

# JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION WRITING STYLE GUIDE

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This guide is intended for both authors and editors. We don't want to tell you how to write or make you write like everyone else. But we do want your message to be clear and memorable.

This guide will help you write effectively and it will help you meet JRF publication guidelines from the start, for consistency and to avoid the need for editorial intervention. Finally, it will guide you towards creating a document that works effectively in a web environment. This is vital because most people access JRF reports and summaries through JRF's website ([www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)).

## A–Z OF HOUSE STYLE

### Abbreviations

- Use as few abbreviations as possible.
- Use full stops in lower-case abbreviations such as i.e., e.g., and also in etc., Co., p. (page) and pp. (pages).
- No full stops should be used in uppercase abbreviations (such as UK, US etc.) and no full stops in measurement abbreviations such as mm, kg and so on. Abbreviated units of measurement do not take a final 's' in the plural. Please be consistent with use of metric units and abbreviations.
- It can be useful to readers to include a glossary of all abbreviations and acronyms used in the text.

### Acronyms

- Keep the use of acronyms and initials to a minimum.
- Use acronyms for proper terms – DEFRA (Department for Education, Food and Rural Affairs) – but not for unofficial terms such as V&CS (voluntary and community sector).
- Capitalised acronyms take no full stops. Use the full name on first use with the acronym in brackets, then the acronym thereafter.
- It can be useful to readers to include a glossary of all abbreviations and acronyms used in the text.

### Acts, bills, white papers, green papers and legal cases

- The title of Acts of Parliament should appear in roman (not italic) with no comma between the title and the year, in this form: 'the Finance Act 2006'.
- The titles of bills (proposed new laws), white papers (parliamentary papers laying out government policy) and green papers (consultation documents) should appear in italic and all main words should have an initial capital letter. (Businesses and non-parliamentary bodies frequently issue white and green papers of their own and these should be treated in the same way.)
- The names of parties in legal cases should be in italic, with the v. between in roman and with a full stop. The year of the case appears in roman, in brackets following: e.g. '*Marks v. Spencer* (2007)'.

### Active or passive voice

- Use the active voice. It makes the writing tighter, more immediate and introduces action earlier in the sentence. Compare: 'Fred rowed the boat across the lake' (active) with 'The boat was rowed across the lake by Fred' (passive).
- You may use the passive voice if you want to focus attention on the receiver of the action: 'The town's residents were asked what they thought'.

## Britain, Great Britain and the United Kingdom

- Confusion between the UK and its constituent parts is common. In all writing it is important to be clear what you are referring to.
  - **Britain** is a geographical term describing the island containing England, Wales and Scotland.
  - **Great Britain** is usual for the political unit that encompasses these countries.
  - The **United Kingdom** is a political unit that includes these countries and Northern Ireland (but not the Isle of Man and the Channel Isles).
  - The **British Isles** is a geographical term that includes the United Kingdom, Ireland and the surrounding islands.
- Note that devolved political authority means there are differences between the countries of the UK, and the language you use should reflect this.

## Capital letters

- Minimal use of capitalisation is preferred. What this means is that while **general** is not capitalised, the **specific** takes a capital letter at the start of the word:
- *Benefits and government programmes* 'Most would agree that benefits play an important part in this. In particular, interviewees confirmed that both Income Support and Housing Benefit ...'  
'A number of government programmes – including the New Deal for Lone Parents – fall into this category.'
- *Government/government* 'The Brown Government is bucking the trend established by previous governments.'
- *Job titles* 'Among government ministers, Housing Minister Jane Smith is unique.'
- *Official bodies* 'York Housing Association is one of the housing associations that ...'  
'Not many borough councils can compete with Lambeth Borough Council when it comes to ...'
- *Regions* 'Roads leading south from the city centre are congested during the rush hour.'  
'The population is concentrated in the north-east of the country, not South East London.'
- *Royalty* 'The Queen of Spain shares with other heads of state ...'
- *Specific religious institutions and buildings* 'The Church of England owns many churches in need of refurbishment.'
- *Titles and headings* Use an initial capital for the first word and all subsequent proper nouns in all titles, subtitles, headings and subheadings, e.g. 'What have we here? A brief biography of Byron'.

## Contractions

- Contractions ending with the same letter as the original word do not take a final full stop: Mr, Dr, St, plc, 1<sup>st</sup> and so on.
- Contractions – don't, 'won't, can't, etc. – are acceptable in directly reported speech but should be avoided in general.
- Ampersands are acceptable in common acronyms/names such as B&Q or Marks & Spencer, but should be avoided otherwise.

## Dates and time

- Use the form 5 August 2007.
- Refer to 'the 1930s' (not 'the '30s' or 'the Thirties'); 'the seventeenth century' (not 'the 17<sup>th</sup> century' or 'the Seventeenth Century'; but note its adjectival use in 'seventeenth-century philosopher').
- Times should be in the form 10am rather than 10 am or 10a.m.

## Editing/technical details

- Use a spaced en-rule (alt key + hyphen/underscore key) for parenthetical dashes in the text: 'She said – and it was quite clear – that we should leave.'
- Use a closed up en-rule for joining together two nouns: 'UK–US', 'French–English'. (But use a hyphen in 'Anglo-American', 'Franco-English'.)
- Use a closed-up en-rule for ranges of numbers: 'A group of 18–35 year olds'.
- Use a single line space between paragraphs and before a new heading or subheading.

## Emphasis

- Don't overuse capitals, italics or bold face text for emphasis as they make text harder to read. Good writing style should convey any necessary emphasis. Equally, delete exclamation marks not used in directly reported speech.

## Figures, tables and boxes

NB. Always supply your figures separately, not embedded in Word files. See 'Supplying text and graphics' guide at [www.jrf.org.uk/funding/current-funding-holders](http://www.jrf.org.uk/funding/current-funding-holders)

- Boxes, figures and tables should always be cross-referenced in the text and should always be numbered consecutively, e.g. 1, 2, 3 etc.
- Text references to boxes, figures and tables should be in the style: 'The comparison of trainees and other interviewees revealed a broadly similar pattern between the two groups (see Table 3).'
- All boxes, figures and tables should have captions. These should appear at the top of the box, figure or table and be in the style: 'Table 3 How to make a perfect soufflé'. No full stop between the word 'Table', 'Figure' or 'Box' and the number, which should always be Arabic. Double space after the number and before the caption. Caption to take initial capital letter for first word and any proper nouns only. No full stop at end of the caption.

- Notes on their content should be in roman text immediately below the box, figure or table. More general notes on text should appear in a numbered list form (see 'Notes' and 'References' sections).
- Sources should appear after notes (if used) and be preceded by the word 'Source' (initial capital) and followed by a colon.

## Hyphens

- Generally speaking, minimal use is preferred. However, hyphens can be very useful for clarifying meaning:
  - They join two or more words to form a single expression: 'get-at-able'.
  - Adjectivally, they clarify meaning: 'a well-dressed man' is not the same as 'a well, dressed man'.
  - They join a prefix to a proper name: 'pro-Darwin'.
  - They separate a prefix from the main word to clarify meaning: re-cover/recover, re-sign/resign.
  - They separate two similar consonant or vowel sounds: co-operate, Ross-shire.
  - They represent a common element in a list: 'two-, three- or fourfold'.

Generally, follow *The new Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* for decisions on capitalisation.

JRF special rulings include:

email	home-owners
decision-makers	owner-occupiers
hearing impaired people	policy-makers

## Italics

- May be used for titles and foreign words/phrases where strictly necessary.
- May also be used for added or original emphasis in quotations and direct speech.

## Jargon

- Jargon is a difficult area. Yesterday's jargon can become so entrenched in the policy debate that it is impossible to avoid. As with Americanisms, it is probably best to treat jargon and specialist terms with caution. If you think the reader will not understand the word, it is better to use something else.
- Try to avoid using new verbs that have been formed from nouns such as 'operationalise' (use 'put into practice', instead).

## Lists

- Use bullets (round first, then dash for sub-bullets) in preference to numbered lists unless there is cross-referencing or meaningful progression. (If numbered or lettered, use full stop and double space after number/letter.)
- No unpunctuated bullet points.
- There should be a line space before and after bulleted lists.
- Where each point is a full sentence, introduce with a capital letter and close with a full stop. Otherwise, introduce each point with lower-case letter and close the final point with a semi-colon and a final full stop.

## Notes

- Please do not use the MS Word automatic footnote or endnote function.
- Use endnotes rather than footnotes.
- Refer to all notes in the text and number them consistently.
- Note indicator numbers should be placed outside the full stop at the end of the sentence: 'and other researchers in this field recorded similar responses.<sup>3</sup> We also saw that...'
- If the note refers to part of the sentence only, the note indicator can go in the middle of the sentence: 'other recent publications<sup>3</sup> do not mention this observation.'

## Numbers

- Statistics: round up figures under ten to the nearest whole unit unless there is a very clear need to be precise (e.g. 8 per cent rather than 7.7 per cent). Note that percentages do not need to add up to 100 – the acceptable range is between 99 and 101, to take account of rounding.
- Present ranges of numbers in the shortest form possible: 123–7, 1860–5. But retain 'tens' in 18–19, 1914–18.
- Spell out numbers in text up to and including twelve. But be consistent: use 'eleven to thirteen' rather than 'eleven to 13'.
- It is acceptable to use both figures and spelled out numbers where confusion might otherwise occur: 'ten of the businesses in the complex employed fewer than 10 employees, while fifteen employed over 20'.
- Never start a sentence with a figure, spell out instead. If the number cannot be spelled out, rewrite the sentence.  
Use figures for ages (12 years old), measurements (12 light years, 10 millimetres, 2 hectares), all percentages and abbreviations (such as kg, km etc.).
- Round numbers above 999 may be spelled out: two thousand, two million, five thousand.
- Use per cent not % unless it occurs frequently or the piece is very statistical. Use % in tables, figures and boxes.
- Use commas in four- and five-figure numbers.

## Plural and singular

- Data is treated as a single noun.
- Companies and organisations are treated as singular.
- Single nouns may take third person plural possessive to avoid sexist bias stemming from using the masculine pronoun: 'Each child was asked whether their parents read with them at home.' When possible, however, use a plural noun: 'All the children were asked whether their parents read to them at home.'

## Quotations

- Quotations should always be attributed, even if you need to do so broadly (e.g. mother, social worker) to preserve individual anonymity.
- We prefer the standardisation of reported speech to any attempt to replicate individual speech patterns/dialect using either the standard alphabet or phonetic transcription. We want to ensure the meaning is clear to as many readers as possible. Swearing or derogatory language is acceptable in relevant direct quotes.
- Extract quotations of more than 40 words. Extracted quotations have no inverted commas at the beginning and end. Dialogue within quotations retains its own inverted commas.
- Use single inverted commas ( ' ') for non-extracted, quoted material.
- Speech, and quotations within quotations, take double inverted commas ( " " ). Use single inverted commas for introducing awkward or unusual terminology (i.e. 'cringe' or 'sneer' quotes) but keep usage to a minimum.
- Attributions for extracted quotations (in JRF reports) should appear on a new line under the quote, right-aligned, no parenthesis.
- Use square brackets to mark any author's interjections or linking material ([ ]).
- Use three points for ellipses, with a space on either side, to indicate omissions. Close up a final ellipsis to the closing quotation marks where the sense is left hanging: e.g. "I wanted to do that, but ...".

## References

### *References to other publications*

Please use the author–date (or Harvard) system:

- The author and the year of publication are cited in the text in the form: ‘other research (Brown, 2004) suggests’ (note: comma between author and date). If the author’s name forms part of the sentence: ‘other research by Brown (2004) suggests...’.
- The full reference then appears in a list of references at the end of the document. If there are two or more publications by the same author in the same year, use a, b, c after the date: ‘(Brown, 2004a)’. If there are two authors with the same surname, initials should be used: ‘(A. Brown, 2004)’.
- References to multi-author works may take the form: ‘(Brown, *et al.*, 2004)’ with full details of all authors appearing in the list of references.
- Personal communications and other unpublished works (such as theses) may be referred to via a full reference in the text: ‘(A. B. Jones, personal communication)’.
- The list of references at the end of the text – after any Notes – should be alphabetically arranged. Works by a single author are listed before works written with others. Multiple multi-author works should be arranged alphabetically by second author.

The form of entry for references is:

- Author, A. B. (2007) ‘Title of paper’, *Title of Journal*, Vol. 111, No. 11, pp. 11–22
  - E.g. Innes, M. (2004) ‘Signal crimes and signal disorder’. *British Journal of Sociology*, 55(3), pp. 335–55
- Author, A. B. and Another, C. D. (eds) (2001) *Title of book*. Place of publication: Publisher
  - E.g. Jamieson, J., McIvor, G. and Murray, C. (1999) *Understanding offending among young people*. Edinburgh: HMSO

### *References to JRF publications:*

*Findings:* ‘The impact of tax credits on mothers’ employment’, JRF *Findings* (August 2007, Ref: 2110)

*Round-up:* ‘Experiences of poverty and educational disadvantage’, Donald Hirsch, JRF *Round-up* (August 2007, Ref: 2112)

*Solutions:* ‘How can funding of long-term care adapt for an ageing population? Practical examples and costed solutions’, Sue Collins, JRF *Solutions* (August 2007, Ref: 2113)

*Viewpoint:* ‘Are mixed communities the answer to segregation and poverty?’, Paul Cheshire, JRF *Viewpoint* (August 2007, Ref: 2111)

### Referring to groups

This is a sensitive area and accepted usage is constantly changing. If you are writing within your own specialism you will be familiar with the most acceptable usage. If not, you may need to seek advice on current acceptable practice. JRF prefers the following usages.

Use	Don't use
people experiencing poverty/ poorer people/ people on a low income/ people receiving benefits (as appropriate)	the poor/ people dependent on benefits
homeless people	the homeless
disabled people	the disabled
men/women	males/females
people	persons
disabled/ non-disabled people	able-bodied people
people with learning difficulties	people with learning disabilities/ learning disabled people, except where phrase is used in titles of other works, government programmes etc.
older people (or 'much older people' for over-85s)	elderly people
care staff or care practitioners (paid staff)	carer (unless applying to 'informal' or unpaid carers)
Gypsies/Travellers (capital letter)	
people from minority ethnic communities/ minority ethnic groups / ethnic minority groups	ethnic minorities/ minority ethnics
black*	Black/ BME/ black afro/ Afro-Caribbean
white*	White
deaf (describes the impairment)	Deaf (unless being used to define an identity, as a linguistic minority)
hearing impaired people	hard of hearing
visually impaired people/people with visual impairments	blind/partially blind
people with mental health problems	mentally ill

*\*Census or cultural terms may require a capital letter.*

Once you have established which group you are speaking about, 'people', 'interviewees' or participants' etc. can be used to avoid repetition.

### **Referring to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation**

- Use 'supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation' not 'funded by ...'.
- Abbreviate to 'JRF'.
- Do not use Rowntree, the Foundation, or the Rowntree Foundation, and never the Rowntree Trust.
- JRF also runs a housing association, which is referred to as the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust or JRHT (but, again, never the Rowntree Trust).
- Two other organisations are sometimes confused with JRF: these are the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd. All three organisations are completely separate bodies.

### **Referring to other organisations and publications**

- The definite article in the names of these usually takes a lower case 't': the *Sunday Times*, the Houses of Parliament, the National Health Service (or, more usually, the NHS).
- But use an initial capital letter for 'The' with single word publications such as *The Guardian*, *The Economist* and *The Independent*.

### **Spellings**

- Generally use British spellings, with –ise word endings.
- Follow US spelling of program and disk for computer-related programs and computer disks including disk drives etc. But stick with computer programmers (rather than programers).
- Generally, follow the *The new Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors*, but please use: judgement (but judgment in the legal sense), focused, connection, medieval, encyclopaedia.

### **Structure**

- How do you structure your writing? Start by finding answers to the following questions:
  - Who is going to read the document?
  - What will they expect to get from it?
  - When (and where and how) will they be reading it?
  - What are you trying to achieve by writing it?
- Plan out your structure. One way to do this is: Write your main subject and the main themes and ideas connected to it. Add sub-ideas and topics, then number the main ideas in order of importance or by logical progression. Do the same for the sub-topics. This should give you a sensible overall structure, with virtually all your main and subheadings in place.
- Some publications produced for JRF will be more straightforward with a standard structure around which you must organise your writing. (Each of these has a separate guidance document, which will be available at [www.jrf.org.uk/funding/current-funding-holders](http://www.jrf.org.uk/funding/current-funding-holders))

- Once you begin writing your document, remember that your goal is to organise material so that readers can extract what they want in the shortest possible time. Some of this will be achieved by good structure. Other tools include:
  - **Bulleed lists.** These extract significant points and draw the reader's eye. They can be overdone – beware of lists within lists – but used well they are a definite help.
  - **Figures, tables and boxes.** People absorb information graphically. If you can put some of your facts into a graph or a table, please do so. Boxes can be used to highlight nuggets of really vital information.
  - **Appendices.** Use these to keep the main document clear of detail that might otherwise overwhelm the reader.
  - **Subheadings.** Let readers know where they are in the information flow. Meaningful, short sub-headings help break the text into digestible parts. They also facilitate scanning behaviour by the reader. The first few words of a heading are vital (see note on 'Titles', below). Don't number subheadings or headings – only chapters should be numbered.

### Tense

- In most cases, the 'past historic' is the appropriate tense to use, e.g. 'Working mothers felt they were juggling home and work responsibilities', *not*: 'Working mothers feel they are juggling home and work responsibilities'. The 'present continuous' *may* be appropriate where the project has used a very large sample.

### Titles

- Titles should be clear, short and understandable. They should be descriptive and give an immediate and clear indication of the subject matter. They shouldn't be 'quirky' and if there is a subtitle, the main title should contain the description of the report's content. The title should not be just the 'working title' used during the research phase of the project.
- Titles are of critical importance on the web (see 'Web readability'). A clear title containing search keywords will help ensure that your document is ranked well by search engines and will help your reader find it among the clutter of their results pages.
- Eye-tracking studies show that when scanning, for instance, search engine results pages, the eye of the (Western) reader fixes on the (top) left area of text (see images below). By ensuring that the first words of a title are 'information carrying' your work is more likely to be found and read.



Copyright: *F-shaped pattern for reading web content* (Jakob Nielsen, 2006).

- This figure shows 'heat maps' from user eye-tracking studies of three websites. They show how users read three different types of web pages:
  - an article in the 'About us' section of a corporate website (far left);
  - a product page on an e-commerce site (centre); and
  - a search engine results page (far right).
- The areas where users looked the most are coloured red; the yellow areas indicate fewer views; followed by the least-viewed blue areas. Grey areas didn't attract any fixations. In particular, note the rightmost image – a Google search results page that indicates just how important the first words of a document title are.

See [www.useit.com/alertbox/reading\\_pattern.html](http://www.useit.com/alertbox/reading_pattern.html) for more information.

### Web readability

- The most common way for people to access JRF documents is now via JRF's website (although most will print hard copies of what they find). Web users are often in a hurry, and reading from a screen is tiring, so it is a mistake to expect online readers to be as thorough as print readers. Short, clear pages sympathetic to scanning draw people in and keep them reading. And a clear, short document works just as well – if not better – when printed.
- When facing a web audience, it is especially important to make a good impression, to ensure that the first 'screenful' is optimised for online reading:
  - Put your conclusions at the top of the page. Use the journalists' 'inverted pyramid', ensuring that the most important information is at the beginning and the tiniest additional detail in the last sentence.
  - Prune words ruthlessly: keep it plain and short.
  - Use scannable text, including bulleted lists, short paragraphs and links.
  - Use a clear document structure, with good subheadings.

More information on this can be found at: [www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/](http://www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/)

**Writing for JRF publications**

- See separate guidance notes for reports and summaries available at [www.jrf.org.uk/funding/current-funding-holders](http://www.jrf.org.uk/funding/current-funding-holders)

## SIX WRITING VIRTUES

These six 'rules' offer straightforward ways to improve the effectiveness of your writing.

### *1. Use short words and short sentences*

As Ernest Gowers, author of *The Complete Plain Words*, put it: 'Be short, be simple, be human'. Why risk using 'exigencies' when you can use 'needs'? The list below is a small selection of commonly used words with better, shorter alternatives.

Long sentences can also muddle and exhaust the reader. Try to make your sentences about 15 to 20 words long, on average. If they are regularly closer to 50 than 15 words, consider the following:

- Split and disconnect. Separate the main ideas with a full stop. Leave the main ideas separate.
- Split and connect. Similar, but use a linking word such as 'however,' 'yet' or 'so', to start the second sentence.
- Use a list. Could you take the main points in the sentence and make them into a bulleted list?

Cut verbiage. Are your sentences full of words that don't carry meaning? Try deleting needless prepositions ('check out', 'face up to', 'meet with'). Banish vague words ('considerable', 'substantial', 'quite', 'somewhat') and remove waffle ('the vast majority of', 'in a number of cases', 'in connection with', 'as regards').

Delete adjectives. Only use them if they make your meaning more precise. It is useful to know if the crisis is 'economic'. It is less useful to be told it is 'acute'.

### *2. Write in concrete not abstract terms*

Abstract words are popular because they obscure meaning. Writers can feel more comfortable with the vague and the general. Compare: 'communities where anonymity in personal relationships prevails' with 'streets where people don't know one another'.

It undoubtedly takes more thought to express yourself accurately, and it leaves you more exposed. But if you try to avoid nouns when verbs make things clearer, you will be doing your job better. 'Conclude', don't 'reach a conclusion'. 'Investigate' don't 'undertake an investigation'.

### *3. Be clear*

Do not litter your text with technical terms, unnecessary foreign phrases or clichés that stand between your story and the reader. Use 'idée fixe' or 'raison d'être' and you risk losing your reader. Clichés have a similar effect; they are over-familiar and make your writing dull. If a phrase springs too easily to mind, examine it. Does 'first and foremost' work any better than 'first'? If someone is 'a pillar of the community', do we appreciate them more?

#### *4. Be objective*

Your aim is to be objective and to relay information. You want your intelligent readers to absorb the information and draw their own conclusions. Avoid the conspiratorial ('meetings behind closed doors', 'leaks to the press', 'secret plans'), the dramatic ('tragedy', 'disaster', 'crisis') and the emotional ('families who are torn apart', 'employees who are heartlessly sacked'). Resist guiding the reader with words such as 'allegedly' or 'harshly'. Remember, however controversial, politically sensitive or moving your subject matter, you should always write factually and dispassionately.

#### *5. Use punctuation to help*

Good punctuation will make your meaning clearer to your reader. While your choice of punctuation is as personal as your choice of words, a few basic rules need to be followed.

Commas. Commas work for you in four ways. They separate clauses ('As the players ran onto the field, the crowd roared its approval'); they can help clarify meaning ('She took the book which was hers' does not mean the same as 'She took the book, which was hers'); they separate items in a list (as with this list); and they mark the beginning and end of 'asides' ('All the cakes, except the dry-looking flapjack, sold in minutes').

Semi-colons. If you want a more distinct break in a sentence than a comma would give, but you don't want a separate sentence, a semi-colon is ideal: 'To err is human; to forgive, divine'.

Colons. The pause created by a colon is more profound: colons are used when the second part of the sentence follows naturally from the first; to lead from a general idea to a specific point, perhaps. They can also be used to introduce a list.

Full stops. These are used at the end of all sentences that don't end with a question mark or an exclamation mark. They are also used to indicate abbreviation.

Apostrophes. These show possession ('the man's joke fell flat') or omission ('I'll say so'). There are perennial problems with plural possession ('the red car's wheels were less worn than all the other cars' wheels' [singular then plural]; 'the new child's book was newer than the other children's books' [singular then plural]), and words like 'its', which only takes an apostrophe when 'it's' the short form of 'it is'.

#### *6. Use modern British English*

While certain Americanisms annoy British readers, many US words and phrases are now common here and enrich British English. However, when writing for a primarily British audience it still makes sense to avoid words and phrases like 'gotten' (which still sounds illiterate to the British ear), 'loan' (as a verb, rather than lend), 'stand in line' (rather than 'queue'), or 'appeal a verdict' ('appeal against a verdict'). In this quickly moving area, be a trend follower rather than a trendsetter: use Americanisms conservatively.

Finally, use the active voice. The active makes things livelier, shorter, more immediate, more relevant, snappier – and is all the more important for web writing. It makes the writing tighter, more immediate and introduces action earlier in the sentence.

## **FIVE TOP TIPS FOR WRITING & FINAL CHECKS**

1. Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, cut it out.
4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase or jargon if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

As you write always try to:

- Keep the reader in mind.
- Be concise. Most publications are accessed via the website.
- Prioritise useful information and conclusions. Keep them at the top of the copy and the start of paragraphs.
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short. Your on-screen reader will thank you and there will be no complaints from hard-copy readers.

- It is a good idea to re-read your text after a break of a few days. Ask yourself:
  - Is it too formal? Too chatty?
  - Does it mean what you want it to?
  - Is it objective? Or have you allowed personal opinion and speculation to creep in?
  - Rewrite where necessary. Then read it again.
- After your final edit, try running the spelling and grammar checks that come with MS Word. Although not infallible, they can compensate for word blindness brought on by knowing what a sentence should say. To get the best out of them:
  - Try to stay alert throughout the spell checking. (It is so easy to hit 'ignore' every time.)
  - Don't assume automatic grammar corrections are correct. (MS Word would change 'These should be arranged alphabetically by second author' to 'Second author should arrange alphabetically'.)

## REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

### Good writing guides

*The Complete Plain Words* by Sir Ernest Gowers.

*The Oxford Guide to Plain English* by Martin Cutts.

### General reference books

*The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*.

*The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors*.

*Eats, Shoots and Leaves* by Lynne Truss.

### Technical reference books

*Copy-editing* by Judith Butcher.

*Hart's Rules*.

### Web guides

[www.plain-text.co.uk/a\\_to\\_z.html](http://www.plain-text.co.uk/a_to_z.html)