

HSE publications house style guide

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Introduction

The guide combines a detailed house style with an explanation of the typical basic structure of HSE publications. It includes examples which will give you an idea of heading weights, spacing etc.

Language

HSE publications are usually aimed at a well-defined level of industry, eg employees, managers or owners of small businesses. It is important to bear this in mind when amending the text so that it will be effective in getting its message across.

Avoid gender-specific language and look out particularly for the use of masculine terms to refer to people of either sex. The only exception is when quoting directly from legislation. In most guidance a paraphrase is adequate and here the wording can be altered.

Instead of using 'the employee . . . he/she', try 'the employees . . . they'. Refer to workers rather than workmen etc.

Plain English

HSE publications should be as accessible as possible. Avoid long sentences and language which is too wordy or long-winded. This is particularly important when editing guidance publications.

Use short, simple sentences

- Keep to three clauses in a sentence at the most.
- On average, keep sentences to 15-20 words, but include sentences that are longer and shorter than this for variety.
- Paragraphs should not contain more than about four sentences.
- Avoid over-elaborate sentence structures and using double negatives. For example, say 'a welcome statement' rather than 'a not unwelcome statement'.

Break up the text

- Avoid long passages of unbroken text.
- Use sub-headings and bullet points to group pieces of advice.

Remove unnecessary words

- Delete words that are just padding out the text.
- Avoid over-use of words such as 'more', 'most', 'more and more', 'very', 'very much'.
- Try not to use more than two adjectives to describe a single noun, eg avoid 'wide, varied audience'.
- Avoid 'nevertheless', 'consequently', 'indeed', 'of course'.

Use active not passive

Use the active rather than the passive.

Passive: *'Steps can be taken to manage safety effectively.'*

Active: *'Take steps to manage safety effectively.'*

Avoid clichés

Beware of word combinations that have become clichés through overuse, either within HSE or more generally. 'Heated debate', and 'unique opportunity' are examples of this. Whenever you are tempted to use a stock phrase, question what it means.

Tone of voice

- Use a tone of voice appropriate for your audience and the purpose of the communication.
- Only use specialist language or 'jargon' if you are confident that the reader will easily understand it.
- Be careful when using phrases that might be very familiar within HSE (eg acronyms such as 'MGS') and question whether readers will understand them.

Use:

- 'people' not 'persons'
- 'deaths' not 'fatalities' (unless it is an annual report or a statistical report)
- 'to' not 'in order to'
- 'before' not 'prior to'
- 'among' not 'amongst'
- 'while' not 'whilst'
- 'so' not 'thus'
- 'use' not 'utilise'

When you come across the phrase 'so far as is reasonably practicable', do not change it, as it is central to the overall requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.

Spelling and punctuation

Spelling and hyphenation should follow *The concise Oxford dictionary*.

Make sure you are consistent in using 's' rather than 'z' for word endings, eg specialise.

Use en rules (–) rather than hyphens (-) in the following:

- The book should be published in March – check the exact date.
- See paragraphs 67–75 (meaning 'to').
- Oil–water interface (meaning 'and').
- When introducing parts of a regulation in SI text, eg:

- (1) *In this regulation, "the dutyholder" means –*
(a) *hjfthjdfjdfjdfjdfthdfjdfthjdf;*
(b) *fjhdkhjkfjkfhkfhkfhkjhkj.*

Use 'dutyholder' not 'duty holder'

Punctuation etc should follow *Hart's rules for composers and readers at the University Press Oxford*.

'Must' and 'should'

These words have specific meanings in relation to legal requirements. If you come across 'musts' and 'shoulds' in the text, do not amend these without checking with the author that your new version still carries the same legal weight. Do not edit in 'musts' and 'shoulds', eg do not change 'it is recommended that' to 'you should' unless the author has agreed this.

House style

Abbreviations/acronyms

These should be spelt out in full when first used, with the abbreviation or acronym in brackets. After that, just the abbreviation or acronym can be used. Do not use full points or put 'the' before those for government departments (refer to HSE not the HSE). For example:

'The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) publishes a wide range of guidance. HSE inspectors write most of the material.'

Never use full points in common abbreviations in the text and use the following style: 'Some substances can be harmful, eg lead, zinc etc'. In other words, use a comma before eg and ie but not before etc.

Just because an abbreviation is in capitals, it does not mean that there will be initial capitals when it is spelt out, eg PPE should be spelt out as personal protective equipment.

The abbreviation or acronym for a set of regulations should always come after the full title, as in the examples below:

- Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007 (CDM)
- Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 1998 (CHIP)
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (as amended) (COSHH)
- Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER)
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR)

Here is a list of commonly used abbreviations/acronyms in HSE publications:

Acas	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
ACDS	Advisory Committee on Dangerous Substances
ACOP	Approved Code of Practice
ALARP	As low as reasonably practicable
BSI	British Standards Institution
CLG	Communities and Local Government
COSHH	Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (as amended)
defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EHO	Environmental health officer
EMAS	Employment Medical Advisory Service
GN	Guidance note
HSC	Health and Safety Commission
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
HSG	Health and safety guidance book
HSL	Health and Safety Laboratory
HSW Act	Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974
IAC	Industry advisory committee
INDG	Industrial guidance leaflet
LAU	Local Authority Unit
LEV	Local exhaust ventilation
LPG	Liquid petroleum gas
MDHS	Methods for the determination of hazardous substances

MSD	Musculoskeletal disorder
NIG	National interest group
NII	Nuclear Installations Inspectorate
ND	Nuclear Directorate
OSD	Offshore Division
PPE	Personal protective equipment
RPE	Respiratory protective equipment
RSI	Repetitive strain injury
SI	Statutory instrument
WEL	Workplace exposure limit
WRULD	Work-related upper limb disorder

Acknowledgements

Put brief acknowledgements, particularly for photography, at the foot of the copyright page or on the inside front cover. For individual items, the acknowledgement could go after the caption. Lengthier lists should be at the back of the book, just before the references, or they may need to go on the inside front cover if they will not fit elsewhere in the book.

Addresses

Present addresses without commas at the end of each line (unless they are listed on a single line). There should be no full stop or comma before the postcode.

Tel: 0151 922 1234 is the style used for phone and fax numbers. When telephone numbers are followed by a fax number, use the following style:

Tel: 0151 922 1234 Fax: 0151 922 1456

Present e-mail or website addresses like this:

- e-mail: fred.smith@hse.gov.uk
- www.hse.gov.uk

You can use punctuation after an e-mail or website address.

Capitals

Use initial capitals only for proper nouns, personal titles and titles of journals, books etc. For example:

- initial capital: Constable William Brown, Fire and Rescue Service, Guidance Note CS22, Chief Inspector of Mines, Better Backs campaign, European Week for Safety and Health, Prohibition Notice, Improvement Notice;
- lower case only: local authority, police, HSE guidance notes, inspectors, chief inspectors, director and autumn;
- Acts, specific sets of Regulations, Directives and Approved Codes of Practice should always be capitalised, for example the COSHH Regulations would be referred to as the Regulations etc. But a specific regulation, eg regulation 1(3), takes lower case and use lower case when the reference is non-specific, eg 'HSE has a wide range of regulations to cover most hazards'. Note that in the legal series, section 2 takes lower case, and Schedule 1 takes upper case. 'Act' is always capitalised.

Dates

Dates should be written in the order: day, month, year, eg 1 January 2000. Do not use 'st', 'nd', 'rd' or 'th' after the number.

If you are referring to a single year, such as a financial year, which covers parts of two calendar years, use 1997/98; if the period is more than a single year use 1990-98, eg:

- In the financial year 1997/98 the company was fined £5000.
- In the period 1990-98 there were 100 deaths in construction.

However, use this for the 21st century:

- In the period 1992-2002 there were 100 deaths in construction.
- Do not use 1999/20 or 1999/00, but do use 1999/2000, eg in the financial year 1999/2000.
- Do use 2000/01, 2001/02 etc.

Figures and tables

Number these in sequence throughout the text – Figure 1, 2, 3, Table 1, 2, 3 (with capital 'F' and 'T'). Never use 'Fig'. Also indicate in the margin where figures and tables should be positioned as this will help the designer who will try to position them as closely as possible to the first reference in the text. Do not refer to position, for example 'Figure 2 above' as the final positioning may be different. Always caption figures and tables, using bold and plain text as shown:

Figure 1 An example of a safe excavation

Do not put a colon after 'Figure 1' or any punctuation at the end.

Table layout

Bear in mind the following key points:

- totals and subtotals should be consistent throughout the table;
- if there are subtotals, they should sum to grand total and be presented in a distinctive way, for example offset, bold, italics (if sufficiently distinctive), smaller, or in brackets.

In tables *only*, use a space in four figure numbers when aligning, for example 2 000 (see later section **Numbers** for general guidelines).

An example of a table is given here:

Table 3 Enforcement notices issued by HSE

Notice	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01
Improvement	6 484	6 512	5 219
Deferred prohibition	144	124	82
Immediate prohibition	3 961	4 172	3 385
Total notices	10 589	10 808	8 686

Footnotes

- Footnotes should be used only as a last resort as they tend to break the flow of the text and can cause problems with page make-up (if editing on screen, check that the footnotes are all there).
- They should be at the foot of the page, should be in a smaller font size than the body text and should always end with a full stop. They should also be short and concise.
- Footnotes should not be used to reference titles of publications. These should be dealt with as numbered references.
- The footnote marker sequence is * † repeated in duplicate if necessary. The footnote marker should appear after any punctuation, eg HSG150.**
- Notes to tables should appear immediately under the table and should use a different numbering system to normal footnotes.

Example

** This is an example of how to present footnotes.

Headings

Try to keep the levels of subdivision to a minimum; three should be enough for most purposes but sometimes it is necessary to have four. They should be treated consistently throughout the text. Headings are usually all ranged left. Using a consistent style of heading for each level within the Word text will help the designer when they convert the text.

A headings – Large bold initial capital and lower case letters

B headings – Bold initial capital and lower case letters

C headings – Bold italic initial capital and lower case letters

D headings – Roman italic initial capital and lower case letters

For leaflets and information sheets, we do not use the 'A' head as it is too large and so the 'B' is used instead.

Hyphens

Refer to *The concise Oxford dictionary* for hyphenation. All attributive compound adjectives should be hyphenated, eg a 30-year-old factory, an up-to-date record. Other examples are:

- 8-hour time-weighted average (8-hour TWA)
- co-ordinate, co-operate
- first aid, but first-aider and first-aid box
- ill health but ill-health risk
- lift truck, but lift-truck accident
- over-3-day injury
- post-traumatic
- re-entry
- web only, but web-only publication

Numbers

Write numbers up to and including ten in full unless they are part of a mathematical expression or associated with a unit of measurement; 11 and above are expressed in figures except at the beginning of a sentence. Try to avoid using a number at the beginning of sentences by changing the sentence around, but if you have to spell out numbers such as, eg 37 use 'Thirty-seven' with a hyphen. See also the sections on Time and Units.

The exceptions to this to avoid inconsistency in the same sentence are:

- '1 in 20'.
- In 1995, more than 100 workers were killed and 3 were injured.

Use a space, not commas, to mark thousands in numbers with more than four digits, for example 12 000, 1 234 443. This is because we follow the style for British Standards and in many European countries commas can be used as full points. Four-figure numbers do not need a space, for example 2000. Spell out million, eg £20 million, not £20 m.

When referring to a spread of numbers, always follow this style:

- In 1995 there were 100–125 deaths in construction.

Paragraph numbers

For all priced publications we number paragraphs with a single tab after the number, starting at 1 in the introduction (not the foreword or preface). Paragraph numbers should not be followed by a full stop and there should be no decimal numbering (many of the drafts we receive adopt the 'see paragraph 2.1' approach and we have to renumber the document to make it consistent with house style and easier for readers). Reference to other parts of the document should be by paragraph number not page number or 'as above', as these may change in the final layout. This also avoids problems when the text is converted for HSE Direct. When referring to paragraphs, do so like this: 'See paragraphs 123–125'.

Most publications do not need chapters or section numbers, but this will depend on the document.

Don't place a paragraph number against a heading, it should go alongside the next paragraph in the text.

Paragraph numbers begin again from 1 for each appendix.

Quotation marks

Always use single quotation marks to indicate speech, special-use words or phrases etc. For special-use words, use quotation marks on the first mention and then drop them. Use double quotes only to indicate a quote within a quote.

If you indent a quotation, you should still use quotation marks. This does not always apply to legal publications where quotes from regulations do not have quotation marks but the text normally appears in italics. Our style is to use 'curly' quotes.

References

Use superscript numbers throughout the publication to indicate in the text that further details are available in the 'References' section. The superscript number should appear after punctuation, eg HSG150.¹ Only bracket the number if there is any danger of confusion with mathematical expressions. The reference keeps the same number each time it appears in the text. You do not need to keep numbering a reference if it appears several times in a document – the first mention is enough.

Check the spacing for ISBN numbers. The ISBN numbers for HSE publications follow these styles and spacing:

0 11 88XXXX X (older publications) or 0 7176 XXXX X (newer publications).

From 1 January 2007, all ISBNs will have the prefix 978 and should be displayed like this:

978 0 7176 XXXX X

The last number (the check digit) on existing ISBN numbers will change – check the HMSO ISBN box on the Filemaker database for the revised number.

Always refer to Regulations with 'the' in lower case. For example:

- Follow regulation 13 of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006.

Running heads

For simplicity, we generally use only the title of the publication for running heads, and not chapter or section headings.

Sub-paragraphs and lists

Our usual style is to arrange sub-paragraphs and lists by bullet points. However, in legal publications we normally adopt (a), (b), (c) etc. If you need to cross-refer, use eg 'see paragraph 25(b)'. If they need to be subdivided again use (i), (ii), (iii) etc, but the key thing is to make sure you are consistent within a document.

The style for listing sub-paragraphs or lists where each item belongs to the same sentence is:

- a colon (without a dash) before the listing (as above);
- lower case letter for initial word;
- a semi-colon after each point; and
- a full stop at the end of the list.

If the list is made up of separate sentences, use upper case for the first letter of each item, full stops and question marks.

For example:

- Have you carried out a risk assessment?
- Have the results been recorded?
- What action has since been taken?

or:

Here are some basic guidelines for safeguarding machinery:

- Use fixed guards where the need for access is infrequent.
- Use moveable guards which are interlocked, where there is a need for more frequent access.

Always make sure there is a line space between the introductory line and the bullet list.

In some of our posters and flyers we have dispensed with the full stops if each sentence is only a short statement, eg:

There are three key ways of avoiding slips and trips.

- Keep it tidy
- Look where you're going
- Don't rush

Time

Time is treated in the same way as other quantities: words are used for periods of time such as 'it took him six months', and figures for exact measurements and series of numbers. Use figures in 8.00 am, words in eight o'clock, no hyphen in half past eight. With the 24-hour clock, use 19.45 to avoid confusion with years.

Titles of publications

Try to keep titles as short as possible and make sure they convey what the publication is about. Keep subtitles to a minimum – a maximum of one if possible.

Units

A single space should separate a number and unit, for example 12 mm, 80 kg. Similarly for temperatures, the style is 5 °C. However, for percentages it should be 5%, rather than five per cent, except at the start of a sentence.

Use SI units and abbreviations where possible, eg 25 m/s. Imperial units should not be used, although there are a few exceptions such as mile(s). In other cases, where the abbreviation may be unclear, spell out the full name when the unit is first used (eg in the same way as general abbreviations), and check this with the author. However, mile(s) should always be spelled out.

SI base units

<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>
length	metre	m
mass	kilogram	kg
time	second	s
electric current	ampere	A
temperature	kelvin	K
amount	mole	mol
luminous intensity	candela	cd

Also:

hours	h
watt	W
kilowatt	kW
alternating current	ac
direct current	dc
Use tonne not ton	