

House Style

Commonwealth
Foundation



House style

Standard text

We have developed some standard wording to describe our organisation:

The Commonwealth Foundation is a development organisation with an international remit and reach, uniquely situated at the interface between government and civil society.

We develop the capacity of civil society to act together and learn from each other to engage with the institutions that shape people's lives.

We strive for more effective, responsive and accountable governance with civil society participation, which contributes to improved development outcomes.

Terms that we use

Civil society

Civil society is the diverse arena outside of the family, the state, and the market where people associate to advance common interests through voluntary actions and implies a commitment to democracy and equal treatment of all people.

Civil society organisations

Civil society organisations are outside the state or the market, are diverse and include: volunteer organisations, indigenous peoples' organisations, non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, labour unions, faith-based organisations, charitable and philanthropic organisations, professional associations and foundations, and parts of media and academia.

Governance

Governance encompasses the rules, institutions and processes, through which people, organisations and governments work toward common objectives, make decisions, generate legitimate authority and power, and promote and protect human rights.

Participatory governance

Participatory governance is about how the state, the market and civil society interact to effect change. These interactions involve the inclusion of civil society in decision-making processes, enabling citizens to exercise voice and vote and engage in policy formation.

Capacity development

Capacity development can be seen as a locally driven process of learning by leaders, coalitions and other agents of change that brings about changes in socio-political, policy-related, and organisational factors to enhance local ownership for and the effectiveness and efficiency of efforts to achieve a development goal.

Tone of voice

Approachable and inclusive

We write and speak with clarity and authority to ensure a consistent, professional approach that is easily understood by all audiences.

We use gender inclusive language.

We avoid any jargon, phrases or unexplained abbreviations that may exclude our readers.

We keep acronyms to a minimum and always include a key or restate their meaning for their first use within text:

- ...civil society organisations (CSOs)... and thereafter ...CSOs.

Succinct and simple

We aim for succinct phrasing rather than unnecessarily complicated structure:

- 'because' rather than 'due to the fact that'

We should remove any words that add nothing to a sentence:

- The application ~~that was received~~ from
- We are currently ~~in the process of~~ preparing a response

We should not turn verbs into noun phrases:

- 'we intend to' rather than 'it is our intention to'
- 'please arrange' rather than 'please make arrangements for'

Shorter sentences are easier to understand so we aim for a sentence length of no more than 15-20 words. Large passages of text can be daunting so we break up long passages into shorter paragraphs.

We also use tools to give pace and emphasis to any publication, including subheadings, lists, charts and tables.

Authority and confidence

We are the representatives of an internationally respected organisation. There are therefore times when we must be authoritative; we must give clear opinion, direction and instruction.

We need to show authority without being over-authoritative. To achieve this balance we:

- do not use dense or complex language but do not shy away from complex issues
- are enthusiastic about accomplishments and express praise for good work but do not use excessive adjectives
- use language that is familiar to our audience (who may not always work in international development)

If we express a personal opinion we make clear that we are not speaking on behalf of the Foundation.

How we describe ourselves and relate to others

We use the words 'we', 'our' and 'us' as much as possible when it is clear that we are talking about the Foundation as a whole. We do not use 'they' or 'them'.

We can use 'the Foundation' to avoid repetition of 'we' within a paragraph.

'the Foundation' can also be used when talking in an historical context, thus reinforcing the status of our corporate image and brand. For example, 'the Foundation organised the Commonwealth People's Forum 2011 in Perth, Western Australia'.

When talking about the Foundation, we always refer to it in the singular and not plural. For example, 'The Foundation is' not 'The Foundation are'.

We use 'you' when talking to our audiences. For example, 'You (the grant recipient) should complete the online application form by 31 January 2013'.

'I' can be used in correspondence if a personal approach is needed or if 'we' is not appropriate. For example 'I recommend that you contact your High Commission.'

We only use the third person if conveying the views of others.

Use of English

We use English for all of our official communication.

Where possible, we use standard English phrases, rather than non-English alternatives:

- 'way of working' rather than 'modus operandi'
- 'about' rather than 'circa'

Where a word or abbreviation has become naturalised into English we use it in the naturalised form, rather than trying to apply grammatical rules from its original language:

- we do not use an accent for cafe
- we use anglicised plurals for 'forums' and 'syllabuses'

We follow English (UK) spelling conventions:

- theatre (not theater)
- colour (not color)
- organisation (not organization)
- programme (not program)

We do not use 'etc'.

Numbers

We write out the numbers zero to nine as words, and switch to numerals from 10 onwards:

- ‘the players attended nine out of 10 sessions’

The exceptions to that rule are when numbers:

- relate to a standard unit of measurement (£5, 2cm, 9pm, page 6)
- are joined by a dash meaning ‘to’ (5-14, 6-12 years)
- are in a table or figure (where we use numerals to make best use of space)
- are referring to standard wording for proper nouns (in England’s education system, ‘Year 5’ and ‘Key Stage 1’)
- start a sentence (‘Nineteen diplomats attended the session.’)

We use commas in thousands or specific larger numbers but use decimals for generic larger numbers: 1,000, 2,800, 3,280,210, 7.5 million (not 7½ million).

We write out ordinal numbers up to 20 and use numerals above; first, eleventh, 23rd.

We write out simple fractions like ‘three-quarters’ (with hyphens) but use numerals for complex fractions like ‘1/38’.

We only use the percentage sign in tables or mathematical usage. In text we write 25 per cent, not 25%.

Times

Where appropriate, we use the 12-hour clock and use ‘am’ and ‘pm’, not ‘o’clock’.

We use a full stop as a separator between hours and minutes (rather than a colon or dash).

We leave out full stops, spaces or unnecessary zeros:

- 9am (not 9.00am)
- 9.30pm (not 9:30pm)

Dates

Whenever possible, we use dates or specific time references rather than ambiguous phrases such as:

- ‘in summer’
- ‘this year’

We use the following styling for dates:

- on 21 December
- Tuesday 21 December 1991
- 1990s, the 80s (no apostrophes)
- the 21st century
- 1991-2, 1983-91 (to show periods of time)
- 1991/92 (to show a financial year)

Money

We always use numerals to express sums of money.

We use symbols but not abbreviations to denote money and we leave out full stops, spaces or unnecessary zeros:

- £ and p (not pounds and pence)
- £3 (not £3.00)
- £3.50
- 99p (not £0.99)
- £2.5 million (not £2,500,000 or £2.5m)
- £1,000

- we define 1 billion as one thousand million

For non-sterling currencies we write out the name in full in text but use symbols in tables or captions:

- ‘the fee was 150 yen’

We assume that any reference to dollars means US unless otherwise stated:

- NZ\$10

Punctuation

The apostrophe

There are two uses for apostrophes: for possession and for omission.

To indicate possession

For singular words we add an apostrophe and an 's':

- That was the writer's opinion
- It was published in the school's name

For names and proper nouns ending in 's', our convention is to add clarity (and show that they are not plurals) by adding an additional 's':

- I was impressed by Mrs Jones's application to the task (single person)

For plurals that end in an 's' we add the apostrophe after the 's' as this clarifies meaning:

- The writers' collaboration was impressive (multiple writers)

To indicate omission

We use an apostrophe to show where a letter (or letters) have been missed out.

For example:

- I'll be there (I will be there)
- It's great to see you (it is great to see you here)

Nb. Use of contractions and omissions may be inappropriately informal for our more formal communications, such as reports.

Exceptions to the rule

In some specific Commonwealth usage there is no apostrophe:

- Examples: Senior Officials Meeting, Finance Ministers Meeting

Commas

We use commas sparingly and only when they provide meaning.

We use a comma before 'and' if it adds clarification to meaning:

- there was a marked difference between Jack and Jill, and Bill and Ben

When ending a list with 'and', a comma is not usually necessary:

- the poet performed to children, teachers and guests

We use a comma to separate someone's name from their title or job description:

- 'Vijay Krishnarayan, Director, Commonwealth Foundation'

Full stops

We use single spaces after full stops (and other punctuation marks).

Lists

When presenting a bulleted list, we introduce it with a colon. We do not put any punctuation at the end of the bullet points, and we begin each new bullet in lowercase.

Occasionally we use bullets to indicate a list of more detailed points which are punctuated as normal sentences.

For in-house communications we use circular, solid bullet points. If we need to indicate a second level of bullets we use circular 'hollow' points.

- First level
 - o Second level
 - o Second level
- First level

Quotation marks

By default, we use single quote marks.

We only use double quote marks for a quotation within a quotation.

For quotations that span multiple paragraphs, we open each paragraph with single quote marks but only use a closing quote mark at the end of the quotation.

We use three dots (...) to mark omissions from a quotation and four dots (....) where the last is an added full stop.

Using capitals

We use as few capitals as possible. We only add a capital letter if it helps to provide meaning. For example we do not capitalise:

- ‘civil society organisations’
- ‘strategic plan’

For titles and headings we only capitalise the first word, unless we are using the name of an organisation that is conventionally written with initial capitals throughout.

We use capitals for full names of meetings and events:

- Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
- Commonwealth People’s Forum

Titles and ranks accompanying a personal name are capitalised:

- Prime Minister
- High Commissioner

We capitalise acronyms and sets of initials throughout, eg. USAID, SKAT, except for those that have become words, such as Unicef, Oxfam.

Spelling out symbols or abbreviations

We spell out the ampersand (&) as ‘and’ in all cases except if it is the name of an organisation and they always use the ‘&’.

We spell out the oblique (/) as ‘or’ or ‘and’, except in tables, in number or date formats or in website addresses.

Instead of using ‘and/or’, we rephrase the sentence to say ‘x or y or both’.

We write ‘page’ instead of using the abbreviation ‘pg’ or ‘p.’ unless in a table where space is tight.

We have adopted the convention of removing all full stops in common abbreviation, unless they add additional meaning.

For example:

- PhD, BA, MSc
- CD, DVD, VHS, TV
- Mrs, Mr, Dr

However when using latin abbreviations we use one full stop:

- eg., ie., nb.

Italics

We occasionally use italics for emphasis or to denote hierarchy of headings.

Our main use of italics is to denote the title of a published work.

If a title is written in full and then later mentioned in an abbreviated form, we do not continue with italics.

- ‘the current issue of *International Journal* contains the full entry criteria. In the Journal we examine the criteria in-depth...’

Works include:

- titles of performances and events
- books
- films
- magazines, newspapers and other publications
- plays
- television and radio programmes

Referencing

When referencing external sources we use the Harvard Referencing System.

For guidelines on using this system see: www3.imperial.ac.uk/library/subjectsandsupport/referencemanagement/harvard

Where possible we use footnotes rather than endnotes.

Contact details

We use a consistent format to write our contact details.

It is not necessary to include all details in every piece of communication, although the relative sizes should remain consistent.

We should make a judgement about the amount of detail that is useful in each context.

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E foundation@commonwealth.int

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Our address is written out in full over four lines



A full paragraph break is introduced to show clear distinctions between content



We include contact numbers and email address and indicate them like this



We always include our web address

Writing for the web

People read websites differently than they do printed material. In particular, people scan the range of content rather than reading left to right, top to bottom.

By following these simple tips, our online communication will be more effective:

- 1. Begin with the conclusion**
Put the most important information at the start, such as the ‘who, what, where, when, why, and how’.
- 2. Shorter sentences**
Keep the sentences simple, with one main idea. As a rule, we should aim to write 50 per cent less text than we would in print.
- 3. Shorter paragraphs**
Multiple paragraph breaks allow the reader to rest their eyes. As a rough guide, paragraphs should be kept to less than 60 words.
- 4. Explanative headings**
Good headings are crucial. We try not to use references or metaphors that do not adequately describe the content.
- 5. Sub-headings**
Sub-headings also make content easier to scan. We should group related topics by using subheadings.
- 6. Keywords first**
Where possible, headings and links should begin with the most important words.
- 7. Lists**
Information in lists is clearer and easier to scan. But we should be careful that we don’t use too many on a single page.
- 8. Long pages**
Content that spans several pages (and therefore requires the reader to scroll) should be kept to a minimum. If we have a lot of content we should consider ways to split it.
- 9. Pages or downloadable files**
We should include content as on-screen pages but should also consider making large documents into downloadable files.
- 10. Alternative text**
Our website should be accessible to all users. To facilitate this we should provide a suitable text equivalent for any images we add to a page.
- 11. Link names**
We should avoid link titles such as ‘more’ and ‘click here’. Instead we should use descriptive text that refers to the intended linked page or item.
- 12. Abbreviated URLs**
We do not use ‘http://’ as part of any named URL. We do use ‘www.’ on all appropriate URLs. When referring to our own URL, we drop the ‘www’ and use ‘commonwealthfoundation.com’. We don’t use lengthy URLs that include more than one forward slash ‘/’. Instead we create a short URL (known as an ‘in-point’) such as ‘commonwealthfoundation.com/lecture’.



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