

GFS written style guide

We all have our own ways of expressing ourselves in day-to-day life. This can be influenced by where we're from, our perception of our audience and how much importance we put on any given piece of communication.

However, for an organisation, consistency is important. This guide clarifies the way we'll express ourselves in anything we write in our capacity as GFS staff. Soon, most elements will become second nature when you write something for work, but until then, you can always refer to this guide if you're unsure of how to write something.

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The fundamental rules

In theory, as long as you abide by the advice in this section, 99% of what you write will be in line with our style. The rest of the guide simply expands these core principles in more specific areas, and explains the unusual exceptions.

Sometimes there will be multiple correct ways of doing something, choose the one which uses the least space on the page or screen. If it is not in this guide, see which is most common practice.

Common grammar and punctuation clarifications

- Girls Friendly Society uses British English. Do not use American English or any other variant, even if you are writing for an international audience.
- Use lower case in headings, apart from the first letter of the first word, proper nouns or some abbreviations.
- Write out numbers up to ten, and use figures for 11 onwards, unless in times or number ranges (eg aged 5-11)

Our organisation

When using our full names, always use "Girls Friendly Society". When referring to Girls Friendly Society, do not add 'the' or "The" at the start. The only exception is when referencing titles or content within historical documents which refer to "The Girls Friendly Society" and "Girls' Friendly Society" etc.

In any piece of writing, refer to the organisation in full first -from then on, use our acronym. If you are writing for an external or unfamiliar audience, add GFS in brackets after the full name before moving to the acronym.

- [Girls Friendly Society \(GFS\) delivers a variety of programmes to girls and young women. GFS has several groups throughout England and Wales.](#)

Always capitalise the "G", the "F" and the "S" and never add full stops between the letters.

In general writing, we advise that we avoid using our acronym in a possessive context, instead using "Girls Friendly Society's" in the first instance and "our" thereafter. However, some kinds of writing may present exceptions, for example policies. In this case, use "GFS's", not "GFS'"

- [Girls Friendly Society's mission is to help girls and young women to fulfil their potential and our vision is to provide opportunities to develop confidence.](#)
- [GFS's mental health policy is supported by MIND.](#)

In external communications, individual groups should be referred to as "GFS group name". ie "GFS Pilling", rather than "our Pilling group" or "the Mill Hill group".

- [The girls and young women at GFS Pilling had a great time learning about female politicians in their local area last week. If you're interested in joining GFS Pilling, sign up today.](#)

If referring to groups as a whole, they should not be capitalised.

- We are offering all GFS groups the chance to apply for a grant of up to £500 to support their activities.
- Our groups based in the Midlands have banded together to raise funds for a minivan.

When talking about our beneficiaries at a specific group, check the age range of the group. If the group is only for under 13s, "girls" is sufficient. Where the groups has members of 13+ only, use "young women". Where the age range is mixed, use "girls and young women".

- Girls and young women from GFS Dunvant have been making Easter bonnets this week
- GFS Wainfleet is open to girls aged 5-11.

When talking about our beneficiaries in a more general sense or when it is not possible to check a group's age range, always use "girls and young women".

- Girls Friendly Society is committed to helping girls and young women develop confidence, self-esteem and resilience.

Titles and names of people

Job titles and departments

When referring to a specific individual's role, always capitalise and write job titles in full.

- Our Programme Coordinator, Leigh, has created a guide for providing half term activities.
- We are recruiting a Group Leader for GFS Balham.

When talking about a role in a more general term, the role should not be capitalised.

- We encourage group leaders to attend training that will develop their skills and help them deliver the best possible programme.

Names

We avoid using titles such "Mrs, Mr and Ms". However, if relevant, we also use titles for members of the peerage (Sir/Dame/Lord/Lady etc).

Do not separate people's initials with spaces or full stops.

- JRR Tolkein, DH Lawrence and RW Cook.

Capitalise titles when used as part of an individual's formal title, not when referring to the title in general.

- John Johnson is the Fellow of Alliterative Chronology. The other fellows are extremely jealous of his remarkable hair.

If using a person's title, state their full title, forename and surname when first mentioned. On subsequent mentions, use either surname only or first name if the piece is less formal. Be consistent with whichever usage you choose.

- Professor Robert Winston presents *Child of Our Time*, a genre and longitudinal study documentary. Winston follows the lives of 25 children after their birth at the turn of the millennium.

For Reverends, Right Reverends, Very Reverends, etc, the religious title precedes the academic title. Always use a capitalised "The" before the title.

Books, films, songs, games etc

Use italics and capitalise the first word of the title and all words within the title except articles (a/an/the), prepositions (to/on/for etc) and conjunctions (but/and/or etc).

- *Game of Thrones*.
- *Grand Theft Auto V*.
- *Much Ado about Nothing*.
- *In the Heat of the Night*.

Use single quotation marks and do not italicise type for titles that are not whole publications, ie a chapter of a book or an episode of a series.

- The girls' favourite chapter from *Fantastically Great Women who Changed the World* was 'CoCo Chanel: fashion queen'.

Punctuation

Always follow basic grammar and punctuation rules. In this section, we will provide the preferred house style for any occasions where the correct use may be uncertain or commonly misused.

Apostrophes

Use "'s" after singular nouns (it was the blonde girl's brush), plural nouns which do not end in "s" (he was a wolf in sheep's clothing) and indefinite pronouns to indicate possession (it was everyone's preference).

Use an apostrophe with no "s" after a word ending in "s".

- Its (no apostrophe) is "belonging to".
 - It's is the contraction of "it is".
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Bullet points

Bulleted lists follow a colon. If the sentence before the colon and the bullets after it form a continuous sentence, each line should start with a lower-case letter and there should be no full stops, colons or semi colons at the end of each point.

- **Girls Friendly Society Topics**
Girls Friendly Society covers topics, such as:
 - confidence building
 - arts and craft

- cookery
- day and residential trips
- personal, social, health and economic (PHSE) education
- sex and relationship education (C-Card scheme)
- young motherhood

If the bullets do not follow on in a continuous sentence, each line should start with an upper-case letter and there should be a full stop at the end of each point. A typical situation would be a list after a heading.

- **Girls Friendly Society Topics**

- Confidence building.
- Arts and craft.
- Cookery.
- Day and residential trips.
- Personal, social, health and economic (PHSE) education.
- Sex and relationship education (C-Card scheme).
- Young motherhood.

Semicolons

Avoid the use of semicolons wherever possible. It is preferable to rewrite a sentence if a semicolon is needed. However, there are situations in which they are required, and meaning would be lost if the sentence were restructured.

- The festival was to be held today; it was cancelled due to the rainy weather.

Where possible, or if in doubt, use an en dash (–) instead of a semicolon. Semicolons are useful in complicated lists in place of commas to improve clarity.

- I have been to Newcastle, Carlisle, and York in the North; London, Exeter, and Portsmouth in the South; and Coventry, Birmingham and Nottingham in the Midlands.

En dashes (–) *the middle-length dash*

Use singly and surrounded by spaces to link two parts of a sentence, in place of a colon.

- When dinosaurs agreed on something, they'd often high-five one another – they couldn't talk and had to resort to gestures.

Use to link concepts or ranges of numbers, with no spaces either side

- They originally made 15–17 cupcakes. Anne believed that two were eaten, which is why they currently only have 15.

Hyphens (-) *the short dash*

Use when writing an age.

- Our two-year-old will not stop having tantrums.

Some words are hyphenated to join words together.

- The design is state-of-the-art.

Use hyphenated compound adjectives and adverbs.

- The on-site play area is community-led.
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Slashes

It is sometimes acceptable to use a forward slash when suggesting alternatives options within a sentence, although this should be done sparingly. You should not include spaces between the word, the slash and the next word.

- Extra support is needed when the girls are bowling/swimming/horse riding.

Back slashes are not to be used.

Exclamation marks, question marks and ellipses

Exclamation marks should be used very sparingly, if at all.

Never place a question mark and an exclamation mark together: (!?)

- "What in the world are you doing up there?" – simple question.
- "What in the world are you doing up there!" – question, but also exclaiming.

Do not use a full stop at the end of titles, even if they make a sentence, but, if a title ends with an exclamation mark or question mark, do include it.

- The Sound of Music
- Oliver!

Ellipses are only ever formed of three dots.

- To be continued...
-

Quotation marks

Use double quotation marks for direct speech or a quote, and single quotation marks for direct speech or a quote within that.

- "Tom told me, 'this will never work,'" said Jim.

If the quote would have required punctuation in its original form, place the punctuation inside the quotation marks. Place any punctuation which does not belong to the quote outside the quotation marks. Quotes within quotes should be represented by single quotations.

- Laura said that the case was "far from over" and that "we will win!"
- Do you agree with the saying, "All's fair in love and war"?
- "I wish we could have three day weekends," said Julie.

Ampersands

Ampersands should be used in headings/page titles. They may also be used if they are part of official titles or names. Otherwise, spell out "and".

- [Emily and Katy's favourite baby products brand is Johnson & Johnson](#)
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Latin abbreviations

We do not italicise or use full stops after latin abbreviations. Where possible, it is best to avoid these abbreviations, as they are not always understood by screen readers, or users with English as a second language.

etc [*et cetera*] means "and the rest"

Use to indicate the continuation of a list

- [Girls Friendly Society has many groups in the North: Swinton, Layton, Appley Bridge, etc \[the list could continue with other groups that exist\].](#)

eg [*exempli gratia*] means "for example" or "such as"

Use with examples which are not exhaustive (and do not follow with a comma)

- [Girls Friendly Society has many groups in the North, eg Swinton, Layton, Appley Bridge](#)

ie [*id est*] means "that is" - use with definition or lists which are exhaustive (and do not follow with a comma)

- [Every member of the Beatles, ie John, George, Paul and Ringo.](#)

ibid [*ibidem*] means "in the same place" – do not use.

Numbers, dates and measurements

Dates

We write the date as day of the week, date, month followed by year. Depending on what the subject is, the day of the week or year might not be needed. However, the order remains the same.

Only use "on" if before a day of the week – however it's not always necessary. Never use "the".

Never use "of" to specify the month. No suffix to the number (st, nd, rd, th) is required.

- [All changes must be made by 5 December](#) – day of the week is irrelevant so can be dropped.
 - [Come to our garden party on Saturday 8 June](#) – day of the week helps with clarification.
 - [Girls Friendly Society officially began its work 1 January 1875](#) – a historical date.
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Spans of numbers and years

Shorten periods where it is not ambiguous to do so and use the shortest text possible.

- The Second World War (1939-45) was a turning point for Europe and the world.
- A group of ardent protestors held the city hall 1973-6.

To refer to a financial year, you should use the format "2015/16".

- Amanda was annoyed because she forgot to do her tax return for 2013/14 and got fined £100. She made sure she completed it early for 2014/15.

If using "from" with a start date/time, always use "to" to indicate the end date/time rather than an en dash. Alternately, just use an en dash without "from".

- The summer vacation runs from June to September.
- The summer vacation runs June-September.

Times

Use the 12-hour clock and include a full stop between the hours and the minutes, not a colon.

- We are going to meet for lunch at 1.30pm.

Use "noon" or "midnight" instead of "12 noon" or "12 midnight".

- Don't feed a gremlin before midnight.

Small vs large numbers

Always remember the common rule that numbers up to ten are written out - use figures for 11 onwards.

When discussing large rounded numbers in text, do not use k/m/bn in the place of thousand/million/billion. Instead, write out the number either completely in words (for one to nine thousand/million/billion) or in a mixture of figures and words (for 10 thousand/million/billion and over).

- The new Star Wars film made \$248 million at the box office in its opening weekend.
- "We hold the world ransom for... one million dollars!"

However, exact large figures should be written out numerically – avoid this unless the exact numerical fact is relevant.

- There were more than two thousand people at the event. There were exactly 2,121 to be precise.

Use commas to punctuate numbers that include a ten thousands digit or more.

- You owe me £20,000.

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

- There were 15 girls who went on all of the GFS trips.

- There were three GFS trips which ran across six days.
- There were 15 girls who went on all 3 of the GFS trips which ran across 6 days.

There are exceptions to this rule, such as times, units of measurement and school years.

- The Year 6 group helped the younger girls on the trip.
- We are meeting at 1pm.
- The girls walked 5km for charity and raised £9 for each km.

Units and symbols

It is acceptable to use km (kilometres), ml (millilitres) and other such abbreviations for types of unit. In this instance, use the digit, don't write the number out.

- She took a 350ml bottle of water on her 8km run

Spell out first for "first", "second" and so on up to and including "tenth"; use numbers and "st"/"nd"/"rd"/"th" for larger ordinal numbers.

- I came 22nd in the race last year, but this year I came second.

Always use figures and symbols for percentages, measurements and currency.

- GFS membership went up 30% this year.

Tables and statistics

Only ever use figures in tables or diagrams. Numbers in tables should use figures regardless of size.

Clown stats

Average number of wigs	Long floppy shoes owned
1	8
2	56
3	8646

Accessibility and inclusivity

If you are ever unsure of the correct term to use, please ask a member of the marketing team, as it's very important that we use the most inclusive terminology at all times.

Disability

The word "disabled" is a description not a group of people. Use "people with disabilities", not "the disabled".

Many deaf people whose first language is BSL consider themselves part of “the deaf community” – they may describe themselves as “Deaf” (capitalised) to emphasise their deaf identity.

Avoid medical labels or “suffers from” or “wheelchair bound”- they tend to reinforce stereotypes of people with disabilities as being unwell.

Cultural diversity

Never refer to individuals by their culture, ethnicity or background – unless there is a specific and convincing reason to do so. As a general rule, unless there is an extremely good reason, simply avoid making distinctions of cultures, race, tradition etc.

The term “ethnicity” is used to refer to the sense of identity which derives from shared cultural characteristics such as language, religion, history or geographical location - do not use this term to describe someone’s racial origin.

Gender and sexuality

Use “they” to refer to an unspecified person, not “he”.

If at all possible, use a gender-neutral terms to describe roles or professions eg “police officer”.

We should use woman/man over female/male, as the latter are considered scientific terms that refer to the sex of a species based on their role in reproduction.

Not all people associate with the terms male or female, and you must be considerate of this. They might be more comfortable being referred to as “they/their”, “ze” or “e” instead of “she/he” and “her/his”. Always follow an individual’s preference in regards to preferred gender pronouns.

Avoid describing individuals in regards to their sexuality if at all possible; where it is relevant to do so, consider what the individual has expressed their sexuality to be, and use their own terms. If you do not know and still need to describe them, use the term LGBT+.

Accessible content

When possible, to allow for difficulties with comprehension, attempt to keep sentences as short as possible. When you have the option of which word to use, always choose the word which is shorter, more recognisable, and easier to understand.

Images and videos

When you add an image to the web, you should always include an ‘alt tag’, which is a written description of the image and ensure that those using sight

readers know what images we have included. If you're unsure of how to do this, please ask a member of the marketing team to show you.

Screen readers cannot recognise text within an image, so any information displayed via an image must be available elsewhere on the page or post.

For videos you should also, wherever possible, include a full transcript or subtitles for those with visual or hearing impairment.

Words we use regularly

- coordinate/coordinator not co-ordinate/co-ordinator
- member not Member
- membership not Membership
- bookkeeper not book keeper
- groups, not branches