



English  
Language  
Style Guide

**LEaF**  
TRANSLATIONS

We are LEaF and we stand for Language Expertise and Finesse.



Lucy Pembayun, Founder of LEaF Translations

# Welcome to the LEaF Style Guide.

This guide has been designed to help you write better English, whether you are a business owner, a student or someone for whom English is not your native language.

The LEaF English Language Style Guide is an easy-to-use, quick reference guide. It addresses parts of English grammar that people (both native speakers and non-native speakers) often find difficult and seeks to provide a clear answer to common grammatical questions.

Some of the information provided relates to strict grammatical rules; other information is a matter of preference. The English Language Style Guide was originally created to ensure that all of LEaF's expert translators adhere to the same conventions to guarantee consistency across all of our English translations. Thus, for example, the guide states that measurements should be written in the format 12 cm. If you prefer to write 12cm, you may of course do so. The key is to be consistent across all of your writing.

Please also note that this Style Guide makes no claims to be fully comprehensive. There may well be glaring omissions. If you have a burning grammatical question or think of something that you believe should be included in future versions, please email [hello@leaftranslations.com](mailto:hello@leaftranslations.com) and we will endeavour to include it in the guide.

All that being said, we hope you find this Style Guide to be a useful resource for your English writing.

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The LEaF English Language Style Guide will be updated from time to time. The latest version can be found at <https://leaftranslations.com/styleguide>.

# About LEaF Translations

Founded in 2017, LEaF Translations is a small, friendly translation company based in York, UK. Specialising in translations for the main European languages, as well as English proofreading, LEaF works with businesses in York and further afield to help them reach new international customers with multilingual content.

Unlike many translation companies, LEaF works with a small pool of expert translators, each highly qualified in their field. All projects are managed personally by founder, Lucy Pembayun, and clients are always told who is translating their project to ensure full accountability. All translations are also proofread by a fellow language professional to guarantee exceptional quality at all times.

Lucy founded LEaF with a determination to show that business can be ethical and this desire to have a positive impact runs right through the core of the company. From a focus on exceeding customers' expectations, to treating translators as equal partners, to donating to climate projects around the world, Lucy is driven by the desire to not only create an excellent translation company, but also a real force for good.

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# Apostrophes

The apostrophe has two main uses:

1) To indicate possession,

e.g. Steven's dog, the children's playground etc.

2) To indicate the omission of letters,

e.g. they + are = they're

you + are = you're

For possession apostrophes, i.e. the first use, note the following:

- the apostrophe goes after the S for plurals ending in S, e.g. the builders' tea;
- if a name already ends in S, you can choose to omit the S after the apostrophe, as in Ross' chair (Ross's chair is also correct);
- a common mistake made by native speakers is to put an apostrophe before any plural S, e.g. meat pie's. This is incorrect. Apostrophes should only be used before a plural S to indicate possession;
- you do not need an apostrophe for pronouns indicating possession, i.e. yours, hers.



Another common error concerning apostrophes is confusing its and it's.

The rule is quite simple: you only write it's with an apostrophe when it is short for it and is:

it's = it + is

its = possession, i.e. its mouth is really big

Finally, note the difference between the following:

your and you're

their and they're

In both cases, the first is the possessive pronoun - your dress, their house.

You're and they're are short for "you are" and "they are" respectively.

You can find more information about apostrophes on the LEaF blog [here](#).

# Abbreviations and acronyms

**Definition: an abbreviation is a shortened version of a word.**

There are two types of abbreviation: those containing the first few letters of the original word, and those containing the first and last letters.

Examples of the former include: approx., min., est.

Examples of the latter include: Dr, dept, Mr.

This distinction is important regarding when to use a full stop.

As a general rule, only use a full stop in cases where the abbreviation does not include the last letter of the original word:

Dr, Mr, vs, St and Inc. versus alt. and Corp.

**Definition: an acronym is an abbreviation formed by the initial letters of other words.**

Full stops should not be used for common acronyms, such as BBC, VAT, NATO, UN, RSVP etc.

When using an acronym that may be unfamiliar to readers, write the term out the first time it is used with the acronym in brackets, and then use the acronym in the subsequent text, e.g. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

# British vs American spellings

Although British and American English are broadly similar, there are some differences in terms of the meaning of some words and the spellings of others. This section covers some of the main differences in spelling between British and American English.

**Some basic rules:**

1) **-ise, -isation and -yse vs -ize, -ization and -yze**

Thus, British spellings include criticise, globalisation and analyse, versus the American equivalents criticize, globalization and analyze.

There are some exceptions to this, e.g. verbs that always contain a Z, like seize, and verbs that always contain an S, like surprise.

2) **analogue, dialogue vs analog, dialog**

The former is the British spelling, the latter the American.

3) **two Ls in Britain vs one L in the US**

i.e. cancelled, tranquillity, traveller, modelling versus canceled, tranquility, traveler and modeling

4) **the omission of letters in American English**

Some American versions of English words omit letters used in the British versions. Examples include:

colour vs color

aluminium vs aluminum

programme vs program (although the latter is used in British English when referring to computer software)

5) **-re in British English vs -er in American English**

e.g. in metre (meter)

# Bullet point/list punctuation

Do not capitalise the first letter of bullet points.

Do not punctuate the end of bullet points if they are a list of items, e.g.

Flowers available:

- \* roses
- \* tulips
- \* pansies
- \* daffodils

Add a full stop to the last bullet point if the bullet points form a complete sentence with the preceding text, e.g.

The following flowers are available:

- \* roses
- \* tulips
- \* pansies.

If each bullet point is a sentence in its own right, add a semicolon to the end of each point and “or” or “and” to the penultimate point:

When you enter the building, proceed as follows:

- \* check the information on the notice board;
- \* sign in at the reception desk; and
- \* proceed to the waiting room and await assistance.



# Capitalisation

Capitalise proper nouns, e.g. names, towns, countries, brand names, planets, the names of specific buildings, organisations, days of the week, months etc.

Capitalise acronyms, e.g. VAT, CEO, UNESCO.

Only capitalise the first letters in headings (except to grab attention on websites).

For websites: menu headings and page titles may be capitalised as desired – it depends on the website in question, but remain consistent within the site.

For books, films, songs: capitalise the first word and all subsequent words except articles (the/a), prepositions (to/on) and conjunctions (and/ but), e.g. Back to the Future, The Wind in the Willows.

For locations, capitalise if part of the proper noun:

e.g. Mount Everest, The Lake District, the River Ouse

Note: the Ouse river, Hoher Meißner mountain – in these cases the proper noun is the Ouse/Hoher Meißner; river and mountain are common nouns here, as in the red house.

Job titles are capitalised where they refer to specific people, e.g. the President, the Queen, the Prime Minister, Managing Director Paula Nickolds.

Job titles are **not** capitalised where they refer to a general post or profession, e.g. my teacher, the managing director of that company.

You can find more information about when to use capital letters on the LEaF blog [here](#).

# Colons and semicolons

**Colons are used to introduce a sub-clause, which follows on logically from the first part of the sentence,**

e.g. I have two favourite hobbies: writing and walking the dog.  
The second part of the sentence cannot stand alone.

Colons are also used to introduce a quotation: "This is a great example of a quote" and to precede a list (both in prose: like this or this; and bulleted lists).

Note: Do not capitalise the first letter after a colon, unless it is part of a heading or would be capitalised in normal prose (see [Capitalisation](#)) e.g.:

German to English translations: by writers not machines

German to English translations: LEaF Translations provides expert translations to Germany companies.

(In American English, it is common to capitalise the first letter after a colon.)

**Semicolons are used to link two related parts of a sentence that could also stand alone,**

e.g. I don't like household chores; I prefer to be outside.

When used correctly, they are like a halfway house between a full-stop and a comma, and provide a useful way to create a pause in a text.

Semicolons are also used in lists, which already contain commas,

e.g. My favourite places are York, England; the island of Menorca in Spain; and a place called Pondok Sari in Bali.

# Currency

Currency symbols are written before the amount:

£10.50, \$5, €5.50

Currency abbreviations are written after the amount:

10 GBP, 5 USD, 5 EUR

The names of currencies are not capitalised: e.g. ten pounds, five dollars, five euro (note euro not euros)

## Examples:

One hundred pounds is currently equivalent to 86 euro.

The currency in Indonesia is called rupiah. One hundred British pounds is worth almost two million Indonesian rupiah!

Room rates:

\* Single room 80 EUR

\* Double room 100 EUR



# Licence, practice and advice

These words are part of a collection of common English words that are spelt differently, depending upon whether they are used as nouns or verbs and they often cause great confusion in written English.

The rule is quite simple here: if the words are to be used as a noun - i.e. an object - they are written with a C, e.g.

**a TV licence**

**I need more practice**

**Can you give me some advice?**

If the words are to be used as a verb - i.e. a doing word - they are written with an S, e.g.

**I just licensed my vehicle**

**I need to practise more**

**I would advise that you seek help**

Note: in American English, the nouns and verbs are both written with an S.



# Numbers, dates and times

## Numbers

Numbers up to and including ten should be written out, numbers above ten should be written in numerical form:

e.g. five minutes and 30 seconds.

Similarly, spell out the words for first, second etc. up to and including tenth. Use the numerical form for larger ordinal numbers,

e.g. first place vs 20th place.

For large numbers, use commas between thousands for clarity,

e.g.: 1,500, 10,500, 100,500.

Write out the words millions, billions etc.:

e.g. 100 million, 1.5 billion, or abbreviate to 100m and 1.5bn.

## Dates

Dates should be written as follows: 24th March 2020 or 24/03/2020 or 24/03/20.

Note: in British English, the date always precedes the month.

For decades, write 1960s or '60s.

## Times

When writing times, choose between the 12-hour and the 24-hour clock and remain consistent throughout.

The 12-hour clock should be written as follows:

8am, 8.30am, 8am-4.30pm.

The 24-hour clock should be written as follows:

8:00, 14:30, 8:00-14:30.

Do not write 12 noon or 12 midnight; simply write noon or midnight.





# Tricky past participles

Past participles are a common cause of error, particularly those for certain irregular verbs.

The past participles of burn, spell and learn, for example, differ between British English and American English, causing further confusion. The correct versions in British English are as follows:

burn = burnt

spell = spelt

learn = learnt

dream = dreamt

These past participle forms are also used as adjectives, as in:

My toast is burnt.

My name is misspelt on the form.

Lie vs lay vs laid can also be problematic.

There are two different verbs to consider here (discounting “to lie” in the sense of to tell fibs): to lie and to lay.

To lie down becomes “I am lying down” and “I lay down” in the present and past tenses, respectively.

To lay (the table) becomes “I am laying the table” and “I laid the table”.

**You can read more about this confusing topic on the L<sup>E</sup>aF blog [here](#).**

# Symbols and measurements

## Spaces

The main bone of contention for symbols and measurements is whether or not to add a space between the symbol and the number. The rule is as follows:

Do not include a space between the number and the corresponding symbol:  
e.g. 50%, 5°C, 8”.

Do include a space between the number and the abbreviated unit of measurement: e.g. 10 g, 50 kg, 10 mm, 25 m.

*Note the exception to this: the abbreviations for million and billion are written without a space, e.g. £10m (this also helps to differentiate between million and metre).*

## Hyphens

Hyphens should be used in cases where measurements create compound adjectives:

the 500-kilometre journey (or 500 km journey – do not add a hyphen between numbers and abbreviations)

the ten-metre-long garden vs the garden is ten metres long

Note the use of hyphens for ages as well:

e.g. the four-year-old boy




## Our main services:

Translations for the main European languages, including English, German, French, Spanish, Italian etc.

English proofreading & editing services

LEaF Content Audit – for error-free websites that shine!

## What our customers say:




“A fantastic, top-quality translation and a really fair price. Thank you Lucy for your hassle-free, prompt and professional service!”

Selma Kuyas, W0Weffekt

“LEaF Translations – straightforward and professional. Precisely as it should be.”

Petra Jahn-Firle,  
textgenial



“Would definitely recommend: LEaF are fast, friendly and proactive!”

Mona Breulmann,  
Manner & Muller



Thank you for downloading and reading the LEaF English Language Style Guide.

We welcome your feedback and questions about the guide.

For more information about LEaF Translations, to request a quote or discuss your language needs visit:

<https://leaftranslations.com/>

You can sign up to our newsletter [here](#).

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