INFORMATION SECURITY BUZZ

STYLE GUIDE

Contents

Objectives

We have several main objectives in writing this style guide:

• To provide an all-purpose guide to consistent presentation for our writers.
• To make sure all grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage are correct.
• To use language appropriate to the subject matter, the audience, and the purpose of the document.
• To achieve consistency in terms of writing style, argument, and format.
• To eliminate any ambiguity.
• To ensure that our communications accurately reflect modern English usage.

This is a working document that we can add to or change when needed.

Formatting Details

Please adhere to the following formatting style for any documents you submit.

• **Document type**: .docx (Microsoft Word). Any other extension is not allowed.
• **Page size**: A4
• **Font**: Times New Roman
• **Alignment**: Entire document should be left-aligned.
• **Heading 1**: 16pt, bold, no underline
• **Heading 2**: 14pt, bold, no underline
• **Sub-heading**: 12pt, bold, no underline
• **Body text**: 12pt

Capitalisation

The general rule is never to use a capital letter unless it is absolutely necessary.

For example, government. Never capitalise, whether referring to a specific country's government or the concept of a government. A democrat heads the current US government.

If the individual's preference for names with prefixes is known, follow it. If not, use lowercase for the prefix. Ian Jansen van Rensburg is the chief technologist at VMware.

Use capitals for titles prefixing names, such as Professor Briggs or Pope Francis, but not for job descriptions.

Job descriptions such as managing director, trustee, and chairman routinely take lower-case initials even when the company is referred to, although this is not a hard-and-fast rule, and

generally works on individual or company preference. When shortening, always use capitals, such as CIO, CEO, MD, etc.

Examples:
- **"The managing director of Thales."**
- **"Veracode's new CISO."**

Some job descriptions are never used with names, such as 'prime minister'.

Example: **"Although being president of the US is a tough job, President Obama was grateful to be re-elected."**

Give people's title, first name and surname when first mentioned. On subsequent mentions, use the surname only in formal articles, the first name can be used in less formal pieces of content.

Titles

Presentations, titles, films, books, and suchlike.

Capitalise the first word of the title, and all words within the title except articles such as a, an, or the; prepositions such as to, on, or for; and conjunctions such as but, and or etc.

Examples:
- **"The Lord of the Rings"**
- **"Digitisation in a Mobile World"**
- **"Implementing a Zero-Trust Architecture"**
- **"A New MD for Dell Technologies"**

Acronyms

When using acronyms, always spell them out in full with the acronym in brackets the first time you use them, and following that, only use the acronym.

Examples:
- **"Universal Serial Bus (USB)"**
- **"Secure Access Service Edge (SASE)"**

Numbers

Spell out whole-number words for one to ten, and use figures for numbers above ten.

Example:
- **"There were three people in the queue ahead of me and eight behind me. I need to buy lunch for 13 people this weekend."**

For very large round numbers, such as multiple millions and billions, combine a figure and a word, or abbreviate it to 'm', 'bn', etc.

Examples:
- **"The population of the earth is sitting at 7 billion people."**
- **"The population of the earth is now 7bn people."**
- **"The budget came in at just under $4m."**

Spell out words for 'first', 'second' and so on up to and including 'tenth', and then use numbers, such as 21st, 32nd, 53rd, and 40th.

Example:
- **"She was the third person from her university to get a place at Stellenbosch. To his relief, he achieved an upper second. Chester Arthur was the 21st president of the United States."**

Don't use superscript (a character that is set slightly below or above the normal line of type).

Always use figures and symbols for percentages, measurements, and currency. Use commas to punctuate large numbers.

Examples:
- **"Question 13 is worth 11% of the available marks."**
- **"The average height of a woman in the UK is 1.64m."**
- **"The cost, at $10.99, was less than their overall budget of $50."**
- **"The population of Leicester is estimated to be 5,635,234."**

Times

Use either the 12- or 24-hour clock – not both in the same text.

The 12-hour clock uses a full stop between the hours and minutes; the 24-hour clock uses a colon and omits am/pm.

Examples:
- **"The meeting starts at 11.30 am and ends at 1 pm."**
- **"The meeting starts at 11:30 and ends at 13:00"**

Dates

Always put the date before the month.

Example:
- **"Easter this year is on 11 April."**

Don't use 'th' with dates – just the number and month – and never precede the number with 'the'.

Examples:
- **"Christmas is on 25 December."**
- **"The meeting is set for 3 March."**

Punctuation

The general rule is to use as little punctuation as necessary while retaining the meaning of the sentence.

Apostrophes

An apostrophe is used to indicate possession. Use them after singular nouns, plural nouns which do not end in s, and indefinite pronouns.

Examples:
- **"The lady's hats."**
- **"The lady's hat."**

- **"Michelle's time is nobody else's."**
- **"The children's play area is next to the men's bathroom."**

Use just ' after plural nouns ending in s.

Example:
- **"The ladies' hats."**

If a name already ends in s or z and would be difficult to pronounce if apostrophes were added to the end, try to rearrange the sentence to avoid the difficulty.

Example:
- **Tobias's methods were unpopular with the students OR the methods of Tobias were unpopular with the students.**

In compound nouns, where multiple nouns are linked to make one concept, place the apostrophe at the end of the final part.

Example:
- **"The President of Cambodia's dog, and my mother-in-law's cat."**

Never use an apostrophe in its with the meaning 'belonging to it' as this is analogous with his, hers, and theirs. It's is a contraction of 'it is'.

Examples:
- **"The dog has been out in the rain, and its paws are muddy."**
- **"My jacket was left in the rain, and its sleeves are wet."**

The apostrophe is also used to indicate that letters have been omitted, as in the case of contractions. Use an apostrophe in the position the omitted letters would have occupied, not where the space was between the original words.

Examples:
• **"I do not like coffee"** → **"I don't like coffee."**
• **"I should have done that"** → **"I should've done that."**

• **"He took a week's holiday."**
• **"You must give two months' notice**."

Brackets

Use in place of a pair of dashes or commas around a non-defining phrase (one which adds extra information, a translation, dates, an explanation or a definition).

Examples:
• **"The study (which was built in the eighteenth century) needs to be redecorated."**
• **"It was (as far as I could tell) a harmless prank."**

Bullet Points

Don't punctuate the end of bullet points which are a list of items.

Example:
The benefits of cloud are:
• **Business agility**
• **Scalability**
• **Consumption-based pricing**

If text inside the bullet point is a complete sentence in its own right, add a semicolon to the end of each point, 'or' or 'and' (depending on the sense of your sentence) to the end of the penultimate point, and a full stop to the end of the last one.

Example:

The following will be considered acceptable reasons for missing the staff meeting:

• **There was a transport strike. This only applies if the transport strike took place before the date of the meeting and if you have not signed up for email alerts;**
• **You are absent as a result of illness;**
• **You are unable to attend because of family problems; or**
• **You have something better to do.**

Colons and Semi-Colons

Use a colon to introduce a sub-clause that follows logically from the text before it, is not a new concept, and depends logically on the preceding main clause.

Example:
- **"When I was at university, I went on two holidays: to Amsterdam and to Paris."**

Do not use a colon if the two parts of the sentence are not logically connected.

Use a semicolon to link two related parts of a sentence, neither of which depends logically on the other, and each of which could stand alone as a grammatically complete sentence.

Example:
- **"The best friend is the one you can trust; the worst friend is the one you can't."**

Use semicolons in place of commas in a complicated list or sentence if it will improve clarity, particularly if list items already include commas.

Example:
- **"We plan to introduce a range of solutions, including human resources and training; customer relationship management and user experience; and innovation and transformation."**

Commas

Use a pair of commas to surround a non-defining clause (one that adds descriptive information but which can be removed without losing the meaning of the sentence).

Examples:
- **"The pool, which we built three years ago, needs to be repaired."**
- **"The woman, who was in her thirties, wore a lovely dress."**

Use a comma after an introductory adverb, adverbial phrase, or subordinate clause; or use a pair of commas surrounding it if it is in the middle of a sentence.

Examples:
- **"However, it was too late for that."**
- **"It was, however, too late for that."**

- **"With her possessions in a suitcase, Jo left for Rome."**
- **"Jo, with her possessions in a suitcase, left for Rome."**

Do not use a comma after a time-based adverbial phrase.

Examples:
- **"After three courses she was full."**
- **"When she went to the movies she ate popcorn."**

Do not use a comma between multiple classifying adjectives: absolutes which either are or are not.

Examples:
- **"The sixteenth-century gardens are lit up at night."**
- **"It was a large French mushroom with hard grey edges."**

Use a comma between items in a list. I ate sweets, chips, ice cream, and chocolate.

Sometimes, the Oxford comma is used to prevent ambiguity.

Examples:
- **"He took English, Spanish, and Maths."**
- **"I ate bread and jam, spaghetti and meatballs, and pudding."**
- **"He left his money to his children, Sarah and James."**

Dashes and Hyphens

Use dashes a pair in place of round brackets or commas, surrounded by spaces.

Example:
- **"She was – as far as I could tell – the only woman in the room."**

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

Example:
- **"My lift was late today – I nearly missed the meeting."**

Hyphens are also used to link concepts or ranges of numbers, with no spaces on either side.

Examples:
- **"The UK-France non-aggression pact."**
- **"The salary for the job is R25,000 - R30,000."**
- **"5fm is aimed at the 18 - 25 age bracket."**

They are also used in an adjectival phrase before a noun.

Examples:
- **"The up-to-date list"**
- **"A cloud-first environment"**

- **"Mid-eighteenth-century architecture"**

In an adjectival phrase including a verb participle

Example:
- **"The dress was tight-fitting"**

Quotation Marks

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

Examples:
- **"I have never been to Dubrovnik," he said, "but I have heard it described as 'the pearl of the Adriatic'".**

Use single quotation marks for titles that are not whole publications, such as short poems, short stories, songs, chapters in books, articles in periodicals and suchlike.

Examples:
- **Rudyard Kipling's Just So Stories contains 12 short stories, of which 'How the Leopard Got His Spots' is my favourite.**

Odds and Ends

Among vs between

Among is used for undifferentiated items, while between is used with individual, named items.

Examples:
- **"She couldn't decide among all the restaurants."**
- **"She couldn't decide between Dolce Cafe or Higher Ground."**

Mutual vs reciprocal

Mutual is used when more than one person has the same feeling or opinion as another towards a third party, object, or concept, while reciprocal is used when two or more people feel, think or act in the same way about or to one another.

Less vs fewer

Less is used with nouns which are not countable objects, while fewer is used with countable objects.

Examples:
- **"I have less time on my hands."**

- **"I have fewer than six items in my basket."**

Effect vs affect

Effect as a verb means to bring about, or to have the result that.
Affect as a verb means to have an impact on or to change something, and also means to simulate something which is untrue.

Examples:
- **"Everyone can effect change by choosing to recycle."**
- **"A glass of wine may affect his recovery (have an impact on whether he recovers)."**

Infer vs imply

Infer is to read a meaning into a statement which has not been explicitly stated, or to read between the lines as we say.
Imply is to suggest something without explicitly stating it, or to hint at something.

UK spelling vs US spelling

We accept both to accommodate a wide variety of contributions and readers.

In UK English, we use the suffix -ise, yse, isation
In US English we use the suffix - ize, yze and ization.

Technical words and proper names retain the spelling, as do foreign words that have not yet been absorbed into English.

Thank you, and we look forward to your submissions.