



# UCC Style Guide:

## Writing for the web



## **UCC Style Guide: Writing for the Web**

This document shows staff how to apply UCC's house style when writing content for our website.

It will not address every issue encountered by online writers and editors. If you have specific questions or need more guidance, please contact: [editor@ucc.ie](mailto:editor@ucc.ie)

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# 1. Introduction

## What is a style guide?

A style guide or style manual establishes standards for the writing and design of documents. A set of standards for a specific organisation is known as 'house style'.

This guide focuses on writing web text. It looks at how to write for the web (structuring, brevity, tone of voice, etc.) and lays down a standard style (e.g. for titles, dates, etc.).

## Why use a style guide?

The UCC website is our shop window. We want it to be readable, modern, user-friendly and consistent.

Imagine a university website where some webpages are highly formal and stiff, or full of complex terms or gobbledegook, while others are casual and conversational, or where widely varying styles are used for capitalisation, dates, titles, etc. There's no sense of brand identity or professionalism.

A style guide solves these problems. It's like a personal dictionary for the organisation. The challenge of writing for a large website is that many writers contribute to it. A style guide can help to ensure a consistent house style and tone of voice, so that our website appears cohesive and user-focused. It will also help writers and editors to comply with the WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) standard, which is supported by the National Disability Authority.

In some cases, there is more than one option (for example, how to punctuate bullet points), but a style guide selects one style or method to ensure consistency. Following the standards laid down helps to ensure uniformity in style and formatting both within and across texts.

## What are the benefits of a customised style guide?

- it helps us to differentiate UCC from our competitors and supports our brand identity
- it increases customer satisfaction, reduces the number of complaints, and improves our image
- it empowers us to write clearly, concisely and professionally – and thus make content easier to read, scan and understand.

## How will this guide help you?

This style guide will make it easier for you to write for the website. You won't have to scratch your head while wondering, for example, what format you should use for dates – 4<sup>th</sup> September 2014, September 4, 2014, or ...? The guidelines mean you don't have to think about all the little details and can focus on the bigger picture: writing good copy.

This style guide will:

- help you to approach online writing with more confidence and plan your content more effectively
- help you to work use UCC's editorial standards for web content
- make it easier to write content as you can concentrate on the content without having to worry about the minutiae.

## How should you use the guide?

The best way of using this guide is to read and absorb the key points made in Sections 2 and 3, and then refer to the later sections as necessary when writing content.

Note, however, that a style guide is a 'living document'. It should be added to and revised as necessary. If you find that certain issues crop up now and again, please let us know so that we can update the guide – by emailing [editor@ucc.ie](mailto:editor@ucc.ie).

## 2. Writing for the web

People read online in a very different way from reading text in print. Studies show that online readers:

- scan the top of the page more than the bottom
- look in particular at headings, words in bold type, and images
- skim and select
- read a little at a time, mainly in short bursts
- grab what they need and then move on

Website visitors are looking for 'quick-hit' information. If you don't give it to them immediately, they'll get frustrated – and probably look elsewhere or exit the site.

- Online readers often jump about from one page / section of a page to another (unlike print readers who usually turn pages sequentially and start at the top of a page and work down)
- Pages need to stand alone
- Make it easy for users to take their own journey around your site - 3 click rule
- Users need to know where they are and what else is available

Guess the percentage: 25% 79% 50%

- a. How many users scan the page instead of reading word for word?
- b. How much slower is reading from a PC screen compared to reading paper?
- c. How much shorter should web content should be compared to hard copy?

**Answers:**

**a. 79%    b. 25%    c. 50%**



## Plan web content

Digital media does not have the same boundaries as print. It's essential to have a clear focus and remain in control.

In general, your web content needs to do one or both of the following:

- support a key objective (e.g. promote the university or encourage applications from prospective students)
- help a web visitor to complete a task (e.g. give information being searched for)

Thus, you should first decide exactly who you're addressing, your objectives, what information you need to provide, and how to best structure it.

## Focus on your readership

First, ask yourself:

- Who are you talking to? Who are you targeting?
- What do you want to tell them? What do they need or want to know?
- Why should they be interested?

## Define your objectives

What exactly do you want to achieve? Do you just want readers to be informed, or to take a particular course of action? For any web page, ask yourself:

- Why am I writing this page?
- What do I want to say?
- Will readers want to read it?
- What do I want the reader to do?

## Limit each page to one topic

Split your web content into coherent chunks. Each should focus on a particular topic. Put background or supporting information on secondary pages. Don't repeat information (e.g. about application processes) if the topic is well covered elsewhere on the UCC website (and is updated there as needed). Consider adding a link instead.

## **Structure your content with headings and sub-headings**

Add headings so that readers can see the page content at a glance. Think of headings as signposts for readers in a hurry.

Headings serve at least two purposes: they tell readers what a particular section is about, and they break up the monotony of the text.

Keep your headings brief and use keywords. Avoid bland labels and 'dead phrases'; use strong snappy sentences where possible. Capitalise only the first letter of the first word and any proper nouns and names.

If you want to help readers find specific bits of information, simple informative headings are best. On the other hand, if you want to get attention, a catchy heading may be suitable. But be careful. Readers want to know immediately what a particular web page is all about. Avoid 'clever' or enigmatic headings.

If you come up with a playful heading, make sure it's right for the context. For example, 'Making waves' might work in a report about an achievement by the Hydraulics and Maritime Research Centre, but not in an informative page about the centre's activities.

## **Front-load your content**

'Front-loading' your content means putting the key point first, followed by the details. The opening paragraph on a page should answer two questions:

- What will readers find on this page? What is its function?
- Why should they care? How will they benefit?

Detailed background information should be put downpage or on a child page.

For example, if you're talking about a Sports Centre, don't start with background information (about when the centre was built, how much it cost, etc.), but with the main points you want to get across (the facilities provided, who can use them, etc.).

It's best to use the 'inverted pyramid' – in other words, put the most important information first, following by other details in order of diminishing importance.

## **Write content**

As you start writing, remind yourself of the readership you're targeting and stay focused on the information you want to convey, omitting superfluous details.

## **Write in a friendly, relaxed manner**

Online readers are put off by long blocks of stodgy text written in a highly formal style. We want the UCC website to be user-friendly. Use the language you'd use if the reader was sitting beside you.

Don't write with a stiff, institutional voice, or use unnecessary jargon. Use everyday words: 'plenty' rather than 'numerous', or 'a big improvement' rather than 'a significant improvement'.

It's fine to use contractions such as 'won't' rather than 'will not' and occasionally to start sentences with 'and' or 'because'. This of course does not mean being over-colloquial in expression and careless in your writing.

Give the title of your school, department or service in the first instance, but then use 'we' or 'us'.

## **Example**

*Before:* Further information is available from the Mature Students Office.

*After:* You can get more information from our Mature Students Office.

## Write clearly, concisely and correctly

Unclear or over-complicated text, long-winded text and text with basic errors will put off readers and create a bad impression of the university. Some content needs colour and richer language, but it still needs to be written concisely.

## Use topic sentences

A topic sentence is the first sentence in a paragraph and introduces the main idea of the paragraph. It makes your text more scannable and easier to read.

### Example

Computer technology is an indispensable tool in all areas of science and engineering. It is crucial in a wide range of modern services, such as financial markets, telecommunications and air transport ...

The first sentence states the theme of the paragraph; the following sentences give the details.

Note: In some cases, a topic sentence is not needed – for example, when you're narrating a series of events, developing an idea introduced (with a topic sentence) in the previous paragraph, or if all the sentences in a paragraph clearly refer to a main point.

## Use lists

Present long lists in the form of bullet points. Lists are better than long paragraphs because they:

- are easy to scan
- help to ensure concise text
- are less intimidating for readers

See [Bullet lists](#)

## Explain as needed but don't state the obvious

Many visitors will come to UCC's web pages via a search engine, so each page needs to be self-explanatory. Link to background or explanatory information where necessary, but don't over-explain or state the obvious. For example, you don't need to say 'Welcome to the UCC website', or write 'This page is aimed at informing you about the opportunities for mature students' if there's a heading saying 'Opportunities for mature students'.

## Tell a story when appropriate

Telling a story is a good way of engaging people. It can be as simple as writing content with a clear beginning, middle and end, with a clear storyline running through it.

## Use the active voice

Use strong, active verbs (the structure of 'who does what'). Sentences with active verbs are easier to read and have more energy.

*Before:* Our goal is the support and development of research activities, and the assistance of the research community through the provision of information, guidance and advice.

*After:* Our goal is to support and develop research activities. We also aim to help the research community by providing information, guidance and advice.

*(That's four active verbs instead of four heavy nouns.)*

## Use descriptive link text

When you're linking, don't write 'click here'. Instead, use a title that describes where the user will go to by clicking the link. And integrate the link with your content, making it part of a sentence.

## Example

*Before:* [Click here](#), or [More information](#).

*After:* You can find out more in the [Alumni](#) section of our website.

### **Include a call to action, if appropriate**

If you want readers to do something, tell them what you want them to do and make it as easy as possible for them to do it. For example, if you want them to complete a form, link to it or tell them where they can get it.

#### **Example**

To make your application: download, print and return the [application form](#).

### **Use keywords to make the content searchable**

You can use a few simple techniques to improve your page's ranking with the search engines.

*Page title:* Each page should have a title that accurately describes its topic. Place the most important words at the start of the title.

*Headings and subheadings:* The search engines focus in particular on headings, so use key words in your headings that clearly explain the topic.

#### **Example**

*Before:* Postgraduate programmes or Applying

*After:* How to apply for postgraduate programmes

*Body text:* Use the terms and phrases your readers are likely to use when they're searching for information. This will also make your pages easier to understand.

*Hyperlinks:* The search engines also focus on hyperlinks, so 'click here' won't mean much to them. Use keywords in the link.

*Keywords:* Use the keywords of your topic in your opening sentence, and repeat them a few times as appropriate on the page.

## Advice on accessibility

Our website should be accessible to everyone. To make sure your site is accessible to students with disabilities please see the [Disability Support Service](#) where you will find information and useful resources.

## 3. Basic rules – UCC style decisions

### Accents

Use on Irish (see Fada), French, German and Spanish words, but not on anglicised words such as cafe, apart from exposé.

### Acronyms

These are okay, as long as you're sure readers will understand what you're writing about. If you aren't 100% positive, spell it out on the first mention, followed by the abbreviation in brackets. After that, use the abbreviation.

- ✓ University College Cork (UCC)
- ✓ Science, Engineering and Food Science (SEFS)
- ✓ O'Rahilly Building (ORB)

Always use abbreviations when they are better known than the actual words, such as VAT, PRSI, PAYE, GATT, Vhi, RTÉ, ESB.

Don't use full stops between letters and don't add an apostrophe in plurals.

Note: our online readership may not be familiar with Irish/UCC abbreviations and acronyms, so don't take them as granted.

### Age

Age ranges are written with no apostrophes:

✓ **In your 20s and 30s, you ...**

Often the word age can be omitted: instead of *when you reach the age of 65*, **when you reach 65**.

## Alumni

alumnus (singular), alumni (plural)

## Ampersands (&)

Do not use them in written content and only used to truncate titles for layout purposes.

The ampersand (&) is used in some company names. Check in the phone book.

✓ **Harland and Wolff**      ✓ **Marks & Spencer**

## Bullet lists

Bullet point lists are a simple way of avoiding wordiness and waffle. They're particularly useful if you need to ask readers to carry out more than one action. They allow readers to scan key points quickly and easily.

Do not insert a comma, semi-colon or final full point after each point – unless each point is a full sentence, in which case start each point with a capital letter and end with a full point.

Example

The University Park Campus has:

- a range of support services for students
- a sports centre with facilities for both students and staff
- a large library with extensive collections of books, journals and periodicals

If each bullet point is a complete sentence, use sentence case:

Example



- UCC is the world's first Green Flag university.
- International league tables consistently rate UCC research as of world-class standard.
- UCC students have won many national and international awards.

## Capital letters

These are used to start sentences. Don't drop them into the middle of a sentence to emphasise a word.

× *The pages of the University Website are for information only and do not constitute Professional advice in any way.*

✓ *The pages of the university website are for information only and do not constitute professional advice in any way.*

× *The University appreciates how important it is to have affordable accommodation.*

✓ *The university appreciates how important it is to have affordable accommodation.*

Capitalise events when referring to a specific event, as in Open Day, Gala Dinner, Autumn Conferings, but not when speaking generally, as in: We're planning a gala dinner at the end of the year.

When using title case, lowercase the minor words:

✓ *Directions on Format, Layout and Presentation of Theses*

× *Directions On Format, Layout & Presentation Of Theses*

See also [Titles and names](#)

## Captions

When writing captions to pictures showing several people, write as in the following example:

✓ **Spring Conferring at UCC (l-r): Dr Michael Murphy, UCC President; Trevor Holmes, VP for External Relations, UCC; and Dermot Collins, Bursar, UCC**

If two people only are shown, write as follows:

✓ **Open Day: Professor Peter Lenihan (left) and Professor Catherine Costello**

## **Contact details (addresses, email, phone numbers, web addresses)**

### **Addresses**

These should have as little punctuation as possible. Do not shorten 'Road', 'Street' or 'Avenue'.

Use the following style:

**University College Cork  
College Road  
Cork  
Ireland**

but when on one line:

**University College Cork, College Road, Cork, Ireland**

### **Email:**

Use the style:

E: [editor@ucc.ie](mailto:editor@ucc.ie)

Note: don't forget to add a hyperlink, so that people can simply click it to send a message.

## Phone numbers

Use the style:

T: +353 (0)21 490 3000

Note: this style will help people who browse on smartphone to simply tap the screen to call the number

## Web addresses

Use the style:

W: <http://www.ucc.ie/>

Note: don't forget to add a hyperlink, so that people can simply click it to access the website

## Currencies

See Money

## Dates

Dates are written as in 4 April 2008, without any commas. Do not use superscript 'th', 'st', 'nd' or 'rd' after the numerals.

Include the day of the week where useful to the reader (e.g. if the date concerns an event in the near future or a deadline): Wednesday, 4 April.

For decades, write like this, without an apostrophe: the 1990s.

When writing about periods of time, use either the words *from* and *to* or a dash – not both.

- ✓ from 3 June to 5 July 2007
- × from 3-5 June 2007
- ✓ from December 2006 to August 2007
- × from December 2006-August 2007

Similarly, do not combine *between* and the dash:

- ✓ between 1 June and 15 July
- × between 1<sup>st</sup> June-15<sup>th</sup> July

## Disability

Disability demands careful use of English. Use as follows:

- ✓ **a person who has a disability, a person with a disability**
- ✓ **a person who uses a wheelchair**
- ✓ **people with disabilities**
- ✓ **deaf and speech-impaired, hearing- and speech-impaired**
- ✓ **a person with learning difficulties**

Avoid:

- × *victim of, crippled by, suffering from, afflicted by*
- × *wheelchair-bound, in a wheelchair*
- × *mentally handicapped*
- × *invalids*
- × *the disabled, the handicapped, the blind, the deaf*
- × *deaf and dumb*

If you have any queries, contact the National Disability Authority or visit

[www.nda.ie](http://www.nda.ie) or [www.accessibility.ie](http://www.accessibility.ie)

## Fada

These make a difference to the sound of words in Irish (showing that a vowel is long, as in Séamus and Seán). Always include fadas, except on capital letters. Be particularly careful when spelling people's names in Irish.

### Examples

✓ **Coláiste, gardaí, Iarnród Éireann**

Check fadas in this Irish/English dictionary: [www.englishirishdictionary.com](http://www.englishirishdictionary.com)

## Fahrenheit or Celsius?

Use Celsius (though it is useful to add the Fahrenheit figure in brackets). Write 68C.

## Fractions

These should be written out as words: half, two-thirds, five-eighths, two and a half. Or replace with a percentage: 50%, 75%.

## Gender

Use gender-neutral titles where possible: chair or chairperson, not chairman/chairwoman, actor not actress.

Try to avoid using 'he' or 'she' (or 's/he' or 'he/she') when referring to people in general.

× *The typical student is anxious about his exam results.*

✓ **Most students are anxious about their exam results.**

## Linking to other pages/sites

Hyperlinks are the links in a webpage that, when clicked on, open other pages in the UCC website or in external websites, or link to downloadable documents.

Don't use phrases such as *click here* or *more*. Create links that explain what is being linked to (both for your readers and the search engines).

× *For information on accommodation options for postgraduate students, click here.*

✓ **To view information on your options, go to Postgraduate Accommodation.**

Many visitors will arrive at your website on pages other than the home page, so remember to hyperlink to relevant information that they may have bypassed.

## Logo

Guidelines for how to use UCC's logo correctly are available at:

[upic.ucc.ie/visual-identity.html](http://upic.ucc.ie/visual-identity.html)

To request the artwork for the UCC logo, email [upic@ucc.ie](mailto:upic@ucc.ie)

## Money

Write like this, with no spacing: €655.50.

Use the symbol € as in €6.5 million. The plural is euro and cent.

For US dollars and sterling, use the symbols: US\$2,000 and £3,000.

Write out million and billion in full, as in €7.2 million.

## Numbers

Spell out numbers from zero to nine, then use digits, as in: Last year, three professors and 75 students attended the event.

From 10 upwards, if you cannot be precise, write in words: about twenty (not *about 20*), at least a hundred students (not *a 100 students*).

Use commas in numbers greater than 999: 2,139 instead of 2139.

Where one number in a series is greater than 10, use figures for all the numbers: 2, 9, 34, 78 and 150.

When giving a range of figures, use the dash: 45-65, instead of *45 to 65*.

At the start of sentences, write the number in words.

✓ Two hundred students attended the open day.

Use the symbol % for per cent.

Write out first, second, third etc (not *st, nd, rd*) up to ninth, then 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 51<sup>st</sup>, millionth, billionth.

## Qualifications (PhD etc)

Write undergraduate and postgraduate as one word.

For the type of degree in general, use lower-case, as follows:

✓ a master's degree

For abbreviations referring to university qualifications, do not punctuate and make sure to use the correct combination of upper and lower-case letters:

Examples

✓ **BA, BArch, BSc, PG Dip, HDip LLB, MSc, PhD**

If referring to a specific qualification in full, use the following format:

✓ **BA (Hons) Engineering (Civil)**

✓ **MSc Applied Science**

When referring to honours in general, use lower-case: 'a degree with honours'. If writing the formal title of a qualification, write 'Hons' and put in brackets (as in the example above).

Degree classifications should be written as follows:

- ✓ **First, 2.1, 2.2, Third, Pass**

Hyphenate as follows:

- ✓ **She gained a first-class BA (Hons).**

Also hyphenate **part-time** and **full-time**.

## Times

Write as follows: 2am, 6.30pm, etc (use the 12-hour clock instead of the 24-hour clock and don't insert full points in 'am' or 'pm').

For periods of time, use a hyphen, with spaces either side:

- ✓ **The office is open 8.30am - 5pm.**

## Titles and names

### University

- ✓ **University College Cork (UCC)**
- ✓ **Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh (COC)**

But write **UCC/COC** on a branded page.

Note: the word 'university' is *not* capitalised when referring specifically to UCC

× *The University appreciates how important it is to have affordable accommodation.*

✓ *The university appreciates how important it is to have affordable accommodation.*

## Building names



Capitalise the names of buildings, as in:

- ✓ **Cavanagh Pharmacy Building**
- ✓ **Food Science Building**

For a list of building names (and codes), see

<http://timetable.ucc.ie/buildingcodes.asp>

## Colleges, schools, departments, centres, institutes, facilities, etc

Capitalise when using the full proper name:

- ✓ **Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences**
- ✓ **Aquaculture & Fisheries Development Centre**
- ✓ **Disciplinary Appeals Committee**

After the full title has been given, use lowercase as in:

- ✓ **The college has recently announced ...**
- ✓ **The committee has decided ...**

## Courses, modules, and research and subject areas

Capitalise official course and module titles, but use lower-case for general research and subject areas, for example:

- ✓ **You can do a degree in psychology.**
- ✓ **An MA in Psychology usually lasts for one year.**
- ✓ **Introduction to Management Accounting [module]**
- ✓ **The postgraduate course in contemporary history includes a module on conflict in the Middle East.**

## Years and semesters

Capitalise official years and semesters, etc:

- ✓ **Full Academic Year, Autumn Semester, Spring Semester, Christmas Recess, Easter Recess**

When referring to individual years or semesters within a course, use the following style:

- ✓ **year 1, year 2, years 2 and 3**
- ✓ **semester 1, semester 2**

### Personal and job titles

Do not add a full stop after a contracted title: Mr, Mrs, Ms, Dr

Use capitals for job titles, but not for jobs.

- × *She asked for a meeting with the Professor.*
- ✓ **Professor O'Brien received a round of applause.**×

Always spell the title **Professor** in full, never as *Prof.*

## 4. Punctuation

It's important. Look at the difference it can make:

**A woman without her man is nothing. A woman: without her, man is nothing.**

(from *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* by Lynne Truss, published by Profile Books)

### Abbreviations

e.g. (use the full stops) means 'for example'. In lists beginning with e.g., don't end with *etc*, as *etc* is not giving an example.

- ✓ **Research events take place regularly – e.g. conferences, workshops and seminars.**

etc

A full stop is not needed.

i.e. is written like this, with the full stops; it means 'that is'.

✓ **We have had no post for a week, i.e. not one letter.**

Also, see Acronyms

## Brackets

If a sentence is complete without the information contained within the parentheses (round brackets), put the punctuation outside the brackets. (A complete sentence within parentheses should begin with a capital letter and end with a stop.)

✓ **A taught course involves seminars and lectures and normally lasts one or two years (full-time or part-time).**

## Colon

Use before a list, as in:

✓ **The main problems are these: lack of time, lack of interest and lack of resources.**

or before a full-sentence quotation: ✓ **The student said: "Apostrophes are confusing".**

or to introduce a bulleted list.

## Comma

Use commas as follows:

1. After items in a list, except the last but one.

✓ **Please send: your full name, address, phone number and email address.** But add a comma before the concluding conjunction in a series so as to avoid confusion, as in:

✓ **The Colleges of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences; Business and Law, and Medicine and Health are involved in the initiative.**

2. Before and after a clause that provides extra information — but make sure the sentence still makes sense if the clause is removed.

✓ **The speaker said that mature students, because of their life experience, could contribute much to university life.**

3. If they are necessary for clarity, especially in a long sentence. To test this, read the sentence aloud and add a comma where you pause for breath. Better still, divide it into two sentences at the point where you pause (remembering to double-check the grammar).

4. After introductory phrases or words:

✓ **Over the last 10 years, the course has ...**

## Dash

When you want to use a dash in a sentence, use a dash, not a hyphen, as in:

✓ **Students should be aware that appealing an examination result is a serious matter – not to be undertaken lightly.**

✗ *Appealing an examination result is a serious matter - not to be undertaken lightly.*

Note: in Word, if you type a word, a hyphen and then another word, the program automatically turns the hyphen into a dash.

## Exclamation mark

Avoid using exclamation points (!) unless stylistically appropriate, e.g. in a quote.

## Full stop

Add a full stop the end of a sentence. Do not use:

- at the end of a heading
- at the end of short items in a bulletpoint list
- after titles such as Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr
- after initials in names (Ms S Kiely)
- in acronyms (UCC, Vhi, ESB, VAT, BBC)
- for am and pm in times (7am, 10.30pm)
- in measurements (km, cm, lb)

Note: after a full stop in a sentence, use a single space, not two spaces.

## Hyphen

Hyphens are useful, but try to make one word wherever possible. Use them, however, to avoid confusion.

- ✓ **16-person committees are too large**
- ✓ **a 12-week session**
- ✓ **a third-level course**
- ✓ **first-year students**
- ✓ **a two-year course**
- ✓ **up-to-date style, (but 'the files are up to date')**

Adjectives take a hyphen when they go before the noun (object) they are describing:

- ✓ **We have developed a well-thought-out and user-friendly guideline to help students understand the risk of plagiarism.**

Also use a hyphen in prefixes: **non-negotiable, re-entry, ex-directory, mid-1990s.**

Verbs do not take hyphens: **to break up (but the break-up).**

Hyphenate **part-time** and **full-time**.

- ✓ **She now has a full-time job in a major company.**
- ✓ **She now works full time in a major company.**

## Quotation marks

Use double quotation marks when you are quoting someone, and single quotes for quoted words within the quotation.

In the case of a complete quoted sentence, place full points and commas inside the quotes:

- ✓ **The student said, “The course is difficult but very rewarding.”**

In the case of a partial phrase, place full points and commas outside the quotation:

- ✓ **The student said the course was “difficult but very rewarding”.**
- ✓ **The student asked: “What is meant by ‘submitted assessment material’?”**

Use single quotation marks for the titles of articles poems news headlines and for quotes within quotes.

In headlines and captions, use single quote marks.

## Semicolon

Use semicolons to separate items in a series when the items use internal commas:

- ✓ **Members of the research team come from all over the country, including Macroom, Co Cork; Malin Head, Co Donegal; Nenagh, Co Tipperary, and Carlingford, Co Louth.**

## 5. Words, Phrases and Spellings

Think of writing web content as having a conversation. Internet language is more informal than the equivalent content for hard copy. If you wouldn't use a word or phrase in everyday conversation, think twice before using it online.

Here are examples of the kind of phrase not to use:

*accordingly / in a position to / in accordance with / in excess of / in respect of / in the event that / assist / in the majority of cases / in view of the fact that / in light of the fact that / due to the fact that*

- ✘ *in the majority of cases*
- ✓ **in most cases**

### A

#### **accordingly**

can seem rather formal. Other options include: so and therefore – or nothing.

- ✓ **The course includes a research element but is mainly classroom-based, so is considered to be a taught programme.**
- ✘ *The course includes a research element but is mainly classroom-based; accordingly, it is considered to be a taught programme.*

#### **advise**

means to give advice. Don't use it when you mean inform or tell.

- ✘ *Please be advised that our plagiarism rules stipulate that . . .*
- ✓ **Please note that under our plagiarism rules . . .**

#### **advisor**

is correct; do not use *adviser*.

### **amidst, amid and amongst**

should be replaced with **among**.

### **and/or**

is sometimes necessary in a legal context. Otherwise, try to avoid it as it can be confusing for the reader.

× *You should send your name and address and/or your student number.*

✓ **You should send either your student number or your name and address.**

### **as of**

is best replaced by **since** or, in the future, **from**.

✓ **Since 4 October 2011, the library has been open daily.**

✓ **From next month, the library will be open daily.**

× *As of last week, the library is open daily.*

### **assist**

is formal, so use help.

✓ **We regret that we cannot help students who do not submit the required details.**

× *We regret that we cannot be of assistance to students who do not submit the required details.*



## B

### **bank holiday**

is two words and in lower case.

### **biannual**

means twice a year, while **biennial** means every two years. Avoid, because customers may misunderstand them. Use **twice-yearly** or **two-yearly**.

### **billion**

is one thousand million, not one million million. Use billion for sums of money, quantities or inanimate objects – so it's €2.5 billion, 3 billion litres, etc. For people or animals, spell out billion.

## C

### **CD, CDs and CD-rom**

### **chair or chairperson**

replaces chairman or chairwoman, unless the person involved prefers otherwise.

### **co-author, co-organiser but coordinator**

### **Collective nouns**

describe groups of people or animals – a flock of birds, an orchestra, a committee. Whether they're singular or plural ('the committee' is or 'the

committee are'?) depends on what we're saying about them – is it the committee as a unit, or the committee as a group of individuals?

✓ **The committee meets once a month.**

(because we're talking about the committee as a unit)

✓ **The committee are all graduates of UCC.**

(where we're talking about the group as a collection of individuals)

Other collective nouns include: the board, majority, the public, the staff, the team, the crowd, the firm and the company.

### **commence**

is too formal – use **begin**.

### **communicate**

Don't – be specific: **write, phone, email or tell**.

× *The provisional exam results will be communicated two weeks before the end of the semester.*

✓ **You can view the provisional exam results at [www.ucc.ie/xxxx/](http://www.ucc.ie/xxxx/) two weeks before the end of the semester.**

### **complete or finish**

is better than finalise.

### **comprise**

is rather formal – use **consist of, include** or **contain**.

✓ **The research group consists of six people.**

**considering, owing to the fact that**

are too formal and awkward; use **as, since, because**.

✓ **Since the Postgraduate Application Centre does not accept personal cheques or postal orders**

✗ *Owing to the fact that the Postgraduate Application Centre does not accept personal cheques or postal orders ...*

**co-operate, co-operation, co-operative**

**coordinate and coordination**

**Cork city**

(not City) and **county** (not County)

**county**

when abbreviated should be written as Co., e.g. Co. Roscommon.

**cross-border**

**currently**

is best replaced with now, if anything.

**D**

**due to the fact that, in view of the fact that, in light of the fact that**

Use **because** or **since**.

## E

**e.g.**

(use the full stops) means 'for example'. In lists beginning with e.g., don't end with *etc*, as *etc* is not giving an example.

✓ **Research events take place regularly – e.g. conferences, workshops and seminars.**

**elderly**

is acceptable if used occasionally, but people aged over 65 prefer the term **older person**, according to Age Action.

**email**

doesn't have a hyphen.

**endeavour**

is too formal, use **try**.

**end result**

should be avoided, use **result**.

**enquire or inquire, enquiry or inquiry?**

Both are correct. Inquiry tends to be used now for formal investigations, as distinct from a once-off enquiry.

### **etc**

A full stop is not needed. Don't use etc after a list preceded by e.g.

### **ex**

is okay for girlfriend, husband, etc, but not for job titles. Use **former**.

### **except**

or **apart from**, rather than *excepting*.

### **Exchequer funding**

not *exchequer*

### **exists**

is too heavy a word in most cases.

✓ **There is a solution.**

× *A solution exists.*

### **expect or anticipate?**

To *anticipate* is to forestall or be ready to act to avoid something, while to *expect* is to await or look forward to.

✓ **Since we anticipate a large number of applications, we have assigned extra members of staff to work on the project.**

✓ **We expect that the new course will start in the next academic year.**

× *We anticipate that the new course will commence next year.*

## F

### **the fact that**

is clumsy. Use simply **that**, or rephrase the sentence.

× *We regret the fact that the course has had to be cancelled.*

✓ **We regret that the course has had to be cancelled.**

× *The fact that you have accepted a place on this course does not mean that you will not be considered for your other course choices.*

✓ **Accepting a place on this course does not mean you will not be considered for your other programme choices.**

### **farther or further?**

It is simplest to use **further** all the time, as this is now common usage. Strictly, *farther* is for distance.

### **feedback**

is a technological word. Use a word that tells the reader what you really want – **suggestions, views, thoughts, ideas, comments, evaluation or criticism.**

### **fewer or less?**

*Fewer* means a smaller number and is used for things you can count – seven students, three exams, six projects. *Less* means a smaller quantity and is used for things you cannot count – activity, commitment, trouble.

- ✓ **Fewer applicants now make errors when completing the form.**
- ✓ **This had led to less pressure on the students.**

### **finalise**

is spelled with an 's' but is best avoided. Alternatives include: **complete, finish, conclude.**

### **first name**

is correct, *Christian name* is not.

### **first-year**

as in ***a first-year student***

### **firstly, secondly, thirdly**

use first, second and third. If you make a point using the word *first*, you must have at least one following point, and you must start it with the word *second*.

### **following**

is not as good as **after** or **since**.

- ✓ **Since the introduction of the new system, you can submit your application online.**

× *Following the introduction of the new system, you can submit your application online.*

**for**

is better than ***for the purposes of.***

**full-time**

✓ **She now has a full-time job in a major company.**

**G**

**get**

can be too colloquial. Choose a more specific word such as **obtain, receive, earn**. Don't use *gotten*, which is an Americanism.

**government**

should have a capital letter when referring to the Republic of Ireland, as in **in the Government**.

**grandmother, grandfather, grand-aunt, grand-uncle**

**H**

**hi-tech**



## I

### **i.e.**

is written like this, with the full stops; it means 'that is'.

✓ **We have had no post for a week, i.e. not one letter.**

### **in accordance with**

use **by** or **under** instead

✓ **Under the regulations . . .**

✗ *In accordance with the regulations . . .*

### **in a position to**

use **able to** instead

### **indicate**

is not as good as **show**, **tell** or **highlight**.

### **in excess of**

is too wordy, use **more than**.

### **initials**

do not need spaces or full points – e.g. Mrs R Mulcahy, Mr FSL Lyons.

### **initiate**

is not as good as **begin** or **start**.

### **in the event that**

should be avoided; use **if** ...

### **inquire** or **enquire**, **inquiry** or **enquiry**?

Both are correct. *Inquiry* tends to be used now for formal investigations, as distinct from a once-off *enquiry*.

### **in respect of**

is not as good as **regarding** or **about**. Or rephrase:× *Thank you for submitting an application form in respect of the new course.*

✓ **Thank you for applying for the new course.**

### **in view of the fact that, in light of the fact that, due to the fact that**

are not as good as **because** or **since**.

### **-ise** or **-ize**?

We prefer to use the -ise endings as in **analyse**, **centralise**, **organise** and **realise**.

### **it's** or **its**?

*It's* is a shorter version of *it is* or *it has*. The apostrophe shows there is a letter missing.

✓ **It's important to read the plagiarism guidelines.**

*Its*, with no apostrophe, says something belongs to something or someone.

✓ **UCC is proud of the achievements of its graduates.**

✗ *No liability is accepted by UCC or any of it's officers, servants or agents.*

## J

**judgment**

## L

**learned**

not *learnt*.

**log-in** (noun)

is written like this, with a hyphen.

**log in** (verb)

is written like this, as two words.

**long-term**

has a hyphen when it's describing something else: **a long-term programme**,  
but: **in the long term**.

## M

### **in the majority of cases**

avoid; use instead **in most cases, usually, mainly or mostly.**

### **make an enquiry**

is not as good as **ask** or **enquire.**

### **may or might?**

There is a difference between *may* and *might*, and it may be important. *May* allows for the possibility that something may still happen. *Might* says it didn't.

- ✓ **We may be able to process your application by 25 February.**
- ✓ **We might have processed your application more quickly, but we lacked the necessary information.**

### **midday**

is one word and so is **midnight**, but **mid-August, mid-week and mid-term** have hyphens.

### **million**

is written after the number as 'millions' e.g. **\$25 million, three million tonnes of supplies, one million people, 23 million rabbits.**

### **Mrs, Miss or Ms?**

Use whichever the woman in question prefers. With most women in public life (Mrs O'Rourke) that preference is well known. If you don't know, try to find out; if that proves impossible, use *Ms*.

### **Muslim**

is correct. *Moslem* is not.

### **N**

#### **no-one**

is better than *no one*.

### **O**

#### **on the occasion of**

Avoid; just write **on** or **at**.

#### **older people**

is what people over 65 prefer to be called, according to research carried out by Age Action.

#### **ongoing**

Use **continuing**, **continuous** or **continual** instead.

#### **online**

is written like this.

**on receipt of**

should be avoided; write **once we receive**.

**on to**

should be written as two words.

**P**

**partially**

is not as good as **partly**.

**part-time**

is hyphenated: **a part-time course**.

**per annum**

is best avoided. Use **a year** or **annually**.

**per cent**

is written %, without a space after the number.

✓ **She submitted 50% of her work before the deadline.**

Avoid beginning a sentence with the figure:

✗ *50% of her work was submitted before the deadline.*

If you cannot avoid starting with the figure, write it out: ***Fifty per cent of her work ...***

### **period of time**

Avoid: a ***period of three years*** is three years.

- ✓ **The course lasts for three years.**
- ✗ *The course lasts for a period of three years.*

### **persons**

for more than one person, is not as good as **people**.

### **place names**

Do not capitalise north, south, etc, unless used as part of a region's proper name:  
*Northern Ireland* but *north Cork*.

### **post**

like pre, is in most cases not hyphenated but joined to the word it precedes, as in **prenatal**, **postnatal** and **postgraduate**.

When not a prefix, do not use to mean *after*.

### **pre**

as in **prenatal** and **predeceased**, is not hyphenated, but use a hyphen before a vowel, as in **pre-existing**.

### **prior to**

avoid; use **before**.

**program** or **programme**?

Use **programme** unless you mean a computer program.

Note: use the word 'course' rather than 'programme' when talking about UCC's academic courses, for consistency.

**publicly**

**not** *publically*.

**R**

**regarding**

is OK in more formal texts. In general, use **about**. **Regarding** and **about** are both better than *in regard to* and *in respect of*.

**regularly**

doesn't mean often – it means 'at regular intervals'. ✓ **Students must submit papers regularly.**

**report**

Write **a report on** or **inquiry into** but not *report into*.

**request**

is not as good as **ask**.



## S

**schoolboy, schoolgirl, schoolchild, schoolchildren**

are written like this – but write **school-leaver**.

**short-term**

has a hyphen when used as an adjective (but **in the short term**)

**side-effects**

**significant**

has a precise meaning when used to indicate statistical significance, but in general is hugely overused. If you mean important, big or substantial, then use those words instead – or don't use any adjective.

✘ *Significant changes are being made in the course timetable.*

✓ **The course timetable is being changed.**

**spin-out company**

not *spinout*

**state-of-the-art**

**state**

should have a capital letter when referring to the Republic of Ireland, as in **in the State**, but not when it's an adjective, as in **state exams**, a **state benefit**.

### **subject to**

is too formal; avoid using it by rewriting.

- × *The timetables are subject to change.*
- ✓ **The timetables may need to be changed.**

### **summer school**

is not capitalised, unless it's part of a title, as in **the JLT Summer School**.

## **T**

### **terminate**

is not as good as **end**, **finish** or **stop**.

### **thereafter, therein, thereof, thereto**

are all words to avoid.

### **third-level**

as in **a third-level student** and **third-level education**, but **at third level**.

### **till or 'til**

Use **until**.

### **timetable**

has no hyphen in the middle.

## U

### **utilise**

Don't utilise it; use **use**.

## W

### **Web**

with a capital letter.

### **website**

is written like this, as one word.

### **whilst**

is not as good as **while**.

### **who**

rather than *whom*, which these days is considered a bit stuffy.

### **with effect from**

is not as good as simply **from** or **since**.

✓ **The registration fee increased to €2,000, from 19 December 2015.**

### **with regard to**

is formal and awkward; use **about** or **for**.

✓ **The university has made new arrangements for Garda clearance procedures.**

✗ *The university has made new arrangements with regard to Garda clearance procedures.*

### **within**

Don't use when **in** will do.

✓ **We welcome researchers from other departments in the university.**

✗ *We welcome researchers from other departments within the university.*

### **worldwide**

has no hyphen.

### **workplace**

has no hyphen.

## Resources

### Books

***Collins English Dictionary*** (30th anniversary edition, 2010) – for guidance on anything that does not appear in the style guide

***The Penguin Pocket Spelling Dictionary*** by David Crystal – if you lack confidence in your spelling ability

### Online

**Guardian style guide** – useful guidance on anything that does not appear in this style guide: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/styleguide>

**Oxford Dictionaries Online** – a free site offering a comprehensive current English dictionary, grammar guidance, etc: <http://oxforddictionaries.com>