

Website content style guide

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Key:

- ✓ Do this
- ✗ Don't do this
- Further explanation

Important notes:

60% of users browse the internet using a mobile device.

- ✓ Think about how your page will look on a small screen.
- ✓ Think about the potential difficulty for readers if they have to scroll through vast amounts of information.

Web users want to easily locate all relevant content for your service.

- ✓ Group related service content on as few pages as possible, preferably one, so readers don't have to search multiple pages.

Web users want concise answers quickly.

- ✓ Always think about what your reader **needs** and what **action** you want them to take.
- ✓ Write your content in plain English.
- ✓ Separate it into small 'chunks' to guide the reader through the page.
- ✓ Present only the vital details they'll need for accessing your service.
- ✓ Could any other explanatory information be on a PDF?

1. Writing style

Write in the first person.

- ✓ **We** always aim to rearrange missed collections as soon as possible.
- ✓ **Our** apprenticeships are in the top 20% of providers.
- ✓ Join **us** at the community workshops for the local plan.

- ✗ Northumberland County Council has a duty to residents to be transparent.
- ✗ These sections provide you with the opportunity to view a range of information regarding how the council goes about its business dealings.

Use a conversational style. Write as though you were face to face with your reader and explaining this information to them.

- ✓ It's important vehicles only park in bays of an appropriate size.

- ✗ It is important that vehicles park in bays that are suitable for that vehicle type and in the case of larger vehicles such as motorhomes they should only park in bays that are of an appropriate size.

Avoid using jargon and technical language, unless you are writing for a professional audience that is comfortable with the terminology.

- ✓ Think about whether the public understand all the terms used?
- ✓ Imagine your reader knows nothing about your services.

Be direct and avoid repetition.

- ✗ Don't put anything on a webpage that isn't vital to those accessing your service.
- ✗ Don't repeat information that is present on the same webpage or elsewhere.

- ✓ Do put non-vital explanatory information into linked PDFs.

Always write in full sentences but keep them short and to the point. Always read your work aloud. **When you take a natural pause, use a comma or full stop. Don't use more than two commas in a sentence.**

- ✓ Children can be entitled to free school meals if they or a parent receive a qualifying benefit.

- ✗ If your employer does not have a whistleblowing policy, or if you are still not sure how to raise your concerns with your employer or someone else, it is suggested that you first get free, confidential advice from the independent whistleblowing charity Public Concern at Work; they can help you to decide whether and/or how to raise your concern.

When referencing a link, make it clear there is information to be found.

- ✓ [Download the adoption information pack here](#)

- ✗ [Click here](#)

2. Capital letters

- ✓ **Avoid using unnecessary capitals.** Many people incorrectly place capitals in words they think are important but **only true proper nouns (full names for individual/unique persons, places and organisations)** should have a capital.
- ✓ **If a phrase uses an abbreviation - this does not necessarily mean it needs capitals.** For example, CD is a compact disc and HGV is a heavy goods vehicle.
- ✓ **If in doubt, always use lower case.** The full name of a council or organisation needs initial capitals, e.g. Northumberland County Council, but the council, county council, councillors do not.
- ✓ **Job titles should always be lower case** in the main text. Names of departments, committees, divisions or teams should also be lower case.

Yellows indicate incorrect usage of capitals.

- ✗ Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is used to work out claims for housing benefits for tenants renting accommodation from a private landlord.
- ✗ Find out about the work our Environmental Enforcement Team do and how to report any issues to us.
- ✗ The draft Strategy includes a draft Action Plan which sets out what the Council hopes to deliver and by when.
- ✗ This part of the website is for 'Parents' and 'Carers', including anyone with Parental Responsibility, Children's relatives, friends and neighbours who need information or advice.
- ✗ Being mistreated or abused (sometimes called 'Significant Harm') is defined as Sexual Abuse, Physical Abuse, Neglect or Emotional Abuse.
- ✗ There are four Overview and Scrutiny Committees who support the work of the Policy Board and the Council as a whole.
- ✗ To apply for a place in a Northumberland Secondary School (middle, high and secondary) you should be resident in Northumberland and have a child who is due to transfer into a Middle, High, Secondary School or Academy in September 2016.

3. Headings

Headline and subhead style should only use a capital on the beginning word or for proper nouns.

✓ Historic landscape character or Holy Island crossing timetable

✗ Historic Landscape Character or Holy Island Crossing Timetable

4. Commas

Use commas sparingly. Never use more than two. If you have more than two, your sentence is too long to read easily.

- ✓ While perfectly normal, the constant barking or whining of a dog can be disturbing and annoying for neighbours.

- ✗ In deciding whether or not a noise is a statutory nuisance the environmental health officer will consider what would be the likely reaction of an average, reasonable person to the noise taking into account a number of factors including, the locality, the time of day or night, the loudness, and the frequency and duration of the noise complained of.

5. Apostrophes

Apostrophes are used to indicate missing letters.

- ✓ There's an online reporting form and contact details on the Red Squirrels Northern England website here. - **There's instead of There is**
- ✓ If you've ever wondered what happens to your recycling, you can find out by visiting our West Sleekburn recycling plant, near Ashington. - **you've instead of you have**
- ✓ Check what you can and can't put in your bins here. – **can't instead of cannot**

Apostrophes also indicate singular or plural possession.

- ✓ The team carries out the local authority's statutory responsibilities. **The authority (singular) possesses statutory responsibilities.**
- ✓ Kyloe House is a secure children's home based near Morpeth in Northumberland. **Kyloe House is a home for children (plural).**

Singular words ending in S normally take an apostrophe and following S.

- ✓ The Duchess's Community High School
- ✓ Councillor Kate Cairns's expenses

Plurals ending in S just have a following apostrophe.

- ✓ Our students' union is also there to provide advice, guidance and support, and campaign for students' rights.

Use an apostrophe when a period of time modifies a common noun (thing).

- ✓ Your appeal will be looked at in six weeks' time. **The noun is time and the period of time is six weeks.**
- ✓ The children are enjoying two days' holiday. **The noun is holiday and the period of time is two days.**

[If in doubt about apostrophes please consult the Guardian style guide.](#)

6. Numbers

- ✓ One to nine should be written as words. 10 and above are written as figures.
- ✓ When referencing graphs/appendices, it's acceptable to use single figures.

7. Date

Don't use 'th' or a comma in a date.

- ✓ Wednesday 26 October 2015

- ✗ Wednesday 26th October 2015
- ✗ Wednesday, October 26, 2015

8. Time

- ✓ 12-hour clock – e.g. 7am or 4.30pm.
- ✓ noon and midnight

- ✗ 7.00am
- ✗ 24-hour clock – e.g. 16.30 or 14.00
- ✗ 12pm or 12am or 12 noon

9. Ages

- ✓ 12-year-old
- ✓ 12 years old
- ✓ This applies to children aged 12 or under.
- ✓ This applies to children up to 12 years old.

- ✗ 12 year old
- ✗ 12-years-old
- ✗ This applies to children aged zero to 12.
- ✗ This applies to children from birth to 12 years old.

10. Bullets

Use bulleted lists as often as possible. Introduce bullets with text ending with a colon.

To achieve an award, we have to demonstrate and fulfil the following:

- no prohibited additives (from a prescribed list)
- no hydrogenated fats
- no monosodium glutamate (MSG)

If the text that follows the bullet point is not a proper sentence, it doesn't need to begin with a capital letter and it shouldn't end with a full stop.

To achieve an award, we have to demonstrate and fulfil the following:

- no prohibited additives (from a prescribed list)
- no hydrogenated fats
- no monosodium glutamate (MSG)

If a bullet is a complete sentence, it starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop.

On the day, please remember:

- Your garden collection day may not be the same day as your regular bin collection day.
- Put your bin out before 7am.
- Place your bin at the side of the kerb, outside of your property.
- Take your bin back once it has been emptied.

11. Quotes

Use double quotation marks when quoting direct from a person, except for quotes within quotes. You should open the quotation with the name of the person quoted, then the word said and then a colon. A full stop goes inside double quotation marks at the end of a quote that is a full sentence.

- ✓ Dean Jackson said: "This event is the latest step in progressing ambitious plans for the future."
- ✓ Councillor Robert Arkless, cabinet member for children's services, said: "The theme of 'have your voice heard' highlights the role youth work has in getting the next generation involved in decision making."

- ✗ Dean Jackson said: "This event is the latest step in progressing ambitious plans for the future".
- ✗ Dean Jackson said, "This event is the latest step in progressing ambitious plans for the future."

12. Bold

Use **bold for emphasis**, not capitals, and never use underline as readers might confuse this with a hyperlink.

✓ Convert to **real nappies** and save money, as well as the environment.

✗ PLEASE NOTE: we don't recycle juice and milk cartons (Tetrapacks).

13. Abbreviations

If you are going to use acronyms or abbreviations **you must always show the full version first followed by the acronym in brackets**. The only exception is where an acronym is more widely known than the full title. **Avoid using brackets except to explain an abbreviation/acronym.**

- ✓ Cllr Arckless made his plea live to the BBC television audience. **BBC is better known than British Broadcasting Corporation.**
- ✓ Please view Ofsted's processes and procedures for dealing with whistleblowing referrals here. **Ofsted is better known than Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills.**
- ✓ Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) tackle wildfires across the county.
- ✓ North East Combined Authority (NECA) is made up of councils from the region.

14. Exclamation marks

Don't use exclamation marks. Exclamation marks are used for very strong feelings, shouting and danger warning signs. They should not be sprinkled in copy for emphasis.

For further information on grammar and writing style,
[please use the Guardian style guide here.](#)

15. Images

Taking your own photos

- Always get written permission from the person/s in the photo to use online.
- Be extra careful when the subject of the photo is very young or very old.
- If in doubt, ask the web team by emailing website@northumberland.gov.uk

Re-using images

- Don't assume that an image someone else used for one section of our website can be re-used in yours. Always check with them first.

Downloading images

- Please select your images from: www.fotolia.com
Email the image number to: website@northumberland.gov.uk
- Do not download images from the internet, even from websites that claim to offer copyright-free pictures. Publishing images on the website that infringe copyright can lead to severe fines and these will be paid for by your department.

Image selection

- Images should be used to help explain the service rather than making the page more attractive.
- Images should show the service demonstrated by our staff, if possible.
- All of the in-page images on the website are landscape (wide).
- The header images at the top of pages need to be high resolution "letterbox" shape (wide and thin).

