



Writing guide

A guide to our
report writing
style

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- ▲ primary schools
- ▲ secondary schools
- ▲ all-age schools
- ▲ special schools
- ▲ pupil referral units
- ▲ independent schools
- ▲ further education
- ▲ independent specialist colleges
- ▲ adult learning in the community partnerships
- ▲ local authority education services for children and young people
- ▲ teacher education and training
- ▲ Welsh for adults
- ▲ work-based learning
- ▲ learning in the justice sector

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

© Crown Copyright 2023: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the document/publication specified.

Contents	Page
Our writing guide and its role	1
Approaches to writing	2
Style and format	4
Further reading on Plain English	17
Appendix on Inclusive Language	18

Our writing guide and its role

We want our work to be easy to understand and read for a wide audience, including education professionals, government officials, parents and carers and the media. We are accountable to our stakeholders and so we need to make sure that our publications are clear and unambiguous.

This guide aims to help writers and editors to be consistent through a shared house style. Writers and editors should follow the guidance even where they have a different personal view about a preferred style from that set out here.

There is a separate Welsh writing guide which considers the different issues that arise when writing in Welsh. It is not a translation of this English guide.

Approaches to writing

Types of publications

This guide sets out the general style that we use for inspection reports and other documents, for example follow-up progress reports and thematic reports. However, there are a few differences between the style we use in inspection reports and our other types of publication.

Audience

You should keep in mind the intended audience for what you write. A core inspection report will be read by interested parties such as parents and carers as well as education professionals. In follow-up progress reports, the audience is the education professionals within the provider as well as local and regional improvement bodies. The target audience for our thematic reports is also more likely to be education and training professionals in schools/providers and policy makers in Welsh Government.

Tense

In our reports, we normally use the present tense. In core inspection reports we do not speculate about the provider's past but focus on what we see at the time of the inspection.

Follow-up progress reports naturally focus on the progress that the provider has made since their core inspection. As a result, you are likely to use the past tense more frequently in these reports.

In thematic reports, we usually reflect on the current situation of the aspect of education or training that we are writing about and compare it with the situation in the past in order to identify changes and trends. We will discuss the policy background relating to specific developments in Wales and draw on relevant research.

Despite these differences in tone and approach, the aim of all of our writing should be the same – to communicate findings clearly and unambiguously.

Inspection Reports

It is important that we have a consistent approach to our writing, but we should also demonstrate flexibility where appropriate.

Sequencing findings

When writing an inspection report, sequence the team's findings within each inspection area in a way that best captures the strengths and shortcomings of the provider, rather than automatically arranging them in the order that they appear in the inspection guidance. In the overview, the reporting inspector should decide which sequence communicates the team's overall messages most clearly.

Reporting 'by exception'

Reporting 'by exception' means that inspectors can decide not to report on an aspect if it meets requirements and there are no particular strengths or weaknesses. Where there are significant strengths or weaknesses, the reporting inspector has the flexibility to explain these further.

This flexibility helps to ensure that reports are fit for purpose and focused closely on the specific school or provider inspected. It means that reports can support professional learning by exemplifying strengths which may be of interest to other providers in their own development. You can provide one or two examples that help to illustrate what the specific strength or weakness is. This can help a provider to understand exactly what needs to be improved or how they can build on emerging good practice.

Exemplifying strengths helps to ensure that the report is not too generic: the provider should be able to 'recognise themselves' in the text of the report. Be cautious, however, of providing too much exemplification, as this might distract from the main messages of the report.

Evaluation

Reports need to be evaluative, but you can be flexible about how much description is included. It is not essential that every sentence contains an adjective, as long as there is an overall evaluation of the provision that is being described within the paragraph.

If the report comments on significant strengths, then describing the main features of these strengths can help the reader to get a better sense of what is working well in the provider.

Consistency

Reporting inspectors should try to ensure that every report is internally consistent and coherent. Aim to have one style throughout rather than different 'voices' that may reduce the clarity of the messages. No sentence or paragraph should contradict another. The reporting inspector should avoid overusing 'but' or 'however', as this can lead to positive statements being 'cancelled out'.

Impartiality

Inspection teams should report on their own findings, based on the evidence they have scrutinised at first hand. For this reason, reporting inspectors should avoid listing awards achieved by the provider or reports by other bodies, as these come from the scrutiny of others.

Be careful not to make it appear that we endorse any specific approach, or that one commercial scheme or product is particularly effective.

Reporting inspectors should try to avoid making 'hidden recommendations'. The report should evaluate the provision as it is, rather than speculate about what needs

to be done. In the body of the report, avoid phrases like ‘there is a need to...’ The improvements that the provider needs to make should be identified in the section of the report on the recommendations from the inspection.

Report-ready and feedback-ready text

One of the key principles of our inspection arrangements is the manageability of inspection activity, both for providers and for inspection teams. It is important for reporting inspectors to remember these concepts:

- ‘Feedback-ready’ text means continuous prose that may not be perfectly honed or expressed but makes clear the findings from the inspection. It is not simply notes or bullet points, as this may result in feedback that is not clear enough.
- ‘Report-ready’ text is as close as possible to what will go into the eventual report.

Style and format

Abbreviations

Write out abbreviations in full the first time they appear in a document, for example ‘additional learning needs (ALN)’. After this, the abbreviation can be used on its own. However, this is not necessary when the abbreviation is very common, for example NHS or BBC.

Plurals of abbreviations do not need an apostrophe, for example GCSEs.

If you have to abbreviate words which contain hyphens, in most cases use capitals for both elements in the hyphenated word and drop the hyphen in the abbreviation, so ‘work-based learning’ becomes ‘WBL’.

When you are using a common acronym (for example Nato) you do not need to use capitals.

Active / passive voice

It is generally better to use the active rather than the passive voice because it identifies more clearly who is responsible for the action being described. An example of this is:

‘pastoral leaders monitor pupils’ attendance closely’

rather than

‘pupils’ attendance is monitored closely’

This is not a cast-iron rule, however, and in some circumstances it can be helpful to

use the passive voice. In all cases, you should write in a way that gets your message across most clearly.

Adverbs

In most cases, you should avoid putting an adverb between 'to' and the verb it comes with. However, where you place adverbs in a sentence should be a matter of clarity and ease of reading. For example:

- 'Leaders monitor closely learners' progress'

is awkward and 'clunky', whereas

- 'Leaders closely monitor learners' progress'

is much clearer and 'natural-sounding'.

It is often best, however, to place the adverb at the end of the sentence or clause:

- 'Leaders monitor learners' progress closely'

Age ranges

We use the following terms for learners in the different phases of education/training:

children	= maintained nursery schools and non-maintained nursery settings
pupils	= schools (including those with nursery and sixth-form provision)
learners	= post-16 and adult settings

When referring to ages of pupils or learners, be careful to use hyphens correctly. There is a difference between twenty one-year-olds and twenty-one-year-olds! Normally, place a hyphen between all parts of the phrase, as in 'five-year-old children' or 'the provision for five-year-olds is good'.

ALN

You should normally use the term 'additional learning needs' (ALN) to refer to learners who receive additional learning provision to meet their needs. However, during the implementation phase of the ALN Act it may be appropriate to use the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) in some instances, for example when referring to pupils with statements of SEN.

Apostrophes and contractions

When using apostrophes to show possession, check that the apostrophe is in the right place. For example:

'The school's safeguarding policy...'

'Teachers' use of questioning...'

Normally, you should not use apostrophes to make contractions such as 'can't' or 'isn't'.

Bullet points

Use continuous prose for core inspection and follow-up reports.

Do the same for thematic reports but use bullet points where appropriate. Introduce bullets with a stem sentence or paragraph to provide the context for what is being summarised. Do not use bullet points as a free-standing list without an introduction.

Each bullet should normally be one phrase or sentence that expresses one finding, fact or idea. If a bullet requires more than one sentence, it should probably be a paragraph rather than a bullet. Avoid using bullets within bullets.

If the bullet forms a proper sentence in its own right, then it should start with a capital letter. If the bullets are a simple list of items that cannot stand as sentences in their own right, then they should start in the lower case and do not need a full stop.

Capital letters

Use initial capital letters for:

- proper names linked to a specific place, e.g. Bryn Comprehensive School
- most titles of qualifications, e.g. National Diploma, First Diploma (although note 'A levels')
- languages, e.g. 'Welsh', 'English' or 'Spanish'
- year groups ('Year 5', but not 'Y5') and Key Stages

Use lower case for:

- subjects or areas of learning other than languages, e.g. 'history', 'design technology', 'hospitality and catering'
- general titles such as principals, headteachers, directors
- 'nursery' and 'reception' and for other parts of schools/providers, e.g. 'learning resource base'
- Welsh Government funding streams, e.g. 'pupil development grant'

If in doubt about the use of capitals, use lower case.

Collective nouns

Be careful to choose the correct verb form, especially when using collective nouns like class, department, range or majority. These words may be singular or plural depending on the context so it is difficult to set hard-and-fast rules, but these examples may be helpful:

- 'This **range** of strategies **has** a positive impact on pupils' wellbeing.'
- 'These **strategies** **have** a positive impact on pupils' wellbeing.'
- 'The **governing body** **monitors** the school's finances carefully.'
- '**Governors** **monitor** the school's finances carefully.'

When using 'proportion' words such as 'many' or 'majority', use the plural verb:

- 'The majority of pupils make strong progress.'
- 'Most middle leaders have a clear understanding of their role.'

Commas

In general, try to avoid using too many commas. Sentences with multiple clauses can become difficult to understand and are probably better broken up into two separate sentences.

You should usually use a comma:

- before 'for example' (e.g. 'A few pupils demonstrate highly developed writing skills, for example when they...')
- after any qualifying term or phrase at the start of a sentence, e.g. 'Overall,...' or 'As a result,...'
- when introducing a year group or a subject or learning area at the start of a sentence, e.g. 'In Year 3, standards are good' and 'In performing arts, learners achieve good standards in dance'

Commercial products and schemes

Our documents should not appear to endorse commercial products or schemes. For this reason, be careful when using common terms, such as 'iPad', as this may give the impression that we endorse a particular product in an educational setting. It is especially important not to refer to commercial schemes that schools and providers commonly use, for example specific reading schemes. In these instances, it is enough to refer to a 'commercial reading scheme'. (See also 'Information Technology' below.)

Common, familiar words

For clarity and accessibility, use the most common or familiar word, for example, 'start' rather than 'commence', 'finish' instead of 'finalise' or 'use' instead of 'utilise'. (See 'Further reading on plain English' below.)

Emphasising text

If you wish to emphasise something in your writing, use bold text rather than underlining or italics.

Equality and Diversity

Be careful that your writing does not reinforce stereotypes regarding sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation or any other pattern or grouping, and that it does not imply the superiority of one group over another. When referring to learners who are lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, questioning or those with other sexual identities, use the term LGBTQ+.

Avoid implying that any group is 'abnormal' in comparison to the rest of the

population. For example, when comparing people with a disability with those that do not, use a phrase like 'people without a disability' rather than 'normal'. 'Person who uses a wheelchair' is more appropriate than 'wheelchair user' because it puts the person first, before their disability.

Use 'chair' or 'chairperson' rather than 'chairman' or 'chairwoman', and 'headteacher', not 'headmaster' or 'headmistress'. Use 'forename' or 'first name' rather than 'Christian name'.

'Their' or 'they' are better than 'his or her', 'he or she', but in most cases it is better just to rephrase the sentence.

Evaluative words

Our core inspection and follow-up reports should mostly be evaluative, so that the reader can understand clearly the main strengths and weaknesses that you have identified. However, not every sentence in core inspection reports requires an evaluative phrase. For example, one sentence may be evaluative while the next describes or explains the aspect of provision further without the use of more evaluative terms – or vice-versa.

In school and PRU core inspection reports before 2021, we 'categorised' certain evaluative words to ensure that the text of reports aligned to the overall judgement given for the inspection area. For example, 'suitable' was an 'adequate word' and 'outstanding' was an 'excellent word'.

In sectors where we no longer give summative judgements, there is no need to use these words as a framework for our writing. However, this does not mean that these words need to be avoided. If a specific aspect of provision is 'outstanding' or 'underdeveloped' then you should say so. Also, there is no reason why the words 'outstanding' and 'underdeveloped' should not both be used in the evaluation of one inspection area if there is valid, triangulated evidence to support their use.

Font

Use 12 point Arial for all main sections of published documents.

Use 10 point Arial when completing the supporting evidence sections within InputJFs, ReportingJFs and follow-up forms.

Footnotes

We do not normally use footnotes in core inspection or follow-up reports. For thematic reports, see the section on 'References' below for help with referencing using the Harvard Referencing System.

Words in languages other than English

Use single speech marks to identify words from other languages that have not entered the English language. For example, in a report on modern foreign languages, indicate the foreign words as follows, Learners understand which French verbs use

'être' or 'avoir'.

Free school meals

When writing school reports, use the phrase 'eligible for free school meals' rather than 'entitled to'. In many cases, schools' strategies are designed to support a wider range of pupils than just those entitled to free school meals, so 'vulnerable pupils' may be a better alternative.

Hyphens

Here are some examples of words where hyphenation use might not be immediately obvious:

Non-hyphenated	Hyphenated
A level	community-based
asylum seeker	co-operate
benchmark	co-ordinator
bilingual	day-to-day
childcare	decision-making
coursework	extra-curricular
day release	first-hand
email	fund-raising
feedback (noun)	long-term
feed back (verb)	multi-agency
handout (noun)	newly-qualified
healthcare	off-site
jobcentre	on-the-job
landbased	one-to-one
lifelong	post-16
mixed ability	pupil-teacher ratio
motor vehicle	purpose-built
multicultural	re-inspection

multimedia	role-play
postgraduate (noun)	school-based
Sure Start	self-evaluation
taskforce	self-esteem
underachievement	sub-committee
underdeveloped	target-setting
undergraduate	vice-principal
underperform	well-being
video conferencing	Welsh-medium
	whole-school
	work-based

Phrases like ‘well behaved’ or ‘well organised’ have a hyphen when they are used before a noun but do not when used after a verb:

- ‘Well-behaved pupils’
- ‘Most pupils are well behaved’

Write fractions and two-digit numbers with a hyphen (‘three-quarters’, ‘twenty-three’). (See ‘Numbers’ below).

It is better to not use ‘hanging’ hyphens, so for example write ‘part-time and full-time learners’ rather than ‘part- and full-time learners’.

Information technology

The way that providers use digital platforms and devices evolves constantly, and the pace of change increased rapidly during lockdown. If you refer to the technology that providers are using, be careful not to appear to endorse any particular product (see ‘commercial products’ above).

Use generic terms to describe programs and devices, such as ‘tablets’ rather than ‘iPads’.

Many IT terms such as ‘app’ and ‘QR code’ are now commonplace and well understood, so you can use these.

Jargon

In core inspection reports, aim to write in a way that is accessible to the lay reader. The precise meaning of some words that are commonplace to those who work in

education and training may not be clear to those who do not. For example, rather than using 'differentiation', write something like 'adapting work to meet the individual needs of the learners'.

In follow-up reports, there is more scope to use educational terms like 'differentiation', as here providers and local authorities are the primary audience.

Line spacing

Use single line spacing for all documents, including lists of bullets and recommendations. Check this by right-clicking on the relevant text and selecting 'paragraph'.

Monetary values

Express monetary values in as short a form as possible, using 'm' for 'million' and 'k' for 'thousand'. This will avoid the use of long numbers. For example, write £1m rather than £1,000,000. Try to use fractions for numbers above a million, as in £1.25m, but below this try to avoid them, if possible, so write £250k (for £250,000) rather than £0.25m.

Numbers, including fractions, and numbered lists

When using numbers within the text of a document:

- spell out numbers from one to nine, including ordinals (e.g. 'ninth')
- use number symbols after nine (10, 11...999), including ordinals (e.g. '10th'), but there are important exceptions (see below)
- try not to mix numbers and words in the same phrase (for example, it is acceptable to write 'There are 124 pupils on roll aged from 3 to 11 years of age' even though numbers from one to nine are usually written in full)
- put commas in numbers over a thousand (e.g. 5,432 not 5432)
- write decimals in number format, even if less than 10, unless the decimal is the first word in a sentence e.g. 'About 3% of pupils have additional learning needs', but 'Three per cent of pupils have additional learning needs'
- use number symbols to refer to grades, levels, year groups and stages, e.g. grade 1, level 3, Year 10 and Key Stage 2

Numbers – paragraphs

We do not use paragraph numbers in inspection reports, but we do use them in the main findings section of thematic reports. Do not use tiers of numbering for paragraphs, such as 1.2, 1.2.3, etc. as this can be confusing for the reader.

Numbers – percentages

When writing percentages, use the number followed by ‘%’ except at the beginning of a sentence, e.g. ‘Twenty-three percent of pupils have a special educational need’. It may be better to write ‘Around 23% of pupils...’. In thematic reports, a bullet point can start with a percentage in number format.

Write percentages as whole numbers, e.g. ‘23.2%’ would be written as ‘around 23%’. There may be exceptions to this, for example when the percentage figure is less than one.

Also try to use the percentage symbol (%) in tables, even when the legend already indicates that all numbers in the table are percentages.

Remember the difference between a percentage point increase and a percentage increase. An increase from 30% to 33% is a three-percentage point increase, not a 3% increase (it is in fact a 10% increase).

Numbers – quantities and proportions

In order to be consistent, we use these terms to describe proportions:

nearly all	= with very few exceptions
most	= 90% or more
many	= 70% or more
a majority	= over 60%
half	= 50%
around half	= close to 50%
a minority	= below 40%
few	= below 20%
very few	= less than 10%

These terms help to make it clear to the reader the amount of strong or weak practice that has been seen, e.g. ‘In most lessons, teaching is highly effective’.

Avoid phrases such as ‘in the best lessons’ as this does not make clear enough what proportion of lessons is being described. For the same reason, we do not normally use vague terms such as ‘a number’ or ‘some’ particularly when writing about learning and teaching.

Unless there is a specific reason for doing so, avoid using ‘proportions of proportions’, e.g. ‘In many lessons, the majority of pupils...’

Use ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ in contexts where there is clearly a significant difference

between the two. Technically, a majority may be 51% with a minority of 49%, but there is little difference between the two. In this case, it is best to use half or around half.

Overview in core inspection reports

The overview should be a concise summary of the key messages in the report. It is usually written by the reporting inspector after the inspection, but it should be based on the discussions of the whole inspection team.

The overview should:

- read as continuous prose, rather than a selection of phrases cut and pasted from the main finding of the report
- be consistent with the findings in the body of the report
- ‘tell the story’ of the provider and what makes it unique
- show ‘cause and effect’ clearly, for example by explaining that strong leadership has had a positive impact on classroom practice, or that weaknesses in learners’ skills stem from inconsistencies in teaching
- make clear the reasons for the recommendations and level of follow-up

Avoid beginning the overview with any form of statement that could be interpreted as an overall summary judgement, e.g. ‘This is a good school’.

Personalisation

Do not refer to individuals by name in reports. As far as possible, you should also try to avoid making comments in reports that refer to specific teachers or learners or that might allow readers to identify specific individuals. In some cases, this is unavoidable as certain individuals have specific roles and responsibilities, for example the headteacher of a school or the principal of a further education college. However, the focus in these situations should be on the role, not the individual.

If there is one pupil with a statement of special educational needs in a school or one pupil eligible for free school meals, it is important to write in a way that doesn’t identify that individual. Where the provider is very small, write in a way that avoids individuals being easily identified, particularly for comments on learning and wellbeing.

Plagiarism

Always acknowledge the source of published material that you use. See the section on ‘Referencing’ later in this document.

Recommendations

If you’re writing a thematic report, make sure there is a clear link between the

recommendations and the text of the main findings section.

In core inspection reports, make recommendations ‘flow’ naturally from the overview, and clearly explain the shortcoming that needs to be addressed in the main body of the report. Make sure recommendations indicate clearly **what** the provider needs to improve (‘Improve the effectiveness of teaching...’) but not prescribe **how** they should do it (‘...by introducing a more consistent approach to starters and plenaries’).

The number of recommendations will depend on the context of the inspection. However, avoid giving the provider a long list of recommendations, as this may actually hinder their improvement processes.

In some instances, it may be helpful to identify the expected impact of the improvement identified as necessary, e.g. ‘Strengthen planning for the development of literacy skills in order to improve the quality of learners’ writing’.

Avoid recommendations that just refer to improvement in outcomes, e.g. ‘Raise outcomes at Key Stage 4’ or ‘Improve the progress that pupils make in lessons’. Instead, focus on the changes needed to provision and leadership, e.g. ‘Improve the effectiveness of assessment so that it has a positive impact on the progress of learners’.

Do not begin recommendations with ‘Continue to...’ This implies that the aspect of provision referred to is not actually in need of any improvement and makes the recommendation redundant.

Avoid vaguely worded recommendations such as ‘Rigorously address those aspects of the school’s work most in need of improvement’. This says little more than ‘improve things’ and is not helpful to the provider or any external body evaluating their progress, such as a local authority or inspectors carrying out follow-up work.

References

We use the Harvard Referencing System:

- Cite sources in the body of the text
- For in-text citations, include the author’s surname or company name and the year of publication
- Include a list of full references at the end of the document (no footnotes)

For example:

In the body of a text:

‘A recent report (Sylva et al. 2011) stated that’ or ‘In a recent report, Sylva et al. (2011) stated that ...’ or ‘Estyn (2014) reported that ...’

In the full reference at the end of the document:

Estyn (2014) *Numeracy in key stages 2 and 3: An interim report*. Cardiff: Estyn. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/numeracy-key-stages-2-and-3-interim-report-november-2014>, [Accessed 06 January 2015].

Sylva, K. et al. (2011) Pre-school quality and educational outcomes at age 11: Low quality has little benefit. *Journal of early childhood research*, **9** (2), 109-124.

For HMI internal use only: our full guide to the Harvard Referencing System can be found [here](#).

Short paragraphs

Try to avoid writing lengthy paragraphs, as this will reduce the accessibility of the text. However, paragraphs should usually contain more than one sentence.

Tenses

When writing a core inspection report, you will normally write in the present tense, as you are describing and evaluating the provider at the present time, as in ‘Pupils achieve good standards in literacy and numeracy’.

Where it is clear that events occurred in the past, then the past tense is appropriate, as in ‘the school’s previous inspection was in 2010’ or ‘rates of attendance improved between 2016 and 2018’.

Avoid the word ‘yet’ (as in ‘These plans have yet to have an impact on pupils’ progress’) as it implies that you expect that they will in the future.

Text alignment

Align all main body text on the left, and all headings and sub-headings.

Do not justify any text. Justification alters the distance between words and letters and is less easy to read. It also makes it harder to pick up any spacing errors at the editing stage.

Times and dates

- Use ‘6pm’ rather than ‘18:00’
- Write ‘3 September 2022’ rather than ‘3rd September 2022’
- Use ‘2022-2023’ rather than ‘2022-23’ or ‘2022/2023’

Titles, headings and sub-headings

For titles of documents, use capitals for the first letters of titles and lower case for any short connecting words, such as ‘and’, ‘of’ and ‘in’. An example of this is ‘The Annual Report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales’.

In hyphenated words, use capitals for both elements if it is the title of a document, as

in 'Standards and Quality in Work-Based Learning'. However, use sentence case when used in headings or sub-headings, as in 'Work-based learning'.

For headings and sub-headings, use capitals for the first letter of the first word, but use lower case for all other words. An example of this is the heading for this section.

Titles, headings and sub-headings do not need final full stops.

Verbs rather than abstract nouns

It is more helpful to use verbs rather than abstract nouns. For example, write 'pupils use learning resources well' rather than 'pupils make good use of learning resources' or 'the use pupils make of learning resources is good'.

Further reading on Plain English

'The Plain English Guide' (Oxford, 1996) by Martin Cutts provides an excellent introduction to the principles of Plain English.

'The Complete Plain Words' (HMSO, 1954) by Sir Ernest Gowers is still very useful and entertaining.

The Plain English Campaign website is a useful source: www.plainenglish.co.uk.

Writing Guide Appendix on Inclusive Language

Race, ethnicity and national identity¹

In the Equality Act 2010², the protected characteristic of ‘race’ is defined as including colour, ethnic or national origin, or nationality.

As race is often associated with skin colour, we usually refer to ethnicity, which is a broader categorisation that people self-select. A person may view their ethnicity based on cultural experiences, religious practices, tradition, ancestry, language, dialect or national origins.

Avoid using umbrella terms such as BAME or BME and use terms that either reflect a specific ethnic group, if that is appropriate, or refer to ‘ethnic minority’ people. Also avoid using the terms “people of colour” or “person of colour”.

When used, specific ethnic groups should be capitalised.

National identity refers to the country that someone feels affiliated to.³

Welsh and English language

Always refer to Welsh and English equally unless the context is specific to only one.

Gender, sex and sexuality

Never assume a person’s gender.⁴

Use ‘they’ instead of ‘she’ or ‘he’ unless you are certain that you can use a specific pronoun - this applies to children and young people as well as adults.

For pupils in schools, the pupil level annual school census (PLASC) database does not currently allow pupils to have genders recorded other than male or female.

Avoid gendered nouns and use common nouns instead, for example ‘chair’ instead of ‘chairman’, ‘police officer’ instead of ‘policeman’, ‘actor’ instead of ‘actress’.

You may write about work to support, or promote equality for, learners of all sexes, genders and sexualities. Writing this in full is an inclusive approach. The acronym LGBTQ+ is an acceptable shorthand when referring to learners who are not cisgendered, heterosexual⁵ and is the acronym used by Welsh Government in their action plan.⁶ However, it should be explained in a glossary if used in a report. Avoid using the shorter LGBT as this does not cover all learners who are not cisgendered, heterosexual or intersex. or heterosexual.

¹ [Race and ethnicity – Style.ONS](#)

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

³ [National identity harmonised standard – GSS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#)

⁴ <https://7a21077a.flowpaper.com/GuidetoGenderNeutralDrafting/#page=1>

⁶ [LGBTQ+ Action Plan | GOV.WALES](#)

Avoid titles in people’s names that are based on gender or marital status. Gender-neutral titles, such as Professor, Doctor or Reverend may be used.

Disability⁷ and neurodiversity

Use positive language that respects disabled people as active individuals with control over their own lives. Avoid negative language or passive, victim words. For example, write that a person ‘is autistic’ rather than ‘suffers from autism’ or ‘uses a wheelchair’ rather than ‘is confined to a wheelchair’. Avoid using ‘remedial’, as in ‘remedial classes’.

Avoid	Use
(the) handicapped, (the) disabled	disabled (people)
afflicted by, suffers from, victim of	has [name of condition or impairment]
confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound	wheelchair user
able-bodied	non-disabled
the deaf	Deaf people, user of British Sign Language (BSL), people with a hearing impairment
the blind	people with a visual impairment; blind people; blind and partially sighted people
an epileptic, diabetic, depressive etc	person with epilepsy, diabetes, depression or someone who has epilepsy, diabetes, depression etc
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	Autistic Spectrum Condition or refer to autistic learners (note our supplementary guidance on ASC ⁸)
fits, spells, attacks	seizures

Mental health and well-being

Welsh Government’s ‘Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being’ states that: ‘mental well-being includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being.’⁹ The framework also notes that around 1 in 10 children between aged 5-16 have a ‘mental health problem’.

When writing about a provider’s general work, we may write about their support for learners’ ‘mental health’ or ‘mental well-being’. If we are writing about intervention work, then it is appropriate to refer to support for learners with ‘mental health problems’ or ‘a mental health condition’.

⁷ [Inclusive language: words to use and avoid when writing about disability - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/inclusive-language)

⁸ [Introduction | Estyn \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/government/guidance/introduction-to-estyn)

⁹ [WG42005 \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/government/guidance/wg42005)

When using the term resilience, be clear whether this is a reference to resilience in learning (for example perseverance with a task) or resilience in relation to their mental wellbeing.

A mental health condition is considered a disability under the Equality Act 2010 if it has a long-term effect on someone's normal day-to-day activity. A mental disorder is defined in law as 'any disorder or disability of the mind'¹⁰ and would be diagnosed by a health professional. Only use the terms 'mental disorder' or 'mental illness' (as is more commonly used) when this meaning is applicable.

Poverty

Only write about 'pupils eligible for free school meals' when referring to specific data sets about these pupils. In other cases, we should refer to 'pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households' as this is a more inclusive term.¹¹ Do not use the terms 'low-income backgrounds' or 'low-income families'.

Use the term 'addressing the impact of poverty' when writing about the actions providers are taking to reduce or mitigate the impact of poverty on educational attainment and well-being.

Do not use the word deprivation in conversation or in writing. Avoid using terms that unintentionally make a judgement about poverty, such as 'disadvantaged by poverty', 'deprived pupils' or 'pupils living in deprivation'.

Care-experienced children and young people

Legislation refers to 'looked after children' and 'care leavers' but the preferred term that we should usually use is 'care-experienced children and young people'. 'Looked after children' and 'care leavers' may still be used if writing about specific work relating to legislative duties.

¹⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1983/20/contents>

¹¹ [A More Equal Wales: the Socio-economic Duty \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)