Our writing style guide

Why does Royal Holloway need a writing style guide and how does it help you?

The written words that we use represent what Royal Holloway stands for, as much as its logo, choice of colours and images, and indeed the important work that goes on here. They should reflect and reaffirm the tone and personality of the organisation.

English is a complex and constantly evolving language, in which old ‘rules’ may be eroding. This means in some cases we can be less formal. However, writing in an academic or specific professional context may be quite different from writing for the general public, and it is up to the writers in this case to select the appropriate language and conventions that best suit their purposes.

To help you when communicating with the majority of our audiences, the university has decided on some common ‘dos and don’ts’ that should generally be adhered to, to achieve consistency of presentation and ease of understanding.

If we are to achieve our ambitions we need to engage our audiences effectively, and enable them to trust us. A writing style guide helps to ensure consistency and quality, and helps our audiences to feel reassured and eager to engage with us.

Whether in print or digitally, we must strive to be consistent in our written style. This is a guide to help you do that.

### Tone of voice

### Use of words

### Some Royal Holloway specifics

- Our name
- Our address
- Common terminology – getting it right
- Abbreviations and acronyms
- Fonts and styles
- Use of capital letters
- Website references
- Numbers and symbols
- Punctuation
- Layout
Tone of voice

Tone of voice is ‘how we say things’. It is important because it helps people to get a ‘feel’ for what Royal Holloway stands for. It is as integral to how we do things as degree programme design and delivery, our student support services and Open Days.

Our personality traits (see page 4) help us determine our tone of voice: We speak with confidence and authority, but not arrogantly nor authoritatively. Our tone is inclusive.

We stand on the world stage and speak as such. We communicate as a world-leading organisation should: professionally, personally, directly.

Royal Holloway is a close community, which is both physically and academically inspiring. Its size allows its closeness. It is embracing and supportive, without being restrictive of individuality or independence of mind. We are approachable, we imagine our audiences’ worlds and invite them into ours.

We are honest. We are not judgemental.

We embrace both evidence and possibility as much as we do art and science.

We want people to engage with us, so our tone is conversational. We are looking to attract people who believe the same things as us. Our tone must reflect these beliefs.

Use of words

Our audiences want to understand and digest information quickly and easily. By using jargon, over-long sentences or ten words where one will do, we risk losing both their attention and their good will. Keeping sentences short and clear will help you to most effectively share your message.

Here are some top tips:

• Do not use unnecessary words, or overly embellish your language.
• Keep it simple, where you can.
• And where something is complex, break it down into digestible, understandable pieces.

In order to keep our audiences’ attention, it is useful to get across the main points of your text in the first paragraph where possible i.e. who, what, where, when?

Royal Holloway is a dynamic place, and ‘doing things’ is interesting. Where you can, write sentences where subjects are doing things (active), and not simply having things done to them (passive).

e.g.
The College Council will meet next week
is better than
A meeting of the College Council will be held next week

Communicating with audiences online to effectively convey the university’s identity and purpose online requires a specific way of thinking. People read web pages in a different way and have different expectations of what they are looking at.

We have developed separate guidelines and support if you are regularly involved in writing for the web [link when created].
Some Royal Holloway specifics

Our name

Our name is used differently in different circumstances.

Our working name is Royal Holloway, University of London. This should be used in all instances apart from the exceptions listed below. You only need to use our name in full on the first occurrence; after that you can simply say Royal Holloway alone.

• Our legal name is Royal Holloway and Bedford New College. This name is (only) used on all legal documentation, for instance in contracts for certain services or memoranda of understanding with partner organisations.

• In the media, we may use Royal Holloway University. This is to ensure our name is not shortened by the media to University of London in cases when our full name is physically too long for the available space.

• For academic citations we use Royal Holloway University of London (no comma). This ensures that citations are credited to Royal Holloway rather than University of London.

Please also note the following rules:

• When the name is on two lines a comma should not be used e.g. Royal Holloway University of London

• Don’t ever use RHUL, externally or internally. This abbreviation is not known by most people outside the organisation, and is simply confusing. By continuing to use it internally, we are inadvertently keeping the abbreviation, and therefore its external usage, alive.

• Externally, we refer to ourselves as ‘the university’ (lower case ‘u’). This is because we want people to understand that we are a university, although we do not have separate university status.

• Internally, when writing messages for colleagues in your department or across the university, it is acceptable to refer to ourselves as ‘the College’ (upper case ‘C’).

Our address

Our address should be set out exactly as follows:

Royal Holloway, University of London
Egham, Surrey TW20 0EX
+44 (0)1784 434455
royalholloway.ac.uk

(See section on ‘Website references’, page 33)

Common terminology: getting it right

• Alumna (single female former student).

• Alumnae (plural female only former students).

• Alumni (plural male and female former students).

• Alumnus (single male former student, or to refer to an individual of as yet unknown gender e.g. “we asked students to tell us who was their favourite Royal Holloway alumnus”).

Students that don’t come from the UK should be referred to as international students, not overseas students.

Degrees should always be referred to as a degree programmes – not courses.

Refer to Programme Director rather than Course Director.

Abbreviations and acronyms

Universities use a lot of shorthand for complex information. We might understand what these represent if we are working at the university already, but that doesn’t mean our audiences will. If we don’t explain what things mean, we risk losing their attention and trust. Therefore:

Avoid the use of abbreviations wherever possible:

  e.g. Professor not Prof;
  postgraduate or undergraduate not PG or UG;
  Information Security Group not ISG.

When using abbreviations or acronyms, they should be spelled out in full the first time with the abbreviation/acronym stated in brackets. After this, the abbreviation/acronym can be used. Do not include the abbreviation in brackets if it is not repeated later in the text.

  e.g. “Academics at Royal Holloway looking into healthcare provision and access for people on probation, and how that may reduce reoffending rates, have been given a grant from the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) for a new research project. Professor David Denney and Professor Charlie Brooker will be working with Dr Coral Sirdifield and Professor Niro Siriwardena from the University of Lincoln, with the research being funded by the NIHR with a grant of £150,000.”
Use of capital letters

Don’t use all capitals, in headings or body text.

Don’t capitalise every word in a heading unless using a title or name e.g.
write Thomas Holloway – the first 125 years, not Thomas Holloway – The First 125 Years

Some commonly used examples where capital letters are required are
• the College (when referring to Royal Holloway, internally)
• Visiting Professor
• Founder’s Building
• A-/AS-level
• Joint/ Single Honours
• Higher Education.

Some commonly used examples where lower case letters should be used
• university, both in relation to Royal Holloway, when described as ‘the university’ (see section on ‘Our name’, above), or in general terms ‘18 year-olds starting university this year…’
• college or colleges, when not referring to Royal Holloway e.g. ‘as part of our schools’ liaison programme we visit many sixth form colleges each term’
• department or departmental (department is only capitalised when talking about the title of a department in full, e.g. ‘Department of Media Arts’, not ‘the Media Arts department’, or ‘the department’)
• campus
• international
• classifications of degree e.g. upper second class degree
• years of study e.g. year 1, year 2, year 3, final year
• the seasons and teaching terms e.g. summer, autumn term.

Don’t use capital letters in website and email addresses. This looks old-fashioned, is not technically necessary and is not in keeping with the expected modern standard for the appearance of website addresses.

Website references

Do not include http:// or www in web addresses (URLs). This looks old-fashioned, is not technically necessarily in the majority of cases, and is not in keeping with the expected modern standard for the appearance of website addresses.
e.g.
royalholloway.ac.uk, not www.royalholloway.ac.uk

If your URL is very long and complex, you can make things easier for the reader by directing them to the main homepage and signposting from there (if it is easy to get to). If it’s not, get help from the Communications team to set up a short URL.
e.g.
Visit royalholloway.ac.uk/scholarships and select ‘Undergraduate 2017 entry’ is better than
Visit https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studyhere/undergraduate/feesandfunding/bursariesandscholarships/home.aspx

When referring readers to a website, use ‘visit.’

Web addresses should appear in bold type. As they are often what the reader is looking for to access further information, this makes them easy to identify and differentiates them from the rest of the text.

Don’t insert a colon before a web address, it is not required for the instruction to make sense.
e.g.
To book for our Open Day, visit royalholloway.ac.uk/opendays
**Numbers and symbols**

**Words or numerals?** Spell out one to ten and use numerals for numbers 11 onwards.
Never start a sentence with a numeral – spell it out instead.

**Commas:** to indicate values of a thousand, insert a comma: 7,000; 500,000, etc.

**Years:** when stating the year of a degree programme, use figures e.g. year 2, year 3
The academic year should be written 2017/18.

**Centuries** should be written as 20th century (no hyphen, apart from when it’s describing something e.g. 21st-century campus).

**Dates** should be written in the format date, month, year, with no commas, and without th or st

* e.g. 21 April 2017, not 21st April, 2017

Do not use apostrophes in dates

* e.g. 1990s; the 60s

**Times:** don’t use the 24-hour clock. Use a full stop in times, not a colon, and no space before pm or am, plus no extra 00

* e.g. 11.45pm; 2pm; 12noon; 10.30am

**Symbols:** in most written text, use % instead of percent. This is now more commonly recognised in editorial, and is readable by the majority of screen reading technology, so is suitable for us in web copy. Don’t use ‘percent’, which is more common in American English.

**Quotation marks:** when using a quotation, punctuation should be included inside double inverted commas. Quotations should be written as follows:

* According to Liz Wilkinson, “Employer and alumni-led activities are a key part of the Royal Holloway employability strategy.”

Or, if the speech is split:

* “Little is known about the behaviour of most seahorse species,” he comments, “so the research being carried out is of great importance.”

Use single inverted commas to imply that the text is not your own/what you would have chosen to write.

* e.g. “…nearly 40% felt their GP was ‘not at all well-informed’ about Age-related Macular Degeneration and almost half reported that they were ‘not at all helpful/supportive’.”

**Punctuation**

Dr and Prof (where it is absolutely necessary to use this, see section on abbreviations, above) should not include a full stop.

* e.g. Prof Helen Nicholson, not Prof. Helen Nicholson.

Do not include full stops at the end of captions/headings.

Do not include an apostrophe in Masters.
Always write Founder’s Building, or Founder’s, with an apostrophe before the s.

**Hyphens:** some examples of commonly used words which need a hyphen include:

* Vice-Principal
* inter-departmental
* award-winning
* world-leading
* state-of-the-art
* cutting-edge
* internationally-recognised
* A-level
* full-time (unless you write ‘full and part-time”).

**Layout**

**Don’t justify type.** This is old-fashioned and difficult to read.

**To signify a new paragraph,** use a line break rather than indent the text.

**Don’t include a double space** after a full stop at the beginning of a new sentence, just one space.

**Text across two lines:** wherever possible, do not split names or web/email addresses across two lines.