



# Girlguiding

Our tone of voice  
guidelines

version 1

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# Our tone of voice

# Why tone of voice matters

The words we use create an impression in people's minds. And they do this whether we consider them or not.

Think about the difference between 'Hello, it's a pleasure to meet you' and 'Hi, how's it going?'. You'd most likely think differently about the person speaking, depending on which of these they said. Just as you'd see an organisation that writes 'Register your interest in becoming a member' differently from one that says 'Join us'.

**Whenever we communicate for Girlguiding, we want to sound true to ourselves, our purpose and our brand.**

It's just as important to do this when we communicate with each other internally, as it is when we speak to volunteers, girls, parents, carers and the outside world.

This means thinking about the tone and style of everything we write – from internal project plans and PowerPoints to our fundraising emails and social media posts. Our words everywhere should consistently reflect who we are today.

These guidelines will help us to write consistently in our tone of voice and house style. And this in turn will help our messages hit home and our unique personality shine through.

# Our tone of voice and accessibility

Our tone of voice helps us get our messages across clearly. It helps us make sure that every piece of Girlguiding communication is easy to read and accessible to our wide range of audiences. And this helps us be more inclusive, modern and relevant.

We're a brand that welcomes all. So, we use simple language and a clear structure to make our communications accessible for everyone, including people using assistive technology or with cognitive or reading problems.

Our tone of voice techniques and stylistic choices are based on readability research and you'll find evidence for our decisions sprinkled throughout these guidelines.

## A note on reading age

We aim for a reading age of 9, which is the reported UK average and the same level as gov.uk.

Apps like **Hemingway** can help you check the reading age of your writing based on things like sentence length, vocabulary choice and passive voice.

See **page 13** for more on avoiding passive language.

# Sounding like Girlguiding

**We help all girls know they can do anything.**

And we follow through on this through the directness, clarity and energy of our communications.

Our tone of voice helps us put things across simply and clearly so that what we say is helpful and accessible to all. It encourages us to tune in to the needs of others and write and speak in a way that's helpful to our various audiences.

Our tone of voice also helps us bring our brand personality to life so that we create the right impressions of Girlguiding, everywhere.

## Our brand personality

**We're curious, courageous,  
welcoming and encouraging.**

We have 3 tone of voice characteristics that work together to help us reflect our brand whenever we communicate:

### **Straight talking**

We're refreshingly clear and direct.

### **Thoughtful**

We're people-focused and empathetic.

### **Encouraging**

We always sound helpful and positive.

**Let's take a closer look at each.**

# Straight talking

We welcome all girls, and everyone who wants to help girls discover they can do anything. So our communications are always accessible: clear, direct and to the point. We say what we mean using everyday language – and this openness builds trust and credibility.

We're straight talking in all our communications – from social media to programme activities to governance papers.

## Why this matters

Using simple, direct language that's clear to our various audiences shows we're open to all. It also shows we have the courage to speak plainly. When our messages are easy to follow, everyone can quickly find the information they need.

Sounding straight talking is about being:

- **Easy to follow**
- **Open and honest**
- **Refreshingly clear and simple**

We don't take it too far. We never sound blunt, sloppy or too casual.

## How to sound straight talking

- **Use everyday language**
- **Get to the point**
- **Keep sentences short**
- **Use more verbs than nouns**

## Use everyday language

We always want to sound approachable, and for readers to feel like we're talking directly to them. So we write like we'd speak when we're being friendly and helpful. This means using everyday words instead of formal language and jargon.

Instead of...	We say...
Inquire	<b>Ask</b>
Amend	<b>Change</b>
Assist	<b>Help</b>
Contact	<b>Get in touch</b>
Provide	<b>Give</b>

For more everyday alternatives, see [this glossary of plain English](#).

### So instead of this...

Guiding within the United Kingdom is organised into a number of geographical areas to provide support, lines of two-way communication and opportunities for young members, leaders and commissioners to make decisions and take responsibility.

### We'd write...

We're organised by area around the UK to give girls and volunteers easy access to support – and to help them have the best possible Girlguiding experience.

### Top tip

Struggling to find the right words? Ask yourself: what am I really trying to say? Think of how you'd say something to a friend – and write that down. This will give you the essence of what you're trying to communicate, which you can then edit until it's just right.



## Get to the point

We don't beat around the bush. Whatever our message, we get right to it – and focus on what matters most to our readers. For example, if we have a change in safety processes to announce to parents and carers, we explain clearly what's changing and why and how it'll help the young person they care for.

We also respect people's time by being concise. This gives our writing clarity and confidence – and helps our messages come through at a glance. We make every word count – if it's not adding anything to the message or the tone, delete it.

### So instead of this...

If you are not sure how to proceed and need further advice on this, please contact your relevant case worker or HQ team who can advise on this.

### We might say...

If you're unsure about next steps, ask your case worker or the HQ team for help.

### Less is often more

Simplicity is the key to understanding. Our 2021 tone of voice testing showed a unanimous preference for shorter, simpler communications. People said things like:

'Brevity is key - most of us do this on top of full-time jobs and families so we need the minimum amount of comms.'  
– **Volunteer**

'You need to get to the point in less words.' – **Volunteer**

'It needs to be easy to read on my phone.' – **MP**

## Keep sentences short

Short, focused sentences will give your writing energy and clarity. Aim for no more than 15 to 20 words. Try to stick to 1 idea per sentence, as this helps keep the meaning crystal clear. And put the most important information first.

Keep your paragraphs snappy, too: around 4 or 5 lines max.

Varying the length of your sentences can help give your writing pace and rhythm. And the occasional short sentence can add impact. Like this.

### So instead of this...

Appearance pressures through exposure to online adverts and images portraying perfection, are having a detrimental impact on the confidence and wellbeing of girls and young women – with many turning to apps and filters to seek acceptance, according to early findings of Girlguiding’s annual Girls’ Attitudes Survey, supported by players of People’s Postcode Lottery.

### We’d say...

Girls are feeling pressured about their appearance because of online adverts and images showing ‘perfection’. In our latest Girls’ Attitudes Survey, many told us they’re using apps and filters to help them feel more accepted and confident. This survey was supported by players of People’s Postcode Lottery.

### Did you know?

**Research** shows a clear link between sentence length and comprehension. We know, for example, that people understand more than 90% of a sentence with 14 words. At 43 words, the comprehension rate drops to less than 10%.

## Use more verbs than nouns

Verbs (or 'doing words') inspire action – words like run, change and sign up. They have more energy than nouns like behaviour, consideration and analysis. And words like those often have verbs in them anyway: behave, consider, analyse. Your writing will sound more dynamic and confident if you go straight to the verb.

### So instead of...

Our strategy addresses how we can create exceptional experiences for girls and young women, and we will be bringing to life youth participation and continuing to develop our programme of activities to strengthen member experience.

### We'd write...

Our strategy explains how we're going to create exceptional experiences for girls. We'll inspire more young people to get involved and offer an even better programme of activities.

## Being straight talking when naming

A key part of making Girlguiding feel open and accessible to all, and especially people new to our organisation, is talking about projects and initiatives in simple and descriptive language. This means instead of coming up with names that are hard to unpick, like Space to Grow Together, we keep our project descriptions straightforward and clear.

So we might talk about our brand refresh project, for example, or talk about welcoming new volunteers.

We reserve creative names for unique initiatives and events that we can specifically market.

# Thoughtful

We always begin by thinking about who we're writing to. What do they already know and need to know? Where will they be reading our message and what mindset will they have? What do we want them to do, think or feel as a result? Then we plan and write communications that share the right information in accessible language, sounding natural and helpful.

This also means thinking about the best channels and formats to use to get our information across.

## Why this matters

Taking the time to think about our readers helps us make sure our communications hit the spot, every time. And our focus on people helps us come across as warm and welcoming.

## Sounding thoughtful is about being:

- **Easy to follow**
- **Open and honest**
- **Refreshingly clear and simple**

We take care to never come across as overly familiar, patronising or too wordy.

## How to sound thoughtful

- **Put people first**
- **Acknowledge why things matter using warmth and empathy**
- **Help people find key information with good signposting**

## Put people first

We put people front and centre in our sentences by using active language instead of passive.

Passive sentences avoid saying who's responsible for doing something, and can sound vague, distant and evasive as a result.

Take this example: **a toolkit has been developed...**

The question is by who? It's usually much more helpful and human to start with the answer to this question. So in this case, we'd say: we've created a toolkit...

Always think about who the 'doer' is in a sentence and start with them. You'll naturally use a lot more words like 'you', 'we' and 'our', which will help you sound more direct and personal. And being clear about who's doing what helps us come across as more open and transparent.

### So instead of...

Girlguiding values the differences that a diverse workforce brings and is committed to inclusivity, and to employing and supporting a diverse workforce. Applicants from all backgrounds are welcome.

### We'd say...

We welcome and support people from all backgrounds here. It's the diversity of our people that makes Girlguiding special.

## Acknowledge why things matter using warmth and empathy

We show our readers we understand them by acknowledging what they're likely to be thinking or feeling, where we can. But we're careful not to make assumptions – it's a fine balance.

We also focus on the impact of what we're talking about on our audience. For example, if we're explaining a change in safety processes to parents and carers, we say how and why this is better for them and their young one.

Not only does this make it clear that we can see things from their point of view, it also helps us make sure we're writing in a way that's meaningful and appropriate to our audience.

### So instead of this...

Girlguiding offers fun, challenge and adventure to our young members in the UK. We know that young people thrive in safe surroundings so Girlguiding takes the safety of girls and young women very seriously and has an excellent reputation for providing a safe environment for members to enjoy both indoor and outdoor activities.

### We might say...

Safety is at the heart of everything we do. So you can rest easy knowing that when you wave your young one goodbye on her next camping trip or weekly unit meeting, she's in safe hands. Because we know that when girls feel safe, they feel brave enough to do things they never thought they could.

## Help people find key information with good signposting

Think up front about the essential things you want your reader to know. Then make these stand out by putting them in places people will easily see them: at the starts of sentences and paragraphs – and in titles, headings, links and bullet point lists.

If you're writing something longer and more complicated, it's also useful to 'layer' your information – moving from a summary of the key points through to more detail. This gives people the option to read to the level of detail they need. It also helps us keep our communications as accessible as possible for disabled people.

### Instead of writing this...

Your unit's trial invoice is now live. You have until noon on Tuesday 7 March to check it. If the number or names of the girls shown on your invoice is incorrect please amend their records on Go! or speak to your Commissioner if the volunteer records need changing. You'll be able to view the updated invoice from 10am the following day and the official invoice will be ready for you to download from noon on Thursday 9 March.

### We'd write something like this...

Your unit's **trial invoice** is ready.

- Please check your invoice before noon on Tuesday 7 March.
- If you spot anything that needs correcting, either update the girls' records on GO or talk to your commissioner about correcting volunteer details.
- You can recheck your corrected invoice any time from 10am the next day.
- Your official invoice will be ready to download at noon on Thursday 9 March.

## Help people find key information with good signposting

### Accessible linking

Avoid using link phrases like here, click here and find out more, which give no information at all to people scanning the links or to people using screen readers.

Links need to be clear and meaningful, showing in a short phrase where they'll take people to. Not only does this help key info stand out, it makes links accessible.

**Don't:** Our latest updates on Coronavirus and Girlguiding can be found here and should be checked regularly.

**Do:** Please stay on top of our updates on Covid and Girlguiding.

Readers of all abilities scan read to find useful information – especially time-poor people, and even experts and academics. This is particularly true on screens. Studies have shown that people read on average 20% to 28% of a webpage and only 19% of email newsletters.



# Encouraging

Put simply, we help people do things. We support each other, whatever our role in Girlguiding. And most importantly, we encourage girls to be curious, courageous and know that they can do anything. So our communications are helpful and purposeful – written with an outcome in mind.

Sounding encouraging means sounding like real people when we write – like a good friend who's with our girls and volunteers all the way. And it means using energetic, positive language to encourage people.

## Why this matters

To inspire people to do things, our language needs to have clarity and energy. We are a youth brand, and we want to sound like one.

## Sounding encouraging is about being:

- Positive
- Energetic
- Motivating

We don't go too far and sound over the top or like we're trying too hard. And we avoid just adding lots of exclamation marks.

## How to sound encouraging

- Imagine it's a conversation
- Be positive, where you can
- Show, don't just tell
- Be playful (when the time is right)

## Imagine it's a conversation

We can only encourage people if we connect with them – and thinking about our writing as a conversation will help us do this.

How might the other person feel about what you're writing? If they were sitting right in front of you, what would you say to encourage them? Write with this in mind.

### Techniques for conversational writing:

- **Choose everyday words** (also part of being straight talking!)
- **Use contractions** (such as 'don't' instead of 'do not' or 'we'll' instead of 'we will') just like we do when we're talking. You can also start sentences with 'and' or 'but' if it helps the flow of what you're writing.
- **Ask the occasional question to get people thinking and inspire them:** 'What's your next adventure?' 'How will you rise to the challenge?' And sometimes bring in the answer, too: 'Not confident on a paddle board? Not a problem.'
- **Address people directly with 'you'** – and use people's names where you can. We're all in this together. Emails to volunteers, for example, shouldn't feel like they're coming from a taskmaster, but from a peer: 'We're getting in touch to see how you're finding life as a Girlguiding volunteer. Anything we can do to help? Just let us know.'

## Be positive where you can

We put things positively rather than negatively where we can. We point out benefits and positive outcomes where they exist. We celebrate wins, even tiny ones. And we always try to suggest a way forward – using calls to action to add energy and inspire people to get going.

Not only does this show we can see things from people's point of view, but that there's a positive purpose to our communications.

### This means instead of writing...

You won't be able to access GO until you've completed your initial member training.

### We'd say...

As soon as you've done your training you can start using GO.

### Top tip

The best way to see if your writing is in the Girlguiding tone of voice is to read it out loud.

Does it sound natural as you speak it? Like something you'd actually say? If not, keep working on it.

## Show don't tell

We always want to reflect and celebrate the fun, varied and inclusive experience of Girlguiding.

A great way to do this is to paint a picture of what Girlguiding is like – to use description and evocative language to make things specific and real for our audience.

So instead of talking about something in the abstract, we give examples, tell stories and bring in the real voices of our girls and volunteers.

### Instead of this...

Being a Guide is all about having the space to try new things. Through taking part in a range of different activities with girls their own age, Guides develop self-confidence and make lots of new friends.

### We might write...

We run, slide, climb, row, walk, paddle, skip and whizz our way through challenging activities. We laugh all the way and encourage each other to keep on going, ignore the mud on our faces, and never mind which one of us capsizes the canoe or stumbles on the slack line.

## Be playful (when the time is right)

We want to come across as real people when we communicate – authentic and likeable. This means sometimes showing the fun side of Girlguiding in our writing.

When it feels right, we can be a bit playful – perhaps adding a casual phrase, a story, or even a little humour. Don't be afraid to have fun with your writing (as long as it's appropriate).

This helps us show the human side of the Girlguiding brand – and helps make our communications feel genuine and engaging.

### For example...



**Girlguiding**  @Girlguiding · Jul 26

Tweet Tweet! We've created our very own bird nests by finding materials in an outdoor scavenger hunt! Get outside this summer and climb, craft and dance your way through more exciting activities at Rainbows [#YouGoGirl](#)



## 2 techniques for playful writing

### Get creative

Try metaphors, similes, alliteration and repetition.

Marshmallow moments by the fire. Sleepy smiles after a day well spent.

We know your time's precious, so no tedious training here. Just essential learning to help you level up and get the most out of your role.

### Bring in the unexpected

We can put a smile on people's faces by adding an original twist to a list: What can you expect on a Brownie pack holiday? Forest exploring, paddleboarding and pancake making on old bean tins.



# Our style guide

# Writing with style

Whenever we write, we need to be consistent and error-free. This shows people that we're professional and credible – and some people really notice the details and expect us to get them right. This guide will help you make sure you're always using the right style for Girlguiding.

This style guide covers the specifics of our writing across all channels. As most of our communications are online, our style reflects best practice for readability on screens – putting accessibility at the heart of our stylistic decisions.

If you need to look something up that isn't included here, check [Guardian and Observer style guide](#). This is our default guide for advice on how to handle things like punctuation, capitalisation, spelling and grammar.

# Our house style

## Abbreviations and acronyms

Try not to use internal abbreviations in external communications. Always think about whether people will understand them, and if there's a more natural way to say it.

If you have to use an acronym that people might not be familiar with, always spell it out the first time. Then put the abbreviation in brackets, like this:

**We ask all volunteers to have a criminal record check before working with our girls – called the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.**

**A note on plurals:** to create a plural of an acronym, add an 's' to the end without an apostrophe, as in 'there are several PDFs'.

Usually, when you pronounce each letter of an acronym, it's written in all capitals, like HIV. When you say the acronym like a word it only takes an initial capital, like Aids.

Some Girlguiding acronyms that are said like a word still appear in all capitals, like GOLD, ICANDO and WAGGGS. Only use block capitals for acronyms like these – otherwise, avoid them.

### A note on accessibility

Screen readers often struggle with how to read out abbreviations and acronyms – another good reason to keep them to a minimum.



## Capital letters

### We capitalise each main word for:

- Hashtags (for readability): #AdventuresAtHome
- The names of things (proper nouns)
  - Brands: Adidas, Twitter, Google
  - Places: London, Europe, Waddow Hall
  - People: Prince William, Beyoncé
  - Awards – but not the word award itself: Guiding Star award, Silver Fish award
- Unique and marketable Girlguiding events, initiatives and publications – here are the ones we capitalise:
  - Sparkle and Ice
  - Wellies and Wristbands
  - Magic and Mayhem
  - Fearless Fun
  - Big Gig
  - Little Giggle
  - Twisted Tech
  - Go for GOLD
  - Girls' Attitudes Survey

If you're creating a new event or initiative, please speak to the brand, comms and marketing team about naming.

### Why minimise capitals

#### Studies have shown

that capital letters catch the eye and slow down reading in general. For some groups, such as people with visual impairments or dyslexia, capital letters can make it harder to recognise word shapes.

## We capitalise the first word only of:

The first word in any new line of text (in tables, lists, on badges, in email signatures, etc).

Titles, headings, subheadings and online navigation elements like menu items and button labels.

## We don't capitalise:

- Things in general: uniforms, insurance policy, training materials, volunteers, activity centres
- Job titles, volunteer roles, teams and committees.  
For example:
  - We'll be sending a free resource pack to all unit leaders.
  - Our chief executive is Angela Salt.
  - Amanda Medlar, our chief guide, attended the meeting on behalf of Girlguiding.
  - Contact our complaints and compliance team if you need more information.
  - Our audit and risk committee meets every quarter.
- Badges, schemes, topics, themes, qualifications, courses or unit meeting activities in running text (we capitalise the first word only if it's at the start of a line): book lover interest badge, climbing and abseiling scheme, time travellers, barrier breakers, skills for my future, leadership qualification, a safe space level 1, etc
- The words we use to describe Girlguiding areas, such as 'regions', 'counties', our Lanark district, our Tamworth division
- Any word to make it feel more important
- The words in URLs: [girlguiding.org.uk/information-for-parents](http://girlguiding.org.uk/information-for-parents)

**Please note:** in running text, where the general description of something is the same as its 'official' name, we go with lower case for readability.

For example, our code of conduct or the terms and conditions for our website.

If you need to check capitalisation for a particular Girlguiding term, go to our [glossary](#).

## Conjunctions, contractions and dates

### Conjunctions

There's nothing wrong with starting sentences with conjunctions like 'and', 'but' and 'or'. It's perfectly grammatically correct and is more common these days – in fact, it can be a useful way to add a bit of energy to your writing. But use them sparingly and make sure they're followed by complete sentences.

### Contractions

Contractions shorten phrases by adding an apostrophe like 'it's' or 'isn't'. We use contractions to give our writing a more natural, human tone – words like 'I've', 'we've' and 'you'll'.

In speech, we sometimes avoid contracting 'not' for emphasis: I did not do that! So you might want to replicate this in writing. The trick is to read your text out loud to make sure it sounds natural and flows properly.

### Dates

We use this format for dates: day, month then year, as in 12 January 2023. We don't use suffixes (12th, 20th, 1st) as these can cause spacing issues and can affect readability.

It's often helpful to say the day too – and you only need to specify the year when it's not obvious: Thursday 12 January.

If you're using dates in a table, it's fine to abbreviate the longer names of months: 12 Jan 2023.

For decades, we talk about the 1990s or the '90s, never the 1990's, and make sure we're consistent.

## Email addresses, hashtags, headings and ie or eg

### Email addresses

Write email addresses in lowercase. If you're writing an email address at the end of a sentence, it's fine to follow it with a full stop.

### Hashtags (#)

Initial capitals for each word in the hashtag: #GirlsAttitudes

We use these in social channels like Twitter and Instagram. Avoid using hashtags in other places, as they're harder to read than normal text and have no real function beyond social media. The only exception is if the hashtag is part of the official name of something.

### Headings

Only the first letter of the first word should be capitalised, unless it's a proper noun.

**For example:** How to use the Girlguiding brand

### ie and eg

Avoid using these abbreviations. They indicate Latin phrases, and it's much clearer to write out what they mean in plain English. They're also harder for screen readers to pick up.

Remember: ie means in other words, while eg means for example.

If you're short of space and have to use the abbreviations, use them without full stops.

## Money, numbers, percentages and phone numbers

### Money

Use the £ symbol instead of writing out the word 'pounds'. And don't use decimals unless there are pence to include: £45 not £45.00

### Numbers

We write all numbers as digits. **Research has shown** this is much better for readability especially on screens.

If it feels awkward to start a sentence with a number, try to reword it to avoid this. And if you're using 'one' in a phrase where the digit looks strange, write it as a word instead: 'she's one of a kind', for example.

When talking about ages, we hyphenate the compound: 12-year-olds.

### Percentages

To help with readability, always use the symbol instead of spelling out the word: 50%, not 50 per cent.

### Phone numbers

Break these after the area code, for example:

- 020 7834 6242
- 0161 941 2237
- 028 9042 6025 not 0289 042 6025 (Northern Ireland)

Break UK mobile numbers into groups of digits: 5 then 3 and 3: 07XXX XXX XXX.

## Prepositions, singular or plural, spelling, times and websites

### Prepositions

It's fine to end sentences with words like 'of' or 'to' or 'from', just like you would when speaking. You'd say 'who should I speak to?' not 'to whom should I speak?'.

### Singular or plural

Girlguiding and The Guide Association take a singular verb: Girlguiding is...

### Spelling

We use British spelling not American. If in doubt, check the [Guardian and Observer online style guide](#) or the Concise Oxford English Dictionary.

### Times

Write times like this: 9.30am, 10pm

Use the 12-hour clock (11pm) rather than the 24-hour clock (23.00).

### Websites

We don't include the 'www' when writing website addresses: girlguiding.org.uk.

This is no longer necessary, and people usually leave it out when speaking web addresses, plus not all web addresses include it.

Avoid giving links or breadcrumbs (such as Get involved > Ways to donate > Leave a legacy) in printed text and PDFs, as these can easily become outdated and impossible to follow. Instead, say 'look for <X> on our website'.

# Punctuation

## Ampersands (&)

Only use ampersands in brand names (Marks & Spencer). In normal sentences, spell out the word 'and' to help with readability.

## Apostrophes

Apostrophes can be tricky. But they're important – getting this basic punctuation wrong looks unprofessional and can irritate people.

We use an apostrophe for 2 reasons:

1. To show that a letter or letters have been left out: don't forget, I'm here. **See contractions.**
2. To show possession: this month's publication. If the owner is plural, the apostrophe usually comes after the s. If the plural doesn't end in an s, you put the apostrophe before the s: children's.

So, the bees' knees is talking about more than 1 bee. And the bee's knees? Just the 1 bee.

There are 2 situations that can cause problems, so watch out for them:

1. Ordinary plurals don't need apostrophes. 'We sell apple's and pear's' is wrong.
2. It's or its? It's means it is or it has. Its means belonging to it, which is unusual because it shows possession but doesn't need an apostrophe: the company is confident about its future.

## Brackets

Use these sparingly to hold 'by the way' information – too many can get in the way of readability. We use round brackets (like this), not square ones [like this].

If you're putting a whole sentence into brackets, put the full stop inside too. (This is a full sentence in brackets, so it has its full stop inside.)

If you're only putting part of a sentence inside the brackets, then you need to put the full stop outside (like this).

## Colons

We use colons mainly to introduce lists. They can also be used in sentences to introduce a quotation or when the second part of the sentence is expanding on the first. But it's usually better to split ideas into shorter sentences.

## Commas

Use commas in sentences where you'd pause if you were saying it out loud.

## Dashes

These can be used between parts of sentences instead of commas or semicolons. They add a little more emphasis and can also be a useful way of breaking up long sentences – but be careful not to overuse them. Shorter sentences are usually more readable.

## Exclamation marks

Use exclamation marks sparingly, as they can give your writing a slightly hysterical tone. We don't throw in exclamation marks as an easy way of sounding encouraging. Whenever you find yourself using one, always check how it reads without. Then only use it if you think it adds an important emphasis.



## Forward slashes

It's best to avoid these – especially phrases like and/or, which can confuse readers.

## Full stops

We use these at the ends of sentences, and that's it.

## Hyphens

When referring to people by their age, we hyphenate the compound: 14-year-olds.

Sometimes 2 or more words join together as a description before a noun. It's best to hyphenate these where there's any chance of confusion:

- You need to make 3 monthly payments. (3 payments in a month)
- You need to make 3-monthly payments. (1 payment every 3 months)

## Top tip

Tip: when the first word ends in *-ly*, you don't hyphenate the compound: specially designed uniforms.

There's usually no need to hyphenate the words when they come after the noun:

- We're meeting face to face next week – but we're having a face-to-face meeting
- That document is up to date – but an up-to-date document

## Semicolons

Avoid semicolons. These are used to join closely related sentences – it's almost always better to split them into shorter sentences instead.

## Quotations

Use single quotation marks. For quotes within quotes use double quotation marks.

The chief guide told the girls, 'My mum always used to say to me "you can be whatever you want to be"'.  
"

# Look and layout

## Bold

Use bold sparingly to emphasise words, numbers and dates. It's a great way of making something stand out at first glance, so bold text is ideal for key information such as headlines.

Don't overuse bold, as it can make things harder to read. And never use it for an entire paragraph – when everything is in bold, nothing stands out.

We use bold for headings in non-digital communications. For anything that's going to be read online (like our website, online PDFs and Word documents), it's best to apply our heading styles (H1, H2, etc) for consistency and accessibility.

## Bold italic

Bold italic makes text hard to read, so stick with bold alone.

## Italics

Avoid using italics – they make writing look cluttered and affect readability, especially on screens.

## Headings and sub headings

Don't use end punctuation, except when you need a question mark. Don't use a full stop at the end, and think long and hard about using exclamation marks.

Use a capital letter only at the start and lower case after that.

**Do:** What adults do in guiding

**Don't:** What Adults Do in Guiding

## Links

We avoid using phrases like 'click here' and 'read more' when linking. Instead we make our links clearer and more meaningful so that they stand out and indicate where they lead to.

**Don't:** If you have any questions about undertaking a disclosure recheck, please visit our FAQs on our website here.

**Do:** You'll find more information in our disclosure recheck FAQs.

## Lists or bullets

Introduce lists with a colon, and use bullet points like this:

- Item 1
- Item 2

Start each item in the list with a capital letter.

If the items in the list are full sentences, put a full stop at the end, just as you would on a normal sentence. For phrases, there's no need for a full stop at the end. And each list should be one or the other, not a mixture of the 2.

Or, to put it another way:

- If the items in the list are full sentences, put a full stop at the end, just as you would on a normal sentence.
- For phrases, there's no need for a full stop at the end.
- And each list should be one or the other, not a mixture of the 2.

Start your lists off with bullets. Only use numbers if you're listing a sequence or starting your list off with a number phrase (such as '10 great reasons to join Girlguiding').

## Margins

Always align margins to the left – never justify, as the uneven spacing this creates affects readability.

## Spaces

Use a single space after a full stop. Like this. Double spaces after full stops are related to how manual typewriters worked and are bad for readability – plus they look old-fashioned.

Use a single line between paragraphs, like here.

# Inclusive language

We want everyone to feel welcome and included at Girlguiding. So, we avoid language that excludes or makes assumptions about anyone.

Everyone's different and has their own language preferences. It's always best to ask or listen to how the person describes themselves, and use that language where you can.

## **Here's some advice on how to be as inclusive as possible when communicating for Girlguiding:**

- Try and use the correct terms, but don't tiptoe around something. Instead of 'we want our imagery to show diversity', say 'we want our imagery to show racially diverse people'.
- When describing a person or people with a specific characteristic, ask yourself: is it essential to the story? If it is, use the language they use where you can.
- Be specific when talking about a person or community. Name ethnic groups instead of using broad terms like BAME.
  - For example, say 'the Bengali community' rather than 'the Asian community'.
  - If you're talking about the experiences of people who aren't white, 'people of colour' is more common around the world.
- Avoid the term 'minority group' as a blanket term for underrepresented groups, as underrepresented doesn't always mean a minority. Instead use marginalised groups or underrepresented groups.
- Don't use an adjective as a noun when describing someone.
  - For example, instead of 'Muslims', say 'Muslim girls'.
- Bear in mind that not all families have mothers and fathers. Use 'parents and carers' when referring to this group in general.

- Unless we're talking about children, avoid age descriptors like young, old, or elderly as they can reinforce negative stereotypes.
  - If you need to mention age, be precise and give an age range such as 'people who are 60 and over'.
- When talking about disability avoid slang expressions, phrases that suggest victimhood, and negative terms.
  - For example, instead of 'confined to a wheelchair', say 'wheelchair-user' and instead of 'they're dyslexic', say 'they have dyslexia'.
- Be careful about unintentionally derogatory words too, such as 'go crazy with the kids' and 'a mental weekend away'. If in doubt, leave it out.
- People can assume all disabled people are 'heroic' or 'inspiring' for simply existing with a disability. This can feel patronising to some disabled people. For others, this can be a good way to recognise the extra effort they have to make in a society that isn't built for them. So think about what's appropriate for what you're writing. How would the person you're writing about want to be described?
- If you're writing about someone's sexual orientation, use the terms they use. If you need to be more inclusive, say LGBTQ+.
- If you're not sure what pronoun to use when referring to someone, it's best to ask them. We sometimes use 'they' as a singular pronoun.

## A note on the word girl

We're a girl-only space for all girls and young women. We're also proud to be a trans-inclusive organisation and welcome trans girls and non-binary young people.

We know the term 'girl' may not cover these young people – and language is of course always evolving. When we can, we adjust our language to be gender neutral. This helps us include all young people who relate to experiences of girlhood and womanhood.

### For more about inclusive language

- [gov.uk](#) guidance for talking about disability
- The [inclusive content section](#) of the NHS digital service manual



# Glossary of common terms



# Glossary of common terms

A	Our style	Comments
B	1st response	Not First Response (our first aid training scheme)
C	5 essentials	Number 5 then lower case for our 5 guiding principles
D		
E		
F		
G	<b>A</b>	
H	activities	Use in relation to the programme only – when referring to Future Girl, say ‘initiatives’ or ‘opportunities’ instead
I	activity centres Girlguiding activity centres	The words activity centres are always lower case. Use for internal audiences or after first use of Girlguiding activity centres. We no longer say TACs (training and activity centres). When naming activity centres, capitalise the name (Foxlease activity centre)
J		
K		
L		
M		
N	adviser	Not advisor. Lower case for role
O		
P		
Q		
R		
S		
T		
U		
V		
W		
Y		

<b>A</b>	advocate panel	Lower case for both
<b>B</b>	advocates (people)	
<b>C</b>	Anglia region	Initial capitals for place names. Lower case on 'region'
<b>D</b>		
<b>E</b>		
<b>F</b>	annual subscription	Lower case
<b>G</b>		
<b>H</b>	area	Lower case (a broad term for our districts, regions, counties, countries and divisions)
<b>I</b>		
<b>J</b>		
<b>K</b>	a safe space	Lower case - if this might be confusing in a sentence, use a more straight talking word like training or resources. Write levels in lower case: level 1, level 2, level 3
<b>L</b>		
<b>M</b>		
<b>N</b>		
<b>O</b>		
<b>P</b>		
<b>Q</b>	assistant leader	Lower case for the role
<b>R</b>		
<b>S</b>	award	Lower case when referring to awards in general. Capitalise the names of specific awards, but not the word award itself: Laurel award
<b>T</b>		
<b>U</b>		
<b>V</b>		
<b>W</b>		
<b>Y</b>		

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B	
badge	Lower case when talking about badges in general and when describing specific badges: active response badge
badge secretary	Lower case for the role
BAME	<b>Avoid this term</b> – say people of colour instead
barrier breakers	Lower case for Future Girl topic
be well	Lower case for the programme theme
Beaver Scouts Beavers	Initial capitals (Scouts 6-8-year-olds)
Big Gig	Both words capitalised for the name of this event
British Guiding Overseas (BGO)	Capitalised. These are Girlguiding units based in many parts of the world, either in UK overseas territories or in areas where the girls can't join the local national organisation.

<b>A</b>	Blackland Farm	Capitalised as it's the name of a place. Never just Blackland
<b>B</b>		
<b>C</b>		
<b>D</b>	board of trustees the board	Lower case
<b>E</b>		
<b>F</b>	branch associations branches	Lower case
<b>G</b>		
<b>H</b>	Bronze award	First word only capitalised
<b>I</b>		
<b>J</b>	Brownie Brownies	Initial capital when referring to the 7-10-year-old section
<b>K</b>		
<b>L</b>	Brownie buddy Brownie helper Brownie holiday	Initial capital on Brownie only
<b>M</b>		
<b>N</b>		
<b>O</b>		
<b>P</b>	Brownie unit	Not Brownie pack
<b>Q</b>		
<b>R</b>	<b>C</b>	
<b>S</b>	chief commissioner	Lower case
<b>T</b>	chief guide	Lower case
<b>U</b>	climbing and abseiling scheme	Lower case
<b>V</b>		
<b>W</b>	code of conduct	Lower case in running text. First word only capitalised at the start of a line (on the title page, for example)
<b>Y</b>	commissioner	Lower case



<b>A</b>	division	Lower case
<b>B</b>	doing our best	Lower case – if this might be confusing in a sentence, use a more straight talking word like standards or checklist
<b>C</b>		
<b>D</b>		
<b>E</b>		
<b>F</b>	Duke of Edinburgh’s Award	Name of award is capitalised in line with DofE style. After the first mention, can be abbreviated to DofE
<b>G</b>		
<b>H</b>		
<b>I</b>		
<b>J</b>		
<b>K</b>		
<b>L</b>		
<b>M</b>		
<b>N</b>		
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<b>P</b>		
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<b>V</b>		
<b>W</b>		
<b>Y</b>		
<b>E</b>		
	ecard elearning email enewsletter	Without hyphens
	emergency file	Lower case
	Explorer Scouts Explorers	Initial capitals (Scouts 14-18-year-olds)
	express myself	Lower case for the programme theme
<b>F</b>		
	fair trade	Lower case and 2 words when describing the general movement

<b>A</b>	Fairtrade	1 word with initial capital to refer to the official trademarked name
<b>B</b>		
<b>C</b>		
<b>D</b>	first aid first aider	Lower case
<b>E</b>		
<b>F</b>	founders	Lower case. Used to refer to our founders, Robert Baden-Powell and Agnes Baden-Powell
<b>G</b>		
<b>H</b>		
<b>I</b>		
<b>J</b>	Foxlease	Initial capital for the name of the place
<b>K</b>		
<b>L</b>	Free Being Me	Each word capitalised for this module from the peer education programme
<b>M</b>		
<b>N</b>		
<b>O</b>	fundraising	Lower case
<b>P</b>	Future Girl Future Girl Acts	Initial capitals
<b>Q</b>		
<b>R</b>		
<b>S</b>		
<b>T</b>		
<b>U</b>		
<b>V</b>	Girlguiding Inspire or Inspire (if the context is clear)	Initial capitals for our community for 18-30-year-olds
<b>W</b>		
<b>Y</b>	Girlguiding UK	Use only in a global context

<b>A</b>	Girlguiding Scotland	Initial capitals for place names
<b>B</b>		
<b>C</b>	Girlguiding qualified trainer	Lower case to refer to someone who delivers training and has their trainer qualification
<b>D</b>		
<b>E</b>		
<b>F</b>	Girlguiding shop	We can also refer to this as our volunteer shop. Don't use the term trading to refer to the shop
<b>G</b>		
<b>H</b>		
<b>I</b>		
<b>J</b>	Girlguiding Ulster	Initial capitals for place names
<b>K</b>		
<b>L</b>	Girlguiding's strategy or our strategy	Lower case on strategy. We no longer say strategy 2020+
<b>M</b>		
<b>N</b>	Girls' Attitudes Survey	Initial capitals. Don't use the abbreviation GAS externally
<b>O</b>		
<b>P</b>		
<b>Q</b>	Glenbrook	Initial capital for the name of the place
<b>R</b>		
<b>S</b>	GO	Capitals for the abbreviation of our membership system (Guiding Organiser)
<b>T</b>		
<b>U</b>		
<b>V</b>	GOLD	Acronym for Guiding Overseas Linked with Development.
<b>W</b>	Go for GOLD	The event for GOLD
<b>Y</b>	going away with licence or scheme	Lower case
	Gold award	First word only capitalised



<b>A</b>	good turn	Lower case
<b>B</b>	government	Lower case
<b>C</b>	Guide	Initial capital for our 10-14-year-old section. Use only in relation to the members of this section – when referring to everyone say ‘all girls in Girlguiding’
<b>D</b>	Guides	
<b>E</b>		
<b>F</b>		
<b>G</b>		
<b>H</b>		
<b>I</b>	The Guide Association	The legal/financial entity – only use when necessary: for example, ‘please make cheques out to The Guide Association’
<b>J</b>		
<b>K</b>		
<b>L</b>		
<b>M</b>	Guide camp permit	First word only capitalised
<b>N</b>	Guide law	Only Guide capitalised
<b>O</b>	guiding	Guiding is what we do (verb). Lower case, except when it’s in a sentence with Scouting (Guiding and Scouting) or a global context (World Guiding)
<b>P</b>		
<b>Q</b>		
<b>R</b>		
<b>S</b>		
<b>T</b>		
<b>U</b>	guiding magazine	Lower case
<b>V</b>	girls	How we refer to our members in the sections – no need to say ‘girls and young women’
<b>W</b>		
<b>Y</b>		

<b>A</b>	<b>H</b>	
<b>B</b>	have adventures	Lower case for the programme theme
<b>C</b>	<b>I</b>	
<b>D</b>	ICANDO	All capitals for our activity centre in London
<b>E</b>	innovate	Lower case for skills builder topic - <b>see skills builder</b> for more info
<b>F</b>	interest badges	Lower case: fitness interest badge, book lover interest badge
<b>G</b>	International Scout and Guide Fellowship (ISGF)	Spell out with initial caps at first mention then use upper case abbreviation
<b>H</b>	International Women's Day	Initial capitals and apostrophe before the 's'
<b>I</b>	internet	Lower case
<b>J</b>	<b>J</b>	
<b>K</b>	jamboree	Lower case, unless referring to the name of a specific one: Jamboree Denmark
<b>L</b>	joint unit	Lower case
<b>M</b>	<b>K</b>	
<b>N</b>	know myself	Lower case for the programme theme
<b>O</b>		
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L	
large bus permit	Lower case
leader	Lower case for role
leader in training	Lower case
leadership qualification leadership team	Lower case
lend a hand	Lower case
Little Giggle	Capitals for the event name
local authority	Lower case
London and South East England region (LaSER)	Initial capitals for place names. Lower case on 'region'. Often abbreviated to LaSER
Long Service award	Name of award capitalised (but not the word award)
M	
Magic and Mayhem	Capitals for the event name
marketing team	Teams are lowercase
members	Lower case. Avoid using externally: say volunteers and girls instead
members' area (on the website)	Lower case with apostrophe

<b>A</b>	member organisation (of WAGGGS)	Lower case
<b>B</b>		
<b>C</b>	mentor	Lower case for the role
<b>D</b>	mentoring	Lower case
<b>E</b>	Midlands region	Initial capitals for place names. Lower case on 'region'
<b>F</b>		
<b>G</b>		
<b>N</b>		
<b>H</b>	no one	No hyphen, 2 words
<b>I</b>		
<b>J</b>	North East England region	Initial capitals for place names.
<b>K</b>	North West England region	Lower case on 'region'
<b>L</b>		
<b>O</b>		
<b>M</b>	online design centre	Lower case
<b>N</b>	online shop	Instead of web shop
<b>O</b>	order code	Lower case. Girlguiding order code, not trading service order code. Put code before price when describing items
<b>P</b>		
<b>Q</b>		
<b>R</b>		
<b>S</b>		
<b>T</b>		
<b>U</b>		
<b>V</b>	parent and carer	Lower case. <b>Always use parent and carer together, not parent and guardian.</b>
<b>W</b>	patrol	Lower case
<b>Y</b>	patrol sleepover	
	patron	Lower case

<b>A</b>	Pax Lodge	Capitalise place name
<b>B</b>	peer education	Lower case
<b>C</b>	peer educator	Lower case for role
<b>D</b>	peer group residential events	Lower case
<b>E</b>		
<b>F</b>	planet protectors	Lower case for Future Girl topic
<b>G</b>		
<b>H</b>	programme	Lower case
<b>I</b>	promise	Lower case
<b>J</b>	promise badge	
<b>K</b>	promise sign	
<b>L</b>	promise celebration	Lower case. Not enrolment
<b>M</b>	<b>Q</b>	
<b>N</b>	the Queen	Always capitalised. We can initially say Her Majesty The Queen, then HM the Queen or the Queen on other mentions
<b>O</b>		
<b>P</b>		
<b>Q</b>		
<b>R</b>	Queen's Guide award	Name of award capitalised (but not the word award)
<b>S</b>		
<b>T</b>		
<b>U</b>	<b>R</b>	
<b>V</b>	Rainbow	Initial capital for our 4-7-year-old section
<b>W</b>	Rainbows	
<b>Y</b>		

<b>A</b>	Rainbow helper	Lower case for helper
<b>B</b>	Ranger	Initial capital for our
<b>C</b>	Rangers	14-18-year-old section
<b>D</b>	region	Lower case
<b>E</b>	residential	Lower case
<b>F</b>	respect makers	Lower case for Future Girl topic
<b>G</b>		
<b>H</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>I</b>	Scouting	Always capitalised.
<b>J</b>	Scouts	In sentences that refer to both, guiding always comes first and is upper case: Guiding and Scouting
<b>K</b>	The Scout Association	
<b>L</b>		
<b>M</b>		
<b>N</b>	Scout Network	The Scout section for 18 to 25-year-olds
<b>O</b>		
<b>P</b>	Scouts	The Scout section for 10 ½ to 14-year-olds
<b>Q</b>		
<b>R</b>	second	Lower case when referring to the deputy leader of a patrol or six
<b>S</b>		
<b>T</b>	section	Lower case
<b>U</b>		
<b>V</b>	self believers	Lower case for Future Girl topic
<b>W</b>	Silver award	First word only capitalised
<b>Y</b>	Silver Fish award	Name of award capitalised (but not the word award)

<b>A</b>	six	Lower case. Brownie units can have smaller groups known as a six. over case for this Brownie grouping
<b>B</b>		
<b>C</b>		
<b>D</b>		
<b>E</b>	sixer	Lower case when referring to the leader of a patrol or six
<b>F</b>		
<b>G</b>	skills builders	Lower case. Skills builder names are also lower case: first aid skills builder, innovate skills builder. Write topic name + skills builder + stage number: innovate skills builder stage 2
<b>H</b>		
<b>I</b>		
<b>J</b>		
<b>K</b>		
<b>L</b>		
<b>M</b>		
<b>N</b>	skills for my future	Lower case for the programme theme
<b>O</b>		
<b>P</b>	Sparkle and Ice	Initial capitals for the name of the event
<b>Q</b>		
<b>R</b>	social services	Lower case unless referring to a specific body: Hertfordshire Social Services
<b>S</b>		
<b>T</b>		
<b>U</b>	South West England region	Initial capitals on place but not the word 'region'
<b>V</b>		
<b>W</b>	survival skills	Lower case for the unit meeting activity topic
<b>Y</b>		

A	T	
B	take action	Lower case for the programme theme
C	task and finish group	Lower case
D	Theme award	First word only capitalised
E	they	Use as a gender-neutral third-person pronoun
F	trainer	Lower case for role
G	trainer qualification	Lower case
H	trans (adj)	Lower case, preferable to transgender. Don't say transexual
I	trading team	Lower case
J	travelling abroad training programme	Lower case
K	trefoil	Lower case
L	Trefoil Guild	Initial capitals for the name. Lower case when talking generally about individual guilds
M	trustee	Lower case
N	tweet	Lower case (for verb and noun)
O	Twisted Tech	Initial capitals for the name of the event
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U	
UK	England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Avoid saying 'this country' or 'this nation' when you mean the UK. Don't say 'the capital' or 'the national anthem' without specifying which one
unit	Lower case
unit helper	Lower case for role. We don't say 'occasional helper'
unit leader	Lower case for role. We don't say 'guider'
unit meeting	Lower case
unit meeting activities	Lower case when referring to the activities in general. Lower case for topic names: survival skills
unit meeting activity cards	Lower case
V	
volunteer	Lower case
volunteer shop	Lower case – we can also say Girlguiding shop

<b>A</b>	<b>W</b>	
<b>B</b>	Waddow Hall	Capitalised as it's the name of a place. Never just Waddow
<b>C</b>		
<b>D</b>		
<b>E</b>	WAGGGS	Acronym for World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts
<b>F</b>		
<b>G</b>	webpage	1 word
<b>H</b>	wellbeing	1 word
<b>I</b>		
<b>J</b>	Wellies and Wristbands	Capitalise this event name
<b>K</b>		
<b>L</b>	world badge	Lower case
<b>M</b>	World Centres	These are; Our Chalet in Switzerland, Our Cabaña in Mexico, Pax Lodge in the UK, Sangam in India and Kusafiri in Africa
<b>N</b>		
<b>O</b>		
<b>P</b>	world chief guide	Lower case for role
<b>Q</b>		
<b>R</b>	World Conference	Capitalisation following WAGGGS convention
<b>S</b>	World Flag	Capitalisation following WAGGGS convention
<b>T</b>		
<b>U</b>	World Guiding	Guiding has an initial capital in this context
<b>V</b>		
<b>W</b>	World Thinking Day	Capitalise event
<b>Y</b>	<b>Y</b>	
	young leader young leader qualification	Lower case for role and qualification

# Writing for Girlguiding checklist



- Does the writing sound straight talking, thoughtful and encouraging?
- Is the language everyday and active, with plenty of you, we, our, your, etc?
- Does it sound conversational, like a real (likeable) person talking?
- Is your language inclusive?
- Are sentences and paragraphs focused, concise and easy to digest?
- Are things phrased positively, where possible?
- Have you focused on what matters (and why) to your audience?
- Do the main points stand out?
- Where possible, have you used descriptive language, examples and real voices to paint a picture?
- Are the details (like capital letters and punctuation) in line with our house style?



# Our brand is in your hands

If you have any questions about our tone of voice and writing style or would like to add something to our glossary, please get in touch with [brandingmatters@girlguiding.org.uk](mailto:brandingmatters@girlguiding.org.uk)