

Amnesty International UK

ENERGETIC

INCLUSIVE

CONFIDENT

Guidelines to **Editorial Style**

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Welcome to **Amnesty International UK's Editorial Style guide**, part of our toolkit trio of practical guides for powerful brand communications.

This provides basic rules for clear, consistent writing in print and online. Good writing does justice to the human rights stories we have to tell – and will inform and inspire our audiences to intensify the work for change in the world.

The guides work alongside our creative brand 'playbook' and underpin our communications strategy – to engage more effectively with our audiences, reach out to more people, and make Amnesty stronger.

**This guide will be regularly updated to reflect developments in language and terminology*

- See also guides for **Visual Style** and **Using Photography**



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MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

‘Story’ can describe anything, from a tiger who came to tea to a major international investigation into corporate corruption. ‘Story-telling’ is a popular theme for training seminars.

Telling a story works with the three elements – writer, reader and subject. The writer aims to win the reader’s attention and commitment through a compelling story – but who owns the story?

Every Amnesty report, story, tweet, video, email, graphic, has at its heart the life and experience of a human being. As a human rights movement, every action we take is about people. We must be acutely conscious and respectful of how the story, the human, is presented.

That’s a good story

We draw attention to human rights violations to inspire effective action for change. As campaigners, we are familiar with human rights terminology, and technical terms and acronyms slip into our daily usage as convenient shortcuts.

But such terms are unfamiliar to many readers and risk dehumanising the very people whose stories we tell. We know what a human rights defender is, and that there are good reasons to make the term more widely known. But as a general label it is abstract and de-personalising – and compressing this to ‘HRD’ compounds the offence. It is better to introduce the person with what they specifically do (eg stand up for their community’s right to access clean water) and use the term later in the story.

Make words matter

Verbal habits don’t always travel well in writing. Some words we hear a lot in conversation add no value in a written/read piece. ‘Fantastic’, ‘incredible’, ‘amazing’, or ‘brutal’, ‘horrific’ are used to big up something or someone in the story – but they only add a vague opinion. Take the trouble to think of a word that adds value and see how the story gains strength and depth.

Show some respect

How we represent the people in the human rights stories we tell should never simply show them as helpless victims. They are all people who have a voice of their own – our job is to make sure it gets heard and respected in the face of the forces that would silence them. Amnesty now has exhaustive procedures and guidelines to cover collecting information, interviewing people, photographing them, and publishing their stories. These require conscious consent and understanding how the stories will be used. Keep this in mind also for UK stories and photos collected by local groups. See *Applying Amnesty International Values*.



MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Inclusive language

Amnesty International UK is conducting rigorous work across the organisation, and of course editorial and communications guidelines will be updated as this progresses. Meantime we can still do a lot to examine the words and images we use and make sure we are sensitive to all the issues that have been raised.

These are exciting and challenging debates which will have a direct and profound impact on how we understand and work for human rights change. The challenges include recognising and undoing the fact of systemic discrimination. Research by the Open University puts ‘decolonising the curriculum’ in their top 10 most important innovations for the future of education. Institutional standards and guidelines everywhere must change as we take proper account of the many hidden stories emerging.

Diversity challenges include race, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, education, religion, cognitive and physical abilities, thought, age, geographic origins. We need to actively recognise, acknowledge and value these in order to build true equity.

In writing, don’t confuse or conflate the terms race, ethnicity, ethnic origin and national origin. Ethnicity is belonging to a group with a common cultural background such as religion, language. Ethnic origin is ancestry. National origin is your country. Someone of Nigerian parentage, born in the UK and speaking only English, is not Nigerian, but British (of Nigerian descent, if that is relevant to the story).

There are many different views on antiracist terminology. What’s acceptable language is shifting and changing. For example the term ‘person of colour’, in spite of its dubious origins, is now widely

used as a positive and empowering reclamation of the term ‘coloured’. We capitalise the adjective Black (see page 16). This is now official style in US media such as the NY Times, because ‘it best conveys elements of shared history and identity, and reflects our goal to be respectful of all the people and communities we cover’.

In this changing scene, our editorial guide cannot provide a specific answer on every point of style and terminology. But we can highlight writing principles that will keep us alert to the need for diversity and inclusion, and we can always put the human first in our stories.

Check out

- **Gender identity – a beginner’s guide**
- **diversitystyleguide.com**
- **ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide**
- **Divided by the same language**

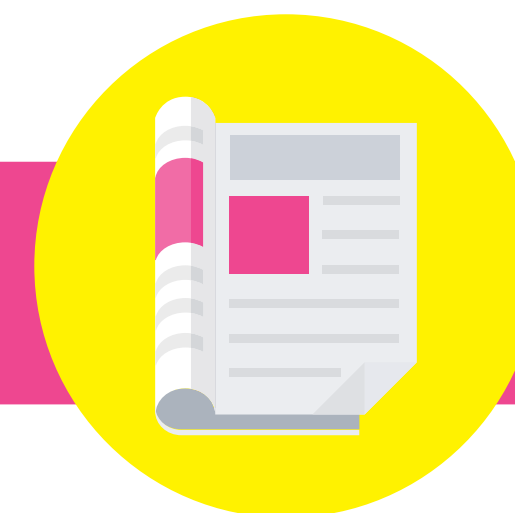
In short...

- Our style and tone show who we are and how we interpret the story and the people in it. Be alert, check policy guidelines and discuss with case managers.
- Evolving language: What terminology is acceptable and what’s not can change.
- BAME as an acronym is acceptable when referring to data, but not to people. Only use BAME in a direct quote or reporting on an organisation. As a ‘hold-all’ it is inadequate, and as an acronym it dehumanises.
- Keep learning, be specific, don’t generalise, choose words with care, check where/when to capitalise.
- Always use gender-neutral language where possible. For gender-neutral pronouns, use plural they, them.
- Men, women and children – generally refer to ‘people’ unless specific identification is relevant to the story. See page 17.



GOOD WRITING

IN PRINT



‘The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one’s real and one’s declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting ink.’

George Orwell

The **principles** of good writing are simple: think about your readers and say what you have to say as clearly as possible. You can apply these to any of Amnesty’s internal and external communications – policy manuals, operating instructions and strategic plans, as well as fundraising or advertising copy, magazine features, campaign leaflets and briefing papers. A third principle applies to communication with our supporters and the wider public: focus on the people.

Think about your readers.

What will get their attention?

What will keep them interested?

What’s in it for them?

Writing, like any form of communication, is a two-way process: readers will interpret your words on the basis of their own knowledge and experience. They are likely to draw conclusions about what you think of them, as well as about what you intend to say. And if they get bored or impatient, they stop reading.

Remember: some readers will know less than you do about your subject matter. Start where your audience is at, and build in more information as you go along so they grasp your argument.



TOP TEN TIPS IN PRINT



1 Limit the ideas in a sentence.

This will help you keep it clear. You can vary the structure and length of your sentences without making them hard to understand. But if a sentence has more than 30 words, that's a sign that it's overloaded. Split it in two.

2 Make it active.

Active sentences use fewer words than passive ones. The active shows immediately who did what to whom, with passive you have to wait to find out.

- **Passive:** A sentence was written by you.
- **Active:** You wrote a sentence. The passive can hide who's responsible for an action
- **Passive:** 'A decision has been taken'
- **Active:** 'The government has decided'

The passive is useful to focus on the person whose rights are abused:

- **Passive:** An Egyptian journalist was arrested by police.
- **Active:** Police arrested an Egyptian journalist.

3 Make it positive.

In writing, the word 'not' is easily missed, especially when people are skim-reading. Make your sentences positive whenever you can.

- **Negative:** We did not implement the plan.
- **Positive:** We failed to implement the plan.
- We abandoned the plan.

Or, to be more emphatic:

- We never implemented the plan.

Always avoid double negatives: they blur your meaning. If something is 'not unlikely', does that mean that it is likely, or it is possible?

4 Keep it short.

Omit needless words. Here are a few examples:

- ✓ Seats
- ✗ Seating accommodation
- ✓ Strike
- ✗ Strike action
- ✓ Now
- ✗ At this time

5 Write with nouns and verbs.

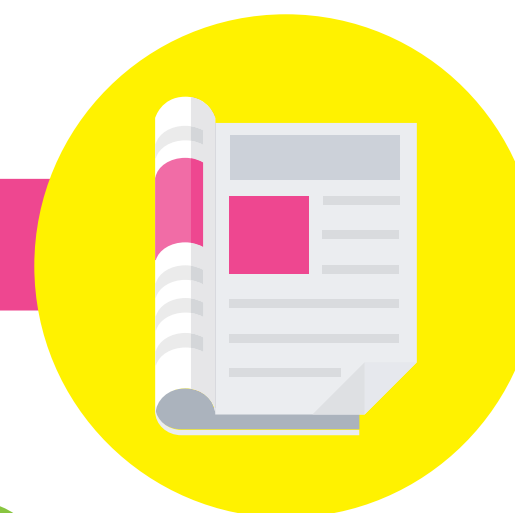
Nouns name people, places, things, events, substances, qualities. Verbs refer to actions, states of being or experiences. If you can get as much meaning into nouns and verbs as possible, your writing will have more impact.

- **Instead of:** Walk slowly
Try: Amble
- **Instead of:** Say loudly
Try: Shout
- **Instead of:** Impact negatively
Try: Harm / damage / undermine

Use adjectives and adverbs only when they add meaning. Resist the temptation to add 'brutal' to murders, 'real' to solutions or 'utterly' to inhumane.



TOP TEN TIPS IN PRINT



6

Show, don't tell.

If you write that an event was fabulous, great or exciting, the readers will know you had a nice time. If you say a human rights violation was appalling or horrific, they will understand you are upset. If you can show them what was fabulous (or appalling) about it, they may start to feel the same way. Give enough detail to engage readers' hearts and minds. If the speakers were inspiring, what did they say? If the riot police were brutal, what did they do?

7

Use specific words.

Avoiding generalisations will help to keep your readers' attention. Avoid generalisations. Call a prison a prison, not a facility; call an international court a court, not a justice mechanism. If you know that the soldiers who came to the village killed and tortured people, then say so. Readers will grasp what happened more clearly than if you say the soldiers 'committed human rights violations'.

8

Avoid clichés.

Many clichés start life as original, vivid phrases. That's why people pick them up and repeat them until they grow so familiar they lose their power and begin to irritate. Think before you reach for favourite Amnesty clichés – 'horrific abuses', 'tireless campaigning', 'making a difference'.

9

Avoid jargon.

Jargon can be a useful shorthand within an organisation. But it can mystify readers, exclude the uninitiated and dignify nonsense. In Amnesty jargon comes from all sides – political, legal, management, social science, UN diplomat-speak, our own inventions. We get so used to it we fail to recognise it. But if we use it with the wider public, readers are likely to feel we are talking to an in-club, not to them.

10

Know when to break the rules.

Sometimes you will need to use the passive form, or the word 'not', or even a jargon term like 'individuals at risk'. But first consider the pitfalls, and the alternatives.



GOOD WRITING

ONLINE



The **principle** of making your meaning clear still holds for writing online. But reading on screen is very different from reading a book or a newspaper article. Instead of reading down the page, people scan and skim until they find what they are looking for – and if they can't find it quickly, they go somewhere else.

When you write online, **think about your audience as users**, not readers, and focus on their needs. Web users are hunting for solutions, they want to find out, go places and get things done. You need to meet their needs fast. What can you help them to understand, find out, or do? How can you make that as quick and easy as possible?

Help users to find you. The art of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is all about making your content more visible in search engine results. These three techniques (right) won't give you free traffic but can help make sure your webpage has the best chance of being shown to relevant users.

- 1 Give your page a concise, unique and accurate title. Avoid puns or vague language.
- 2 Sprinkle relevant keywords throughout your copy. Think about various words and phrases that a user might search for to find your content. But don't go overboard – drowning your copy in keywords will distract from the story and irritate people.
- 3 Fill in the 'alt text' field when uploading an image. Make it descriptive and clear, for example, 'Refugees camp out at Chios harbour in Greece.'



TOP TEN TIPS ONLINE



1 Don't get to the point: start with it.

Tell users what the page is about, clearly and quickly. Users are impatient, impulsive and don't pay attention. The average time a user spent on an amnesty.org.uk page in 2020 was 77 seconds. For those accessing the site from their mobile phones, this dropped to 57 seconds. This is a significant detail given that 72 per cent of all sessions that year were on phones.

2 Put all the key information at the beginning.

Users rarely scroll down to the end of the page. If they do, it is because you have given them a good reason to think they will find what they are looking for. So start with the most important points, then add supporting information and finish with the background. Important means important to the user, not important to you.

3 Make it active and positive and avoid clichés and jargon.

This helps users grasp the point quickly. Please refer to pages 6 and 7 (tips 2, 3, 8 and 9) for more detailed guidance.

4 Use short, simple words.

Most people scan webpages to get the gist, rather than reading line by line: the average user reads about 20 per cent of the page. Short words let them take in more meaning as they scan.

5 Write short, simple sentences.

People read 25 per cent more slowly online than they do in print, so sentences need to be shorter: 20 words maximum.



TOP TEN TIPS ONLINE



6 Write short paragraphs.

This helps to break up text on the page, making it easier for users to find what they are looking for. In print it is unusual to have a one-sentence paragraph, but online a paragraph can be as short as you like.

7 Avoid bland, generic words.

Words like ‘situation’, ‘issue’, ‘special’, ‘challenge’ give users little clue what you are talking about. Be specific.

8 Use signposting.

Use headings, bullet-points, lists and links as signposts to help users find what they are looking for. Fragments let you pull key words to the front, where users can spot them immediately. They are also shorter than complete sentences.

9 Make links predictable.

Links are highlighted on the page and users can spot them immediately. If the link says ‘click here’, they need to read the preceding sentence to find out what the link is for. Will they bother? If the link says ‘Donald Trump squashed by elephant’ users are more likely to click – but the link has to take them to information about Trump being squashed by an elephant. If not, we lose credibility – and users.

10 Break up the page.

Use pullquotes, pictures, infographics, subheadings and lists (see fragments, above). This makes the page more interesting to look at, and easier for the reader to scan.



REFERENCE

A-Z GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION



‘Grammar is the difference between knowing your shit and knowing you’re shit.’

Anon

‘What really alarms me about President Bush’s “War on Terrorism” is the grammar. How do you wage war on an abstract noun? How is “Terrorism” going to surrender?’

Terry Jones

GRAMMAR is a set of rules for putting words together to make them mean something: for getting ideas out of one person’s head and into someone else’s. It enables people who speak the same language to understand each other, and to communicate effectively.

PUNCTUATION is a set of marks used to help make written language clearer. In spoken language, it is not only words and their order that convey meaning, but also pauses, intonation, volume, gestures. Punctuation helps make up for the absence of these in writing.



Adjectives

If a place name has an adjective, use it.

- Italian citizen
- Philippine government
- Syrian authorities

Exception. Use the noun as an adjective in cases like these:

- Syria campaign (if you mean a campaign about Syria, not by Syria)
- Cuba initiative (if you mean an initiative about Cuba, not by Cuba)

Apostrophes

Apostrophes usually indicate missing letters or possession. Apostrophes still matter, and where you put them affects the meaning.

- can’t = cannot
 - cant = insincere, pious talk
 - it’s = it is (missing letter)
 - its = belonging to it (possession)
- It’s time to stop torture.
The government launched its consultation yesterday.
- the bee’s knees (one bee)
 - the bees’ knees (at least two bees)

When a name ends in S, add another S after the apostrophe

- James’s bike

You need an apostrophe when you attach a length of time to a noun:

- in two days’ time
- three weeks’ holiday
- five years’ imprisonment

But don’t add an apostrophe when you attach a length of time to an adjective or prepositional phrase:



REFERENCE GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION

- three years old
- five years in prison

If you are not sure when a time-related phrase needs an apostrophe, try it out in the singular (a week's holiday, one year old).



Brackets

Round brackets are usually used to add a bit of extra information. If the sentence makes sense even without the bit in brackets, the punctuation mark goes outside the brackets (like this). (On the other hand, if you have a complete sentence inside the brackets, it starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop.)

Don't use brackets within brackets.

You can use pairs of dashes and commas to add information, but don't let your sentence get too convoluted.

Square brackets can be used inside quotations, to indicate a note added by a writer or editor to what the person quoted actually said or wrote:

- 'Your organisation [Amnesty International] really helped me,' said the recently released prisoner of conscience.



Collective nouns

Words like committee, government, family should be treated as singular, unless you are talking about the individual members or you want to highlight internal divisions. The same goes for organisations and companies.

- The Board meets quarterly.
- The Board had biscuits with their tea.
- The Cabinet is about to announce its decision.
- The Cabinet are at each other's throats.
- Amnesty International published its report on the death penalty yesterday.

Sports journalism provides an exception to the collective noun rule: Sports teams are always treated as plural.

Colons

Use a colon to introduce lists, examples and quotations. You can also use a colon between two statements when the second one explains or backs up the first one.

For example:

- There was some food left in the fridge: butter, cheese, eggs, yoghurt and lettuce.
- The Amnesty representative said: 'This must stop.'
- The Cambodian authorities are cracking down on human rights defenders and political activists: at least 27 are in jail and hundreds are subject to criminal proceedings.

Commas

Use commas to group words in a sentence together, to help make your meaning clear.

- My favourite sandwiches are chicken and bacon and ham and cheese

could mean

- My favourite sandwiches are chicken and bacon, and ham and cheese.

or it could mean

- My favourite sandwiches are chicken, bacon, ham, and cheese.

Use a comma before and after *however* when it means 'but' or 'on the other hand'. Do not use commas with *however* when it means 'no matter how'.

The meeting started late. However, it finished on time.

The meeting started late. It finished on time, however.

However hard I tried, I couldn't get the punctuation right.



Dangling participles

A dangling participle is an adjective that unintentionally modifies the wrong noun



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in a sentence, which can change the overall meaning. Confused? Here's an example:

- Having finished my dinner, the waitress offered to bring the dessert menu.

This sentence makes it sound like the waitress ate your dinner. You can make things clearer by ensuring the participle and the main verb refer to the same thing, or by using a different construction:

- When I finished my dinner, the waitress offered to bring the dessert menu.

Here's another example:

- **Instead of:** Being a famous ancient monument, I took lots of photographs of Hadrian's Wall.
- **Try:** Because it was a famous monument, I took lots of photographs of Hadrian's Wall.

But don't overdo it. The sentences below are quite clear and acceptable:

- Considering the price, it is astonishing that anyone would buy it.

- Following the coup attempt, thousands of public sector workers were fired.



Exclamation marks

It is grammatically correct to use an exclamation mark at the end of a sentence, but try to resist the urge. It can make you appear coy! Or overexcitable!



Hyphens

Hyphens group words together. They can help make your meaning clear by distinguishing between, for example:

- a cross-reference and a cross reference
- a man eating chicken and a man-eating chicken
- two-year-old children and two year-old children

Adjectives made up of two or three short, common words are usually hyphenated if they come before a noun – but not after it:

- up-to-date research
- long-term goals
- well-known argument
- three-year lease.
- The research was up to date.
- Our goals are long term.
- The argument is well known.
- The lease lasts three years.

Use hyphens in numbers and fractions:

- twenty-four
- five-sixths
- three-quarters.

In most cases, as long as the meaning is clear, you don't need a hyphen:

- human rights defenders
- science fiction books
- decision making powers.



Quotation marks

Quotation marks should be used at the beginning and end of the quoted material. When you quote a complete sentence, the final punctuation mark goes inside the quotation marks. If you quote a fragment, the final punctuation mark goes outside the quotation marks.

- Muthoni Wanyeki, Amnesty's regional director, said: 'Today's ruling is a historic victory.'
- 'Today's ruling is a historic victory,' said Muthoni Wanyeki, Amnesty's regional director.
- Muthoni Wanyeki, Amnesty's regional director, said the African Court's ruling was 'a historic victory'.

If you quote more than one paragraph, each quoted paragraph starts with an opening quotation mark, but only the last paragraph of the quotation has a closing quotation mark.



REFERENCE GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION



Semi-colons

Semi-colons are dying out, especially online, but they are not dead yet. You can use them to balance two connected statements:

- Some people send emails; others send text messages.

They can be used to punctuate lists composed of complex items:

- We call on the authorities to release the activist immediately unless he is charged with a recognisable criminal offence; allow him access to his family and a lawyer of his choice; and end all intimidation and harassment of human rights activists.
- We call on the authorities to:
 - release the activist immediately unless he is charged with a recognisable criminal offence;

- allow him access to his family and a lawyer of his choice;
- end all intimidation and harassment of human rights activists.



That or which?

The traditional rule is: *that* identifies, *which* describes. In practice, you can use *which* to do both: it's punctuation that makes the difference.



Unintended opposites

Efforts to be concise can have unintended consequences.

- The death penalty is popular with our members.
- The campaign to abolish the death penalty is popular with our members.

- Stop activist killings.
- Stop killing activists.

Fake grammar

Many of us were taught in school that we should never:

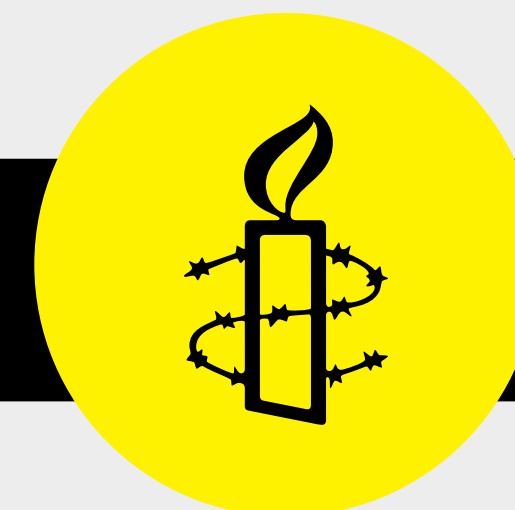
- Start a sentence with 'and', 'but' or 'because'.
- Split an infinitive (insert a word between 'to' and a verb, as in 'to boldly go').
- End a sentence with a preposition, as in: *This is something I will not put up with.*
- Use a plural pronoun and verb after 'none', as in: *None of them know about this.*
- Use a plural pronoun after a singular noun or pronoun, to avoid gender bias, as in: *Everyone is entitled to their day in court.*
Every writer has their own style.

In fact, there is nothing grammatically wrong with any of these.



REFERENCE

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UK HOUSE STYLE



‘Substitute “damn” every time you’re inclined to write “very”. Your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be.’

Mark Twain

A **HOUSE STYLE** is a set of rules that enables us to produce clear and consistent publications. Our house style helps us communicate effectively with UK audiences and reflects our organisation’s values, brand identity and professionalism. It is not about whether something is ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ grammar. It’s about maintaining an identity that our audiences can recognise, even if we have many people writing for us. And it’s also about saving time. There is no need to agonise over relatively trivial decisions such as whether to write organisation or organization: look it up in the style guide (under ‘Spelling’).



Abbreviations

Use abbreviations sparingly: they make a text harder, and less inviting, to read. Spell out the term on first mention, followed by the abbreviation in brackets. After that, use the abbreviation.

- No need to spell out: AIDS, BBC, HIV, UK, UN, USA.
- No need to spell out weights and measures: use kg, km, m, cm, mm etc.
- Do not use full stops after abbreviations (except no. for number).
- Use the full titles of international treaties on first mention in reports, public policy documents and appeal letters. Everywhere else, use the short title.

Accents

Many languages use accents above or underneath letters to mark stress, pitch or pronunciation. They are easy to get wrong unless you know the relevant language well and they may come out wrong online. Make sure we use the correct accents wherever possible – particularly for personal names.

Action

Instructions need to be as clear and simple as possible. If you are using a print publication to drive people to the AIUK website, use a short web address (ask the Digital Engagement Team to provide one).

Amnesty International

Use Amnesty International or Amnesty: do NOT abbreviate to AI, except in picture credits. In more formal publications, use Amnesty International



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as a noun, and Amnesty as an adjective. In less formal publications, use Amnesty. In all external publications, use Amnesty International UK, not AIUK. Fundraising publications require specific wording to comply with charity law.



Capitals

As a general rule, keep it down.

- Use initial caps for titles, but NOT for job descriptions. Prime Minister Theresa May, but after that it's the prime minister. The only exceptions are the Pope and the Queen.
- Use initial caps for the full name of an institution on first mention, eg the World Bank, but thereafter you can refer to it as the bank (unless you have referred to other banks in the meantime, in which case you should go back to the full name).
- Use initial caps for the names of

Amnesty campaigns.

- Capitalise ethnic groups - Black, Asian, Traveller etc, as used by UK government statistics. There is not yet a consistent approach to this, but Amnesty in the USA currently capitalises Black, African Americans, Indigenous Americans etc. Use 'Black' as an adjective, ie 'Black people' not 'Blacks'.
- Use initial caps for acts of parliament: the Human Rights Act, the Lobbying Act, but lower case for bills.
- For schools, churches, hospitals and local authorities, an initial cap for the personal or place name and lower case for everything else: King Edward VI school, St Peter's church, Moorfields eye hospital, the London borough of Hackney.
- Government only has an initial cap at the beginning of a sentence. The same goes for state – unless you are drafting an international treaty.

Contractions

A contraction turns **is not** into **isn't**. Or **it is**

into **it's**. Do not use contractions in formal reports. But it's fine to use them in less formal things, such as social media posts.

Countries

Do not use Britain when you mean UK; use UK government, not British government. See also *UK and devolved governments*, page 21
DR Congo or Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on first mention. After that you can use DRC.
USA for noun, US for adjective.
Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.



Dashes

Distinguish between dashes and hyphens. A hyphen (-) joins two words or numbers. Dashes – like the ones round this phrase – are punctuation marks.

Dates

Write a date like this:

- 10 January 2009
- For a range of dates you can use a hyphen, or 'between... and ...' or 'from... to...'
- 18-25 June
 - between 18 and 25 June
 - from 18 to 25 June.

It is always better to give dates – even approximate ones – than to use words like 'recently'. You never know when your words will be read.

Don't mention it...

The story must be Who, not What... only mention someone's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and more, if this is specifically relevant to the story, eg someone is persecuted because of their religion.

To write 'a deaf person', 'an albino' etc is to define a person by a label.

- ⓧ Wheelchair-bound Mabel Jones wrote a book about making cakes



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- ✔ Mabel Jones, who uses a wheelchair, wrote a bestseller on paralympic basketball.

Check on acceptable ways to refer to specific conditions – such as ‘with albinism’, ‘hard of hearing’.



Euphemisms

Use accurate words:
Died – NOT passed away.
Problem – NOT issue.



Gender

Use gender-neutral language wherever possible. In general, we use ‘people’ rather than ‘men, women and children’. If the report requires more detail, try to make this clear to the reader, without

suggesting that male is the norm. It helps to be as accurate and specific as possible:

- ✔ There were 175 prisoners: 150 men and 25 women
- ✗ NOT There were 175 prisoners, including 25 women

Do not treat women and children as one group.

Do not label women as inherently vulnerable.

Use gender-neutral terms for professions: *firefighter*, *police officer*. The words actor and comedian apply to women.

Do not use masculine pronouns (he, him, his) to refer to people in general. Use gender-neutral pronouns (they, them) unless referring to cases where he or she should apply.

Do not use the term gender in a way that implies only two genders are possible.

See Sexual orientation and gender identity

- See also Gender Identity for beginners, page 20

Geography

Use initial caps for compass points when they are part of the name of a region, county or province eg Eastern Europe, West Africa, South East Asia, West Sussex, East Java, South Dakota. Otherwise use lower case initial, eg in the north of the country.

Government departments

UK government departments and ministries (but not ministers) have an initial capital:

Cabinet Office

Home Office

Foreign Office (abbreviate to FCO)

Treasury

Ministry of Defence

Ministry of Justice

and so on.



Headings

For most Amnesty International UK publications, headings should be either all caps or in sentence case (initial cap on first word only).

Health

Do not equate a person with a diagnosis or an area of medicine (elderly people, NOT geriatrics).

Do not equate HIV and AIDS. Most people with HIV do not have AIDS, so use ‘people living with HIV’ NOT ‘people living with HIV/AIDS’.

Use ‘people with albinism’ NOT albinos.

Use ‘people with mental health problems’ NOT ‘the mentally ill’.

Use ‘a person diagnosed with schizophrenia’ NOT ‘a schizophrenic’.



REFERENCE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UK HOUSE STYLE

Human rights terminology

Refer to the A-Z of terms produced by the International Secretariat, Chapter 8 of *Amnesty International House Style*.



Impact

Use it as a noun, not a verb.

Indigenous Peoples

In referring to a specific people, or group of peoples, use the term they prefer, for example Aboriginal, First Nation, Native American, Maasai. Capitalise Indigenous when referring to people or nations.

Capitalise People or Peoples when referring to the nation, but not when referring to a group of individuals:

- Representatives of Indigenous Peoples attended the meeting.
- Some Indigenous people attended the meeting.

The rights of Indigenous Peoples are premised on their being nations or peoples. Do not use the term *community* to refer to an entire Indigenous People. Do not refer to Indigenous Peoples as populations, tribes, natives or minorities: these terms are often used by states as a substitute for recognising Indigenous Peoples as peoples.

Initials

No spaces or dots in between: GB Shaw, WH Smith, TS Eliot.

Inverted commas

‘Single’ except for quotes within quotes
Do not use inverted commas for titles of books, newspapers, films, plays, or Amnesty campaigns.

Italics

Use for names of films and publications, and for the short names of court cases.



Latin terms

Write in English.

- eg = example
- etc = and so on
- in absentia = in their absence
- in camera = in secret or behind closed doors
- inter alia = among other things.

Less or fewer?

Usually, less refers to quantity and fewer refers to number: less money, fewer people. Use less for fractions or percentages unless they link back to a whole number:

- She ate less than half the cake.
- There were 12 people on the bus and fewer than half had paid a fare.

Lists

For itemised lists, use bullets, unless there is a specific reason for using numbers.

If items in a list are full sentences, they should start with a capital letter and end with a full stop.

Otherwise, items in the list start with a lower case letter.

If items in the list consist of only one or two words each, they don't need punctuation at the end. If they're longer, they should end with a semi-colon.

Last item in the list ends with a full stop.

Literally

Literally means taking words in their primary (not metaphorical) sense.

- I made a dog's breakfast of that article.
= I wrote a bad article.
- I literally made a dog's breakfast of that article. = My dog ate my homework.



REFERENCE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UK HOUSE STYLE



Money

Use currency symbols for UK pounds, dollars and Euros. For everything else, spell out the name of the currency. Use a country initial with the dollar symbol. Use the country name with the name of the currency unless it's immediately clear from the context which country's currency you are talking about:

- US\$500
- 2,000 Lebanese pounds
- 300 Colombian pesos.

Give the equivalent in UK pounds in brackets.

More than

Preferable to 'over', especially when talking about years.

Names

Use full names on first mention, followed by a shorter version if appropriate. If you are trying to build support for an individual at risk, using their given name can help to humanise them. But it can also sound patronising if you use it all the time. Remember that with foreign names, the given name may not be the first one, and the main surname may not be the last one. If in doubt, check with the Individuals at Risk team.



Nations

Do not attribute the actions of a government or a military force to an entire national population.

- China refuses to abolish the death penalty.
- NOT The Chinese refuse to abolish the death penalty.

Numbers

One to nine in words; 10 and above in figures except at the beginning of a sentence.

Use figures with percentages, millions and billions, times and dates, and weights and measures:

- 4 per cent (NOT 4%), 1 million, 3 billion, 5kg, 10km.

Use hyphens in compound numbers and fractions:

- forty-two
- two-thirds.

Use commas in 1,000 and above.



Over and under

Take care with *overestimate*, *underestimate*, *overstate* and *understate* especially with a negative.

- Its importance can be underestimated.
= It's more important than it seems.

- Its importance cannot be underestimated. = It's trivial.
- Its importance can be overestimated. = It's less important than it seems.
- Its importance cannot be overestimated. = It's really important.



Per cent

Two words.

Use the percentage sign (%) only in tables.

Plurals

- 1980s
- Courts martial
- Forums
- Manifestos
- Memorandums
- NGOs
- People (not persons)
- Referendums

Criteria and phenomena are plural. The singular is criterion and phenomenon.



REFERENCE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UK HOUSE STYLE



Quotations

Use single quotation marks for short quotations (less than three lines of text). For longer quotations, use indented text without quotation marks and introduce the quotation with a colon:

- Torture survivor Miriam Lopez said: It's incredible that there is so much support from different countries and cultures, and that people who don't even know me feel solidarity with me and support my struggle. I truly thank you all and hope that I can soon give good news regarding the case.

The words inside the quotation marks, or in the indented section, must be those spoken or written by the person you are quoting. The only exception is in pullquotes (quotations used as a graphic device), which can use a shortened

version, but in this case the full version must be given in the accompanying text.

If you want to omit some of the person's words, you need to show where by inserting three dots.

- Torture survivor Miriam Lopez said: 'It's incredible that... people who don't even know me feel solidarity with me and support my struggle.'

If you want to re-word part of the quotation, you need to show it by putting your replacement text in square brackets.

- Torture survivor Miriam Lopez said: 'I truly thank you all and hope that I can soon give good news [about my] case.' Do not put quoted text into italics.

Tell your reader who is speaking before you start quoting, or immediately after the first sentence. It is frustrating to read several sentences of quotation without knowing who said it.

Putting quotation marks around a jargon

word or a euphemism does not make it acceptable.



References – footnotes and endnotes

It is good to give references (footnotes or endnotes) in research reports and they may also be appropriate in briefing papers. However, they are off-putting and inappropriate in campaign materials and magazine articles.

Footnotes are usually more convenient for the reader than endnotes – they remove the need to flick back and forth to find sources and explanations. However, they make document layout more difficult and time-consuming. Go for endnotes if:

- the document has lots of footnotes
- the document has very long footnotes
- it is primarily an electronic document with notes and text hyperlinked
- time is short.

If the report author has used a consistent system for citing references, we can follow that system. Otherwise, give references as follows:

Name of author, 'Title of article/chapter', in *Title of book/publication: Subtitle*, year of publication, page or paragraph number.

If the publication is cited more than once, on first mention give the reference in full followed by a short version in brackets (Name of Author, *Title*) and use the short version in subsequent references.

For references to documents published by Amnesty's International Secretariat:

- Amnesty International, *Title: Subtitle*, (Index: number)

For web references:

- Name of author/organisation, *Title*, date, web address underlined (with hyperlink in electronic documents).
- Give the date of publication, not the date the page was accessed. Omit <http://> from web address.



REFERENCE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UK HOUSE STYLE

For TV or video, follow these examples:

- BBC, Panorama, 'Trump's first 100 days', 24 April 2017
- You Tube, Amnesty International Australia, '50 years of Amnesty International', 14 December 2011

Roma

Use the term Roma, rather than Gypsy, except when referring to specific UK legislation (which recognises Gypsies, Travellers and Roma), or initiatives such as GTR history month. When writing about individuals, use the term they prefer to describe their identity.



Sexual orientation and gender identity

The terms people use and identify with in matters of sexuality can vary widely from culture to culture. If you need to use a term covering many forms of

sexual orientation, use LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex). But if you are referring to one set of people, be specific: gay men, lesbians, bisexual people, etc. Use the terms that individuals or groups themselves identify with wherever possible, and explain them if necessary. When writing about a transgender individual, use the pronoun that they prefer – 'he', 'she', 'they', etc. See also *Gender*, page 17.

Spelling

- Amid, among, while – NOT amidst, amongst, whilst
- Antiracist, antisemitic (no hyphen)
- Focused, focusing – NOT focussed, focussing
- -ise not -ize: organisation NOT organization, organise NOT organize, etc*
- Protester – NOT protestor
- Supersede – NOT supercede



Third World vs Developing countries

We don't use the term 'Third World'. If it is necessary to use a generic term, we can refer to 'economically developing countries' but this would normally only be in an economic study. Mostly we would group countries in geographic regions. The International Monetary Fund divides the world into advanced economies and emerging and developing economies. See IMF World Economic Outlook for how it categorises countries.

Time

Use the simplest format:

- 11am
- 11.30am
- 11am-3pm
- from 11am to 3pm.



UK and devolved governments

We have more than one government in the UK: the UK government (aka the Westminster government), the Scottish government, the Welsh government and the Northern Ireland executive. Many responsibilities are devolved, so when writing about domestic human rights issues never say 'our government' or 'the government': be specific on where responsibility lies.

The UK government remains responsible for the constitution, international relations and defence, national security, nationality and immigration, nuclear energy, broadcasting, and most aspects of tax, employment and social security.

Matters devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are health and social care, education and training, local government and housing, agriculture,



REFERENCE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UK HOUSE STYLE

forestry and fisheries, the environment and planning, tourism, sport and heritage, economic development and transport.

Scotland and Northern Ireland also have responsibility for justice and policing issues, they have separate legal systems, and they have different powers and responsibilities relating to aspects of social security and equalities or equal opportunities. Scotland has limited tax raising powers and an emerging foreign policy with international development budget.

USING MATERIAL FROM THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT (IS)

House style

There are a few differences in house style between Amnesty International UK and the International Secretariat, so when editing IS material please change it to our house style. (Our house style is based on modern UK publishing style.)

‘Reportedly’

Try to avoid using this word, although it appears frequently in IS documents. If you can find out where the information came from (perhaps by looking in the full report on which an IS press release was based) please be more specific. For example, ‘according to media in country X’ or ‘Joe Bloggs said he was beaten in custody’.



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REFERENCE

WRITING WHAT YOU MEAN

Some words are easily confused with ones that sound similar but look different. If you want to use the words highlighted below, make sure you know what they mean.

affect and effect

An affect is psychological jargon for an emotion, feeling or desire. An effect is a consequence or impression. To affect something means to have an effect on it. To effect means to bring about.

bare and bear

Apart from being a big furry animal, bear means to tolerate or endure. To bare is to reveal something or to undress. So 'bare with me' is a different invitation to 'bear with me'.

canvas and canvass

Canvas is a material usually used to make sails and tents. To canvass means to solicit votes.

Colombia and Columbia

Colombia is a country in South America. The District of Columbia is the location of the US capital. British Columbia is a province in Canada.

complement and compliment

A complement can mean either something that completes, or a full team or crew. A compliment is a bit of pleasant feedback. To complement means to go well with. To compliment means to praise. Complementary means completing, or going well together. Complimentary can mean either expressing praise or free of charge.

defuse and diffuse

To defuse means to remove a fuse or to reduce tension in a conflict. If something is diffuse it is spread out or dispersed.

dependant and dependent

A dependant is a person who depends on someone else for the necessities of life. If something is dependent, it is controlled or determined by something else, or unable to do without it.

desert and dessert

Deserts are large, dry areas of land; desserts are puddings.

discreet and discrete

If you are being discreet about something, you are being tactful or restrained. If two or more things are discrete, they are separate.

draft, draught and drought

A draft is an early plan or sketch, a draught is a cold current of air. A drought is a prolonged water shortage.

drier and dryer

Clothes get drier when you hang them out in the sun. On a rainy day, you might use a tumble dryer.

especially and specially

If you are especially fond of chocolate, you particularly like it. Italy is beautiful, especially in the summer. Specially means for a special reason (I made this card specially for you).

every day and everyday

Every day is an adverb meaning daily. Everyday is an adjective meaning common or frequent.

flout and flaunt

To flout something is to disobey it. To flaunt something is to display it.

formally and formerly

You dress formally to go to a wedding.





REFERENCE WRITING WHAT YOU MEAN

Myanmar was formerly known as Burma.

full and fulsome

A full apology is thorough. A fulsome apology is extravagant and insincere.

grisly and grizzly

Grisly means gruesome. Grizzly means grey (except for grizzly bears).

hanger and hangar

Hangers live in wardrobes. Aircraft live in hangars.

imminent, immanent and eminent

When something is about to happen, it is imminent. You are born with immanent (or inherent) beauty. An eminent person is famous and respected.

imply and infer

Imply means to suggest or to say something in an indirect way; infer means to conclude.

inhuman and inhumane

Inhuman and inhumane have

related meanings, but aren't usually interchangeable. Both mean lacking in compassion. Inhuman, which also means cruel or barbaric, has a harsher sense than inhumane.

interned and interred

If you've been interned, you are in prison. If you've been interred, you are in the grave.

judicial and judicious

If something is judicial, it is linked to a court of law. If it is judicious, it is wise.

licence and license

Licence is the noun, license is the verb. You are not licensed to sell alcohol, unless you have a licence.

practice and practise

Practice is the noun, practise is the verb. I need to practise playing the piano because practice makes perfect.

prescribe and proscribe

To prescribe is to recommend. To

proscribe is to ban. Usually, prescriptions are issued by doctors and proscriptions are issued by legislators.

principal and principle

A principal is a headteacher. A principle is a basic moral conviction. A principal person or thing is the first in rank, or the most important. A principled person is one with principles.

proceed and precede

To precede means to come or go before. To proceed is to continue after a pause. Precede is related to time; proceed is related to action.

purposely and purposefully

If you walked into a room purposely, it wasn't a mistake – you meant to do it. If you walked into the same room purposefully, you did so boldly, determined to do something.

regrettably and regretfully

Regrettably means unfortunately; regretfully means full of regret.

rein and reign

A ruler reigns over a country. Reins are what you use to steer your horse.

reject and refute

To reject an argument or accusation is to deny it. To refute it is to prove it wrong.

stationary and stationery

Stationary means static. Stationery means writing materials.

tortuous and torturous

If something is tortuous it is twisting or devious. If something is torturous it is extremely painful.

unexceptionable and unexceptional

If something is unexceptionable, nobody wants to argue against it. If something is unexceptional, it is ordinary.

uninterested and disinterested

If you're uninterested in something, you take no interest in it. If you are disinterested, you are unbiased and objective.



REFERENCE

SAVE SPACE, AVOID POMPOSITY



DON'T WRITE	X	WRITE	✓
A distance of five miles		Five miles	
A period of five years		Five years	
Absolute perfection		Perfection	
Actively do something		Do something	
Ahead of schedule		Early	
All of		All	
Behind schedule		Late	
Continue to remain		Stay	
Despite the fact that		Although	
During the course of		During	
Entirely new		New	
Face up to		Face	
False pretext		Pretext	
First ever		First	

DON'T WRITE	X	WRITE	✓
Follow after		Follow	
Forward planning		Planning	
Future prospect		Prospect	
In the event of		If	
In two years' time		In two years	
In view of the fact that		Because	
Join together		Join	
Just recently		Recently	
Last of all		Last	
Meet together, meet up with		Meet	
New beginning		Beginning	
On a daily basis		Daily	
Over exaggerated		Exaggerated	
Past history		History	

DON'T WRITE	X	WRITE	✓
Patently obvious		Obvious	
Pre-booked		Booked	
Revert back		Revert	
Root cause		Cause	
Seating accommodation for 150		150 seats	
Succeeded in doing		Did	
Successfully achieved		Achieved	
Sustained an injury		Was hurt	
Take into consideration		Consider	
Temporary reprieve		Reprieve	
To be respectful of		To respect	
Whether or not		Whether	
Work collaboratively		Collaborate	
Work colleague		Colleague	
Worst ever		Worst	



REFERENCE

FURTHER READING

The AIUK house style is based on a number of books and style guides.

International Secretariat

Amnesty International House Style: Operational policy on terminology, names of places, people and entities, references, spelling and punctuation (Index: POL 40/3892/2021) internal document

A particularly useful section of this is Chapter 8, an A-Z of human rights terminology.

Applying Amnesty International Values: Living guidelines for ethical and respectful communications (Index: ORG 10/0572/2019) internal document

Questions to ask yourself before you publish.

Style guides

The Guardian and Observer Style Guide

www.theguardian.com/info/series/guardian-and-observer-style-guide

- If you've got a query not covered in the AIUK style guide, follow the Guardian style.

The Economist Style Guide, concise edition, 2013

New Hart's Rules. The Oxford Style Guide, 2014

- The guide used by the Oxford University Press, this has useful advice on presenting lists, tables and academic and legal references.

The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors, 2014.

- Answers many questions about hyphenation, capitalisation, spelling of place names, and more.





Amnesty International
is a movement of ordinary people
from across the world who stand
up for humanity and human rights.
Our purpose is to protect individuals
wherever justice, fairness, freedom
and truth are denied.