

Your guarantee of consistency

Rest assured, English-language texts from Schrijf.be are:

- **correct:** spelling and grammar are checked meticulously;
- **consistent:** all writers and translators follow our style guide;
- **targeted at the right readership:** accessible and clear.

Our English-language translators and copywriters all follow the guidelines below.

This is version 1.4 of the Style Guide, dated 19 August 2013.

Sources

When it comes to grammar and style, we don't make random decisions.

The leading reference works in the English language guide us every step of the way:

- *New Oxford Style Manual* (for UK English and international English texts), containing
 - *New Hart's Rules*
 - *New Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors*
- *The Chicago Manual of Style* (for US English texts)
- *Butcher's Copy-editing: The Cambridge Handbook for Editors, Copy-editors and Proofreaders*
- *Style Guide of the European Commission Directorate-General for Translation.*

Guidelines

Apostrophe

Use an apostrophe:

- to indicate possession;

The boy's job

The neighbours' kids

BUT

The tree lost all of its leaves (no apostrophe in the possessive form of 'it'!)

- to replace missing letters in contractions (but not abbreviations);
R `n` B
It's a beautiful day (contracted form of 'It is')
- NOT to express plural;
Videos (not video's)
CDs (not CD's)
- NOT to refer to decades.
The 1990s (not the 1990's)

Source: *New Oxford Style Manual*

Bold

Avoid using bold for emphasis in running texts. The effect is usually too startling. Avoid typographical distinction altogether, or use less obtrusive *italics* instead.

Source: *New Oxford Style Manual*

Bullet points

- Introduce lists of short items (without main verbs) with a full sentence.
Afterwards, certain rules apply:
 - an introductory colon
 - no initial capitals
 - no punctuation
 - a full stop at the end.
- Where each item completes the introductory sentence, you should:
 - begin with the introductory colon;
 - end each item with a semicolon;
 - close with a full stop.
- If all items are complete statements without a grammatical link to the introductory sentence, proceed as follows:
 - introduce the list with a colon;
 - start each item with a lowercase letter;
 - end each item with a semicolon;
 - put a full stop at the end.

- If any one item consists of several complete sentences, announce the list with a complete sentence and continue as indicated below:
 - Introduce the list with a colon.
 - Begin each item with a capital letter.
 - End each statement with a full stop. This allows several sentences to be included under a single item without the punctuation becoming inconsistent.

Source: Style Guide of the European Commission Directorate-General for Translation

Colon

Use a colon to introduce a list or to point forward to a conclusion, an example, etc. Colons do not require the next word to start with a capital letter.

Currencies

(See also: Numbers)

Amounts of money may be spelled out in words with the unit of currency, but are more often printed in numerals with the symbols or abbreviations:

Thirteen euros

€13

EUR 13

Symbols always precede the figures:

€52, not 52€

There is no space after a symbol:

€52, not € 52

Source: New Oxford Style Manual

Dates

When writing dates, you should:

- put the day before the month:
Easter this year is on 13 April. (UK English)

NOT

Easter this year is on April 13. (US English)

- express decades as follows:

1990s

NOT

1990's

- avoid putting dates in numerical format as it could cause confusion for UK/US readers:

13 April 2013 is

- 13/04/2013 in UK English
- 04/13/2013 in US English

Do not:

- use 'th' with dates—just the number and month;

Easter this year is on 13 April.

NOT

Easter this year is on April the 13th.

- put a comma between month and year.

In June 1831, ...

NOT

In June, 1831, ...

Source: New Oxford Style Manual and Butcher's Copy-editing

Days of the week

Capitalise names of days and months (note the difference in Dutch):

Monday (as opposed to Dutch: *maandag*)

March (as opposed to Dutch: *maart*)

Source: New Oxford Style Manual

Hyphen (-), en rule (–) or em rule (—)

Hyphen (-)

- For compounds

Use a hyphen to connect two or more words serving as a single adjective before a noun. Compare:

The story is well known.

It is a well-known story.

- After prefixes
Words with prefixes are usually written as one word.
Predetermine
Use a hyphen to avoid confusion or mispronunciation:
Non-negotiable (double consonant)
Re-entry (double vowel)
Anti-Darwinism (second part starts with a capital)
- Before suffixes
Suffixes usually do not take a hyphen
Ladylike, husbandless, childproof
Use a hyphen to avoid ambiguity
A cycling-friendly chief executive versus a cycling friendly chief executive
- To spell out numbers
Twenty-three

En rule (–)

- For elements that form a range
1939–1945
- To replace the words 'to' and 'and'
Dover–Calais crossing
Father–daughter relationship
- Between names of joint authors to show that it is not the name of one person.
Compare:
The Lloyd–Jones theory (two people: en rule)
The Lloyd-Jones theory (one person: hyphen)
Epstein–Barr virus (two people: en rule)

Em rule (—)

- Break in a sentence
There is nothing—absolutely nothing—wrong with him.
- Instead of a colon
I didn't have an educated background—my dad was a farm labourer.
- To indicate an interruption in written dialogue
They couldn't hit an elephant at this dist—

Source: New Oxford Style Manual

E.g. or i.e.

Note the difference between

- e.g. (*exempli gratia*, meaning 'for example') and
 - i.e. (*id est*, meaning 'that is')
- Hand tools, e.g. hammer and screwdriver
Hand tools, i.e. those able to be held in the user's hands

Source: New Oxford Style Manual

Ellipses (...)

- For dramatic effect
The door opened slowly ...
- To indicate omission
I only said, 'If we could ...'
- You are allowed to put other punctuation, (but not a full stop) before or after an ellipsis
Could we ... ?
It might be possible ... !
- Put a space before and after the ellipsis.
I don't ... er ... understand.

Source: New Oxford Style Manual

Figures

(Also see: Numbers)

Use commas to separate large numbers (not dates!) into units of three, starting from the right:

2,200
2,016,523,354

Source: New Oxford Style Manual

Fractions

(Also see: Numbers)

Spell out simple fractions in running text.

Two-thirds of the country (not 2/3)

Source: New Oxford Style Manual

Italics

Italics can be used in the following situations:

- emphasis
The length is less important than the content.
- foreign words or phrases
An amuse-gueule of sardine.
- titles of works
I read it in Time Magazine.
- scientific terms
CSF refers to cerebrospinal fluid.

Source: *New Oxford Style Manual*

It or she

Countries and ships should be described as it rather than she.

England and its traditions

NOT

England and her traditions

Source: *Butcher's Copy-editing: The Cambridge Handbook for Editors, Copy-editors and Proofreaders*

Measurements

The following table contains the seven base SI units.

<i>Physical quantity</i>	<i>Name of SI unit</i>	<i>Symbol</i>
length	metre	m
mass	kilogram	kg
time	second	s
electric current	ampere	A
thermodynamic temperature	kelvin	kg
luminous intensity	candela	cd
amount of substance	mole	mol

Follow the SI (*Système International d'Unités*) for the correct names and symbols.

Further information on SI Units and recommended use can be found in the Organisation

for International Standardisation (ISO) document *ISO 1000*, or in the British Standards Institute (BSI) document *BS 55*. Visit the website of the UK metric association for more links and details: <http://www.metric.org.uk>.

Source: Butcher's Copy-editing: The Cambridge Handbook for Editors, Copy-editors and Proofreaders

Numbers: words or figures?

- Rule: spell out whole numbers from one to ten; use figures for numbers above ten.

There were two people in the queue.

I need to buy presents for 12 people this year.

Exceptions:

- If there are a lot of figures in a text, some above ten and some below, use figures throughout to allow easy comparison by readers.

There were 2 people in the queue ahead of me, and 22 behind me.

- Use figures for percentages and measurements. Use commas to punctuate large numbers.

The population of New York City is estimated to be 8,008,278.

Source: Butcher's Copy-editing: The Cambridge Handbook for Editors, Copy-editors and Proofreaders

Quotation marks

- Use single quotation marks ('x') for a quote:
He said: 'Hello.'
- Use double quotation marks for a quote within a quote:
'Have you any idea', he said, 'what "red mercury" is?'
- Also use single quotation marks ('x'):

- for a newly coined word or phrase:

All Schrijf.be copywriters are 'text athletes'.

- to distance yourself from an expression:

They were 'voluntarily' transferred to another location.

- for nicknames:

Al 'Scarface' Capone

- for explanations:

Bracchium means 'arm'.

- to give the implication 'so-called':
These 'intellectuals' could not even locate the entrance.
VERSUS
These so-called intellectuals could not even locate the entrance.

Source: *New Oxford Style Manual*

Quotation marks in conjunction with other punctuation

Where do you put the comma in an interrupted quote?

- Put the comma *outside* the quotation marks if the comma would not be found in the sentence without the interruption.
Original sentence: He said 'Go home to your father.'
Interrupted quote: 'Go home', he said, 'to your father.'
- Put the comma *inside* the quotation marks if the comma would also appear in the sentence if the quote was not interrupted.
'Yes, we will' becomes 'Yes,' he said, 'we will.'

Full stop, question mark or exclamation mark within a quote

- Put the punctuation *outside* the quotation marks unless the quote in itself is a full sentence.
The Government is in favour of 'smart spending'.
He said, 'We are not alone.'
- No double punctuation.
No further full stop is required at the end of the sentence if the quote itself ends with a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark.
CORRECT René Descartes said, 'I think therefore I am!'
INCORRECT René Descartes said, 'I think therefore I am!'.

Source: *Style Guide of the European Commission Directorate-General for Translation*

Salutations

- Use a comma after salutations in letters and before the signature.
Dear Sir,
Yours sincerely,

- Do not use a colon unless you are writing for a US readership.

Dear Sir:

Source: New Oxford Style Manual

Semicolon

Use a semicolon:

- to mark a separation that is stronger than a comma but less strong than a full point;
- to divide two or more main clauses that could stand as sentences in their own right;
- To further divide a sentence already subdivided by commas:
I went to Brussels, Belgium; London, England; and Tokyo, Japan.

Do not use a semicolon:

- when there is no connection between the two sentences. Use a full stop instead:
I was at the beach yesterday. Are we going for lunch now?
NOT
I was at the beach yesterday; are we going for lunch now?
- when one clause explains the other. Use a colon instead:
Coffee is more than a drink: it's a hug in a cup.
NOT
Coffee is more than a drink; it's a hug in a cup.

Source: New Oxford Style Manual

Single or plural verb?

- Use a **plural** verb with 'a number of' and a **single** verb with 'the number of':
A number of people are beginning to feel the crunch.
The number of persons affected is likely to increase.

Source: Butcher's Copy-editing: The Cambridge Handbook for Editors, Copy-editors and Proofreaders

That or which?

- Use 'that' for defining clauses and 'which' for non-defining.
He stopped the second car that was driven by a woman.
He stopped the second car, which was driven by a woman.

Source: *Butcher's Copy-editing: The Cambridge Handbook for Editors, Copy-editors and Proofreaders*

Times of day

- Use figures with a.m. or p.m.
4 p.m.
- Use words in combination with o' clock
Eight o' clock
- To avoid confusion, use *midnight* and *noon* instead of *12 a.m.* and *12 p.m.*
If minutes are included, use a full stop, not a colon (unless you are writing for a US readership):
UK English: 4.30 p.m.
US English: 4:30 p.m.

Source: *New Oxford Style Manual* and Source: *Butcher's Copy-editing: The Cambridge Handbook for Editors, Copy-editors and Proofreaders*

Underline

Do not underline words for emphasis or other purposes. The main use of underlining in modern printed text is to indicate a hyperlink.

Source: *New Oxford Style Manual*