for the former Fitness to Practise directorate. When writing about the process, or a person's fitness to practise, it's better to write this in full using initial lower case letters ('fitness to practise'). This is more important when writing for an external reader. Internally, FtP is fine to use.
- When we talk about the professional groups we regulate we should always reference nursing associates in England.
- We use gender neutral terms. Always use 'they' or 'their', not 'he/she' or 'his/her'.
- The words 'rules', 'standards', 'guidance' and 'advice' all have specific meanings in our legislation, and should only be used in line with these specific meanings.
- We use the word 'must' when referring to requirements in our rules and standards, and the word 'should' when referring to guidance we produce.
- 'Vulnerable people' or 'vulnerable' – this is a loaded term that can bring up notions of weakness, victimhood, dependency and exclusion. We only use it with great care and not as a synonym for people with disabilities. Use more accurate and meaningful phrases instead that describe the specific vulnerability in its particular situation and setting.
- The word 'supervision' can mean clinical supervision, statutory supervision or something more general.
- 'Committed suicide' - this outdated phrase comes from a time when suicide was considered a crime that a person had committed. Instead, say, 'Died by suicide'.
- Avoid ambiguous phrases like 'reaching out'.
- e.g. or eg - You should use 'for example' instead.
- i.e. or ie - You should use 'that is' instead.
- etc - You should use 'items such as' before your list, or 'and so on' at the end of your list instead.
- 'practice' is the noun, and 'practise' is the verb.
- 'while' not 'whilst'

Contractions

[Back to top](#)

It's fine to use contractions and they can make it easier for people to understand. Just don't overdo it. Here are some that are fine to use and others that are best avoided because they're harder to read.

Aren't
Can't; Couldn't
Could've; Couldn't've; Should've; Shouldn't've; Would've; Wouldn't've
Didn't; Doesn't; Don't
Hadn't; Hasn't; Haven't
Had've
I'd; She'd; He'd; They'd; Who'd
It'd
I'm; I've; She's; He's; They're; They've; Who'd
I'll; She'll; He'll; They'll; It'll; Who'll
Let's

That's; That'll
That'd
There's
There'd; There'll; There're
Wasn't; Weren't
What's
What'll
You'll; You'd; You're; You've

Numbers

[Back to top](#)

Write out numbers one to nine, and use numerals from 10 upwards. Avoid starting a sentence with a number – rephrase the sentence instead. For example, '18,370 professionals joined our register last year' might become, 'A total of 18,370 professionals joined our register last year.'

Use a comma only when writing numbers of five digits or more (1000 but 10,000).

Write London phone numbers with the correct dialling code of 020, never 0207. So, our number is 020 7637 7181. Mobiles are five numbers, followed by six, so 07766 114703.

Times and dates

[Back to top](#)

Dates should be written in the format 21 July 2020. Write times in the 24 hours format, with a colon separator, for example 09:30 or 17:00.

Time and date ranges should be written 21–22 January 2020, or 13:30–16:00, using an en dash with no spaces. To write an en dash, press 'Ctrl' and the 'minus' on the number pad on your keyboard. Note the difference between a hyphen (-) and an en dash (–).

URLs

[Back to top](#)

Hyperlink website URLs in text when possible. For example: '[Visit the NMC website](#)' not 'Visit the NMC website at <https://www.nmc.org.uk/>'.