The Royal College of Nursing style guide
For print, email and all other digital channels
RCN Legal Disclaimer

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Published by the Royal College of Nursing, 20 Cavendish Square, London, W1G 0RN
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If you cannot find what you are looking for, please follow the Guardian and Observer style guide: theguardian.com/guardian-observer-style-guide-a
Writing about the Royal College of Nursing

Spell out Royal College of Nursing in the first instance followed immediately with RCN in brackets. Thereafter use RCN.

Officially we are the Royal College of Nursing of the United Kingdom – but only use this full title in material aimed at international audiences.

Precede any constituent part of the organisation with RCN to be clear that it is part of the RCN, see branches, committees, forums, and regions.

The RCN is one organisation, so the “RCN is” and the “RCN has”, rather than “are” or “have”. However, it is acceptable to use “we are” to create a friendly tone, for example “The RCN celebrated its centenary in 2016; for over 100 years we have been the voice of nursing…”

a, an
a Royal College of Nursing member; an RCN member.

activists
RCN activists are members who have an active role in the organisation, for example, council member, board member, branch officer, forum committee member, RCN representatives, RCN student ambassadors, other committee members, etc.

ampersands (&)
Within the RCN only use ampersands for the following: Chief Executive & General Secretary; Yorkshire & The Humber region. See ‘ampersands’ in grammar and punctuation for further exceptions.

branches
Capitalise when using the full name eg RCN Cumbria Branch. Lowercase if referring to ‘the branch’. Correct full name must include “RCN”. Therefore RCN Cumbria Branch, not Cumbria branch.

boards
Capitalise when using the full name, eg RCN Scotland Board. Lowercase if you are just referring to ‘the board’.

committees
For RCN committees only capitalise RCN Council and governance committees, sub-committees and groups. So the RCN Agenda Committee, or the Agenda Committee. If it’s an internal working committee it’s lower case, for example, the digital development committee. In a list, “committee” becomes generic, so it’s the RCN Trade Union and Professional Nursing committees.

Our committees have chairs or chair people, not chairmen or chairwomen.

Committees are:
- Trade Union Committee (avoid using TUC use TU Committee instead)
- Professional Nursing Committee (PNC)
- Agenda Committee
- International Committee
- Audit Committee
- Remuneration Committee
- Governance Support Committee
- Forum Governance Group
- UK Students Committee
- UK Nursing Support Workers Committee
- UK Stewards Committee
- UK Learning Representatives Committee
- UK Safety Representatives Committee
- Forum Chairs Committee
- Fellows Co-ordinating Committee
- Finance and Investment Committee.

council
RCN Council is capitalised.

council member
Generally, lower case member eg council member. For particular titles use capitals eg Health Practitioner Member of Council, Student Member of Council. See also job role/titles.
countries

The RCN is a four-country organisation. Avoid using “the country” to describe the UK. Use UK-wide instead of national or country-wide, to avoid confusion.

directorates and departments

RCN directorates, departments and teams are capitalised. Only the name takes capitals, eg the Member Relations directorate the Membership team. We have four directorates:

- Finance and Business Enablement
- Member Relations
- Nursing Policy and Practice
- Organisational Capability and Change.

Additionally, there are four RCN countries:

- RCN England
- RCN Northern Ireland
- RCN Scotland
- RCN Wales.

forums

RCN Advanced Nurse Practitioner Forum; then “the forum”.

headquarters

The RCN has country headquarters in Cardiff, Edinburgh, Belfast and UK headquarters in London.

Do not assume that by referring to ‘headquarters’ readers will understand which one you mean.

The Wales headquarters is the only country HQ with a name – Tŷ Maeth.

There are also regional offices around England.

job/role titles

Capitalise a job title if it’s referenced in conjunction with a named person, but if you’re referring to a role more generally it’s lower case.

So:

- Pat Smith, Administrative Assistant
- Administrative Assistant Pat Smith said: “I enjoy my job”.
- But:
- Pat Smith, an administrative assistant
- the administrative assistant was working
- Pat Smith, the Northern region’s administrative assistant.

This also applies to voluntary roles, such as forum chairs or branch secretary, so Anne Smith, Branch Secretary, or Anne Smith, a branch secretary in the region.

The exceptions to this rule are the RCN President, the RCN Deputy President, the Chair of Council, and the Chief Executive & General Secretary which are always capitalised.

We use ‘adviser’ and not ‘advisor’ in the RCN, so be aware if it’s included in a job title. However, note we do use advisory.

publications

Official RCN member magazine full titles are:

- RCN Bulletin
- Activate
- Health+Care (note spacing)
- RCN Students (for clarity you can use RCN Students magazine)

RCN print and printable publications - use title case and italics. See Titles.

RCNi also publishes Nursing Standard and a range of specialist journals. When written for print the titles should be italicised. For digital formats do not use italics.
**RCN Direct**

Write RCN Direct in the first instance (note spacing and capitalisation) and RCND thereafter.

**RCN Foundation**

Independent charity closely associated with the RCN. Following initial use, RCN Foundation can then be referred to as ‘The Foundation’, but not RCNF.

The RCN Foundation is singular – use the RCN Foundation is/was. Not, the RCN Foundation are/were.

**RCNi**

Formerly RCN Publishing. Note capitalisation.

**RCNXtra**

Note, no space between words, and no E on Extra.

**RCN libraries**

The following are the full names of our libraries:

- RCN Library and Heritage Centre
- RCN Northern Ireland Library and Information Zone
- RCN Scotland Learning Hub
- RCN Wales Library and Information Service.

Full names are capitalised; otherwise it’s lower case in the following: library and heritage centre, library and information zone, learning hub, library and information services.

**regions**

The nine English regions are:

- RCN Eastern Region
- RCN East Midlands Region
- RCN London Region
- RCN Northern Region
- RCN North West Region
- RCN South East Region
- RCN South West Region
- RCN West Midlands Region
- RCN Yorkshire & The Humber Region.

We usually list alphabetically. Same with countries.

If not using RCN in the title, the regions can be written as:

- Eastern region
- East Midlands region
- London region
- Northern region
- North West region
- South East region
- South West region
- West Midlands region
- Yorkshire & The Humber region.

**representatives**

RCN representatives include the following accredited roles:

- RCN learning representative
- RCN safety representative
- RCN steward.

Use of ‘rep’ is acceptable, but please consider your audience – will they understand what you mean? Should you be using more formal language?

If using the name as a role title of a particular person, see job and role titles.
RCN Campaigns

**Staffing for safe and effective care - campaign name**

- social media: #safestaffingsaveslives
- dotdigital email tag for reporting: staffing for safe and effective care.

**#FundOurFuture or #FundOurFuture nurses - campaign name**

Note space after, Future and lower case, nurses.

- social media: #FundOurFuture
- dotdigital email tag for reporting: FundOurFuture.
Top ten tips

1. The RCN spells health care as two words.

2. The only exceptions to our no ampersands (&) rule are Chief Executive & General Secretary, Yorkshire & The Humber, A&E, B&B and companies/organisations which use an ampersand in their names, eg B&Q, M&S.

3. We are a four-country organisation. Don’t substitute ‘country’ or ‘nation’ for ‘the UK’ as this may cause confusion.

4. We don’t refer to the nursing family – nursing staff aren’t a family drawn together by a calling to tend the sick, they’re a group of skilled professionals who have chosen to care for people. Use nursing staff or nursing team.

5. Don’t refer to “the government”. There are four governments in the UK, and should be referred to as follows, see also Governments and governance:
   - Westminster government or UK government - individuals are member of parliament or MP
   - Northern Ireland Assembly - individuals are Member of the Legislative Assembly or MLA
   - Scottish government - individuals are Member of the Scottish parliament or MSP
   - National Assembly for Wales - individuals are Assembly Member or AM

6. Nursing not nurses. Our membership includes nurses, health care support workers, health care assistants, assistant practitioners, students … and the list goes on. They’re all involved in the practice of nursing, but they’re not all nurses. If we refer solely to nurses, we’re excluding a significant number of our members.

7. Our student members are nursing students and not student nurses. Just because you’re a student doesn’t mean you’re studying to become a nurse, you could be doing a Masters, PhD or specific qualification to extend your nursing knowledge.

8. Our students are not being trained, they’re being educated. The word training doesn’t sum up the professional skill needed to be a nurse, so we avoid it.

9. Avoid jargon. If you have to use a technical term, ensure that you explain or define a word or phrase the first time you use it. Imagine you are in your second week of a nursing course – would you understand your document or web page? Using plain English makes our publications accessible, inclusive and therefore more useful.

10. –ise not –ize. We use an ‘s’ in words such as organise, recognise and patronise.
Spelling, grammar, punctuation and capitals

Spelling

Use English rather than American spellings: -ise, not -ize (an exception is the World Health Organization).

Grammar and punctuation

Abbreviations and acronyms

Write in full at the first mention and include the abbreviation or acronym immediately after in brackets, ie Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). If the term is only mentioned once, don’t give the abbreviation or acronym.

Do not use full stops or spaces between initials, including those in proper names eg No 10, WH Smith.

Use all capitals if an abbreviation is pronounced as the individual letters (an initialism): BBC, CEO. If it is a pronounced as a word (an acronym), spell out with an initial capital, eg Ofsted, Unicef, unless the acronym has been naturalised into common usage as a word eg scuba, laser, radar. Exceptions to this rule include NICE and WHO.

Capitalise single letters in abbreviated expressions, ie the six Cs

ie, eg, etc, we avoid using these terms except when used in tables or forms, where we don’t use full stops. Spell out ‘eg’, ‘for example’; ‘ie’, ‘that is to say’; ‘etc’, ‘others of the same kind’ or ‘and so on’.

Adverbs / compound adjectives

Do not use hyphens after adverbs ending in -ly; for example, a newly registered nurse; a seriously ill patient. Hyphens are needed with short and common adverbs: a much-respected nurse; an ill-prepared report.

Apostrophes

Use to indicate a missing letter or letters (can’t, we’d) or a possessive (David’s book), ie Florence’s lamp; nurses’ badges; don’t; couldn’t.

Plurals don’t need apostrophes when using an acronym, initials or date – for example, MPs, not MP’s; 1960s, not 1960’s.

Names ending in ‘s’: add an apostrophe s when you would naturally pronounce an extra s if you said the word out loud: Thomas’s prescription. Otherwise, just add an apostrophe: Mr Hastings’ appointment

It’s easy to confuse the possessive pronoun, its with the contraction of it is, it’s, which has an apostrophe. Eg Don’t judge a book by its cover, not, don’t judge a book by it’s cover.

Brackets

Use sparingly. Where brackets form part of a sentence, the full stop comes outside the sentence (as here). (But where the brackets contain a whole sentence, the full stop should be inside the bracket.) Square brackets are used in direct quotes to clarify something not uttered by the speaker: “The nurses in the [A&E] unit were brilliant.”

Bullet points

Bullet points following a colon should:

• start lower case
• make sense when read after the introductory text
• have no punctuation at the end of each bullet
• except after the last item on the list.

Bullet points which do not follow a colon are treated differently.

• They should each start with a capital letter.
• They should each form a complete sentence.
• And they should each end with a full stop.
If a bullet point is a quote or a question, use the appropriate punctuation at the end.

Sub-bullets must all be indented and use consistent formatting throughout.

**Capitals**

Try to keep capitals to a minimum. Too many can make text difficult to read.

For capitalisation of places, people, jobs, companies etc. please see the relevant style guide section.

**Collective nouns**

Collective nouns take a singular verb or pronoun, so the jury has produced a report; the committee is considering its response; the team is confident it will be successful.

**Colons and semicolons**

A colon introduces items in a list. A semicolon separates items in a list.

The course has five sessions: introduction to the issues; getting started; after the first six months; and planning for the future.

Colons should also precede a sentence that is quoted in full – Dame Joanne Bloggs said: “The Westminster government’s response was inadequate.”

Do not capitalise the next letter after a colon. The exception to this is the above example.

Use a colon after a colon that separates out two clauses, eg Moving forward at a pace:

The leadership paradigm

**Commas**

In lists of individual items, do not put a comma before the final “and” – for example, nurses, midwives and health visitors.

The exception – known as the Oxford comma – is where a sequence already includes an item that contains “and” – for example, “She worked in oncology, accident and emergency, and theatres” or where it helps to clarify meaning. Compare “I dedicate this style guide to my parents, Tom Cobbley and Catherine Small” with “I dedicate this style guide to my parents, Tom Cobbley, and Catherine Small”

Also use a comma before “and” in lists where the last two items are made up of clauses – for example: advice on the course, what information is available, and how to find it.

Use commas either side of job titles where the person’s name comes first: “Peter Piper, RCN Officer, said…”, but not where the job title precedes the name: “Chief Executive Jane Jones said…”.

**Contractions**

Contractions such as can’t, don’t and I’m create a friendlier, informal tone. They can be good to use if you are quoting someone as they sound more like someone speaking. Bear in mind they sound more frivolous so avoid in formal communications. Do not use “there’ve” as an abbreviation for “there have”.

**Ellipsis**

An ellipsis denotes a pause or that words have been missed from a sentence. It is only ever three dots, note space before dots start ...

**Exclamation marks**

Do not use unless you are quoting something that already includes one, such as a publication or event title, or website name.

As part of their brand identity, the RCN Foundation may occasionally need to use an exclamation mark; in all other cases the above will apply.

Exclamation marks shouldn’t be used in subject lines or preview text of emails.

**Full stops/points**

Avoid in abbreviated titles or acronyms – UK, WHO, RCN. Do not use after contractions – Dr, Mr, Rev, Ltd.

Do not use to finish a sentence ending in an email address or web address.
Hyphens

Use one word wherever possible, as hyphens tend to clutter up text and make it harder to read. So thinktank, chatroom, smartphone, shortlink; or decision making, record keeping, distance learning.

There are some exceptions to this rule – use hyphens:

- to form short compound adjectives, eg a much-respected nurse; an ill-prepared report
- where not using one would be ambiguous, eg four year-old children
- to separate identical letters, as in co-operate, co-ordinate
- if you’re adding e in front of a word to indicate a digital product or service, but only if it’s required for clarity. So ejournal, ebook, email; but e-library. See digital language for more information.

Note that hyphens do not have spaces either side – while dashes do.

Quotes and quotation marks

Use double quotation marks except in headlines and for quotes within other quotes. For example, Sir David said: “The nurse said to me: ‘I am struggling to cope’. The problem was limited resources.”

If you are quoting a full sentence, the first letter is upper case.

Don’t put unfamiliar or similar words in quotes to mark them out (so don’t write: we have recently launched an “app”).

If your sentence ends on a quote and most of the sentence is the quote, put the full stop inside the quotation marks. Otherwise it should go outside.

Titles

Similar principles apply across a number of types of titles, such as books, magazines, publications and campaigns.

- RCN emails – use title case.
- RCN print and printable publications - use title case and italics.
- RCN website – use title case.
- words in titles take initial caps except for a, and, at, for, from, in, of, on, the, to (except in initial position or after a colon)
- book titles, film titles, RCN event titles, conferences, TV shows, position statements, briefings, guidance documents, policies, articles, library exhibitions – always use title case. If the title includes a colon, the first word after the colon is capitalised, eg The Wandering Womb: Women’s Health Nursing Past and Present. For external events, write it how the organisation writes it.
- campaigns – use title case for RCN campaigns unless there is a stylised way of writing it, so Fund our Future, Healthy Workplace, Healthy You. For external campaigns, write it how the organisation writes it.
- newspapers, magazines and journals – RCN titles of this type should be title case, so RCN Students. For these types of external titles write it how they write it, ie Nursing Standard. For newspapers “the” takes capitals if it’s part of the official title of the newspaper, so The Times, The Guardian, but the Daily Mail.
- web navigation – should be sentence case, eg Get involved, Professional development. See also website addresses and hyperlinks.
Dates, times, numbers, measurements and locations

**Range of numbers, dates etc.**

If the range is written in a sentence, do not use a hyphen. For example: “The meeting took place between 2pm and 6pm”, “it will be available from 16 August until 21 September”.

If it is not part of a sentence eg in a table or a title, use a hyphen. For example, “Mentorship levels 2-3” or “Debate session – 9.30-10.45am”, note no space either side of the hyphen.

**Dates**

**Individual dates**

Use day (fully spelled out), date (always a numeral), month (fully spelled out) and year (always a numeral). Order without ‘th’, ‘nd’, or ‘st’ after the date number. It is not always necessary to use all parts of the date, for example you might not need to include the day or the year. For example:

- Monday 22 July 2016
- Monday 22 July
- 22 July 2016
- 22 July

In tables a numeric format is acceptable. For example 22.7.16.

**Years**

Say “2016”, not “the year 2016”. Always use numerals.

Biannual means twice a year; biennial means every two years.

**Decades**

Use “the thirties” or 1930s, not the ’30s.

Do not use an apostrophe in numeric dates unless it is to show possession. For example “it happened in the 1960s”, “it was a 1960’s dress”.

**Centuries**

21st or 21st century are both acceptable.

**Holidays**

Capitalise religious holidays. For example Ramadan, Holi, Easter.

Capitalise New Year’s Eve, New Year’s Day, New Year Honours, but not new year in general.

Capitalise Boxing Day.

Use Christmas not Xmas.

Lower case for bank holiday.

Birthdays are for living people. Institutions, events and dead people have anniversaries.

**Seasons**

Lower case spring, summer, autumn, winter.

**Times**

For time, use the 12-hour clock, with am or pm: “10am-4pm” or “the meeting is between 10am and 4pm”.

Where both times fall in the am or pm, and it is not written as part of a sentence, write this only once at the end: “10-11am”.

Where it is part of a sentence write am or pm twice: “between 10am and 11am”.

Don’t spell out times, eg half past two, a quarter to three.

**Times of day**

12 noon, 12 midnight. Note the space between the number and the word.

Write out noon, midnight, midday, midnight etc.

Don’t use time-sensitive phrases in web content (eg today, tomorrow) because it won’t be clear when you wrote the content. If you do need to refer to something happening at a particular time then make sure you write the full date, eg 24 March 2014.
Numbers
Spell out numbers up to and including nine, then use numerals.
Always use numerals next to a symbol (5kg, £2 million)

Large numbers
Use a comma in numbers containing four figures or more (3,260).
Million - in copy use m for sums of money, units or inanimate objects: £10m, 45m tonnes of coal, 30m doses of vaccine; but million for people or animals: 1 million people, 23 million rabbits, etc; use m in headlines
Billion - one thousand million: in copy use bn for sums of money, quantities or inanimate objects: £10bn, 1bn litres of water; otherwise billion: 6 billion people, etc; use bn in headlines
In tables use £2bn, 100k without a space.
If you cannot avoid starting a sentence with a number, spell it out: “Forty-four people applied for the job”.

Ages
Use the following formats: she was in her eighties; a 16-year-old boy; a 16 year old; 14-16 year olds; four to 16 year olds; the woman was in her twenties; a twentysomething.

Telephone numbers
Telephone numbers should be formatted as follows:
020 7647 3000
0161 888 9898
07854 123456
Mobile numbers are written: 01234 567890.

Page numbers
Write as numerals. For example: “see page 1” (rather than page one); see pages 1 to 6.

Percentages
Per cent is two words; percentage is one. The per cent symbol (%) is acceptable and is preferred. Be consistent.

Ratios
Write out as “one in six”, “one in 10”. Ratios should be treated as plural eg “one in six patients are obese”. “One in six” represents a number of people, a group rather than an individual.
In a table 1:6 is acceptable.

Fractions
Fractions should be written out and hyphenated: two-thirds, three-quarters. Avoid mixing fractions and percentages.

Measurements
Use numerals with no space between the number and the unit abbreviation. For example 1g, 20m, 100C.

Metric system
Use for weights and measures, with conversion (in brackets) to imperial where this seems useful. Retain original imperial measurement where it feels appropriate – for example, two pints of blood. See Distance for exception.

Currencies
Use lowercase if you are using the whole word eg pound, dollar, euro. Use the symbol if writing an amount. For example £10, $100 million.

Distance
Smaller distances should be measured in millimetres (mm), centimetres (cm) and metres (m). Larger distances should be measured in miles.

Height
Height should be measured in metric where it is conveying technical information. For descriptive purposes, feet and inches may be used. For example “At over six feet tall, John is an easy figure to spot on the ward.”
**Weight**

Use metric: milligrams (mg), grams (g), kilograms (kg).

**Temperatures**

Use Celsius (C – note capitalisation) rather than Fahrenheit.

**Locations**

**Addresses**

Use commas to separate sections of address when writing on one line, except for before the postcode. For example: 20 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0RN.

**Britain, UK**

These terms are synonymous: Britain is the short form of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Used as adjectives, therefore, British and UK mean the same. Great Britain, however, refers only to England, Wales and Scotland.

Take care not to write Britain when you mean only England, for example. British Isles is a geographical term usually taken to mean Great Britain, Ireland and some adjacent islands – it is best avoided.

**National**

Avoid using to describe the UK. The four countries can be considered individually as nations. Use UK-wide.

Use lower case when referring to any specific national anthem. For example, “the German national anthem”, “the national anthem of Italy was played”, “all host countries will hear their national anthem”.

**Compass points**

Use a hyphen and lower case when referring to an area. For example: “the north-west of England”, “south-east Scotland”, “east London”. Except with RCN regions where the area is also the name: RCN North West Region; RCN South East Region.
People and organisations

**Business**

**Annual general meeting**

Spell out first, then AGM.

**Brand names**

Try to avoid where possible. So vacuum cleaner not Hoover; portable toilet not Portaloo; sticky note not Post-it. If you must use a brand name, remember to capitalise it.

**Extraordinary general meeting**

Then EGM.

**Company names**

Many companies are using unconventional formats and other devices that turn their names into logos. Generally speaking, write it how the company writes it, even if this means breaking a different style rule. For example Which?, M&S, P&G, GOV.UK, Change4Life.

Some of these look odd, particularly when used as the first word in a headline, although some are becoming more familiar with time. The most important thing is that it’s easy for the user to recognise what you are saying.

Company names are always singular, ie ‘the RCN is the voice of nursing’ not ‘are the voice of nursing’.

**Job titles**

Capitalise job titles if they are referenced in conjunction with a named person, but if you’re referring to a role more generally it’s lower case. So:

- Pat Smith, Ward Manager at Epsom hospital.
- Ward Manager Pat Smith said: “I enjoy my job”.

But:

- Pat Smith, a ward manager
- the ward manager was working
- Pat Smith, the trust’s ward manager.

This also applies to voluntary roles, such as forum chairs or branch secretary, so Anne Smith, Branch Secretary of the forum, or Anne Smith, the forum’s branch secretary.

The exceptions to this rule are the RCN President, the Chair of Council, and the Chief Executive & General Secretary which are always capitalised.

**Characteristics**

It’s really important to use the correct terms to describe people to avoid causing unwitting offence. The terminology below should help with this, but if in doubt, avoid stereotypes and consider if you were them, would you mind being described in that way?

**Age**

Use the following formats: she was in her eighties; a 16-year-old boy; a 16 year old; 14-16 year olds; four to 16 year olds; the woman was in her twenties; a twentysomething.

**Older people/person**

Do not use pensioners or OAP as a general description.

Do not use: the elderly

Use elderly people; older people

**Children and young people**

Do not use CYP to describe an individual. For example, “You must not give a CYP too many sweets”. Instead say, “You must not give children and young people too many sweets.”

Note that underage is one word.

**Disability**

Use people with disabilities and avoid both “disabled people” and “the disabled.”
Ethnicity
African-Caribbean not Afro-Caribbean.
Black History Month note capitals, BHM after first mention.
Use BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) as preference – spell out at first mention.
Use minority ethnic as an adjective, rather than ethnic minority
Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Travellers – use initial capitals; all are recognised ethnic groups under the Race Relations Act.

Gender
Ensure that your language is gender neutral, for example: chair not chairman or chairperson; humankind not mankind; staffed not manned.
Use woman or women not lady or ladies.
Be sensitive to people who are non-binary and where possible use their preferred pronoun.

Sexuality
LGBTQ is an acceptable substitute for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer” but context may demand that you spell it out at first mention.
Avoid using any sexuality term as a collective noun, for example “the gays”.

Education
School years
Use numerals, for example: year 1, year 10 etc.
Qualifications
Use the following formats:
- A-level is hyphenated
- BA (Hons), BSc, MA or master’s degree
- A first; a second; a 2:1; a 2:2
- NVQ level 3 – no need to spell out this abbreviation of National Vocational Qualification. Note lower case and numeral for level 3.

Governments and governance
Governance
Use the following formats.
- Papers – the Green Paper on Staffing Levels, thereafter green paper, white paper etc.
- Bills - the NHS Reform Bill, thereafter, the bill; draft Mental Health Bill.
- Budget – the Budget.
- Parties - where “party” is not part of the official name, use lowercase “p”, for example, Labour party, Conservative party etc. Otherwise uppercase, for example, Scottish National Party.
- Inquiry – for legal use; an official investigation, otherwise enquiry.
- EU - no need to spell out.
- general election - lowercase. The full title is The United Kingdom General Election of 20XX – avoid where possible.
- government - lowercase. The full name is Her Majesty’s Government. The government is an entity; don’t say ‘he was accused of being too close to government’ – it should be the government.
- high court - lowercase.
- a hustings - not a husting
- Taxes and benefits – lower case, for example: income tax, council tax, housing benefit.
- Lords, House of - capped up.
- quango - short for quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation. But no need to spell out.
- thinktank - one word.
- watchdog – one word.
- (HM Revenue &) Customs - Always write in full, no need to spell out HM.
**England/UK government**

**MP** - member of parliament.

**Houses of Parliament** – upper case H and P.

**House of Commons** - upper case H and C.

**House of Lords** – upper case H and L.

**committees** – eg Commons health committee - upper case C for Commons.

**Department of Health and Social Care** - spell out, then DHSC.

**Northern Ireland government**

**MLA** - member of the Northern Ireland Assembly (or member of the legislative assembly).

**Northern Ireland Assembly** - capped up, but if referred to generally it is lower case - the assembly.

**Queen, the**

Note ‘the’ is lower case. If necessary use Her Majesty, but not HM or HRH.

**Queen’s birthday honours list** – not capitalised.

**Scottish government**

**MSP** - member of the Scottish parliament.

Scottish government and Scottish parliament have initial capitals.

**NHSScotland** has no space between NHS and Scotland, but insert one for ease of reading.

**Welsh government**

**AM** – assembly member of the National Assembly for Wales.

**Welsh assembly** – lower case, official name - National Assembly for Wales is written upper case.

**Crown dependencies**

The Isle of Man and the bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey in the Channel Islands. They are self-governing possessions of the crown recognised internationally as “territories for which the United Kingdom is responsible” Each has a chief minister as head of government and a legislative assembly which can pass laws subject to royal assent through the privy council. Do not confuse them with the 14 British overseas territories (BOTs). (ref: Guardian style guide).

Isle of Man government is called Tynwald

**MLC** – Member of the Legislative Council

**MHK** - Member of the House of Keys

Health and social care services are provided by the Isle of Man Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)

**Jersey** - States of Jersey or The States

Constables or Connétable, Senators and Deputies are elected to The States

**Health** – not part of the NHS, different pay structure than England and Guernsey

**Guernsey** - States of Guernsey or The States

**Deputies** – sit in the States

**Health** – not part of the NHS, different pay structure than England and Jersey

**Council, councils**

Upper case for councils when you are using the full name, so Lancaster City Council, Lancaster council, the council.

Mayor of Anywhere - upper case, afterwards “the mayor”.


Titles and honours

Honours
There is no need to add OBE, CBE etc after names. For dames, knights etc: refer to in full at first reference, Dame Sarah Reynolds, then Dame Sarah. Note that people can be sensitive about their honours. If in doubt about their preferred form of address, check with them.

Mr, Mrs, Ms, Miss
Use the appropriate title of people external to the RCN after first mention – for example, Andrew Lansley; then Mr Lansley. For women, check preference where possible rather than use Ms as default. When quoting members or staff within RCN publications, first names are usually acceptable.

Nursing and health care language

A&E
It’s not necessary to spell out accident and emergency first. Note this is an exception to the ampersand rule and no spaces are included.

adviser
With an e, not advisor. However, we do use advisory.

Agenda for Change
Do not use italics; abbreviate to AfC after first use.

Aids and HIV
Acquired immune deficiency syndrome, but normally no need to spell out.

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus, no need to spell it out. Do not call HIV “the Aids virus” or an HIV test an “Aids test”.

alcohol misuse and misusers
Do not use alcohol abuse or alcoholic.

bacteria
Write names of bacteria in italics, genus name only taking the capital letter, species all lower case – for example, Staphylococcus aureus; Escherichia coli, but E coli is acceptable.

• Clostridium difficile - spell out, then C difficile, not C diff.
• MRSA - Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus; no need to spell out.

bands
Standard pay bands introduced to the NHS as part of Agenda for Change. Lower case, and use numerals eg band 1.

bed
Use five-bed unit, not five-bedded unit.

bed blocking
This is a derogatory term, avoid where possible. If you have to use it, no hyphen.

breastfed/breastfeeding
One word.

caesarean section
Use lowercase, can be abbreviated to c-section.

cannula
Plural is cannulae.

caregiver
One word.

caseload
One word.

childcare
One word.

class A drug
code, NMC code
Lower case code. Use “the NMC code” for clarity (spelt out first time), but you can use ‘the code’ if it’s clear which code you are referring to. Its full publication title is The Code: Professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses, midwives and nursing associates, in which case standard publication title styles apply.

conjoined twins
Never Siamese twins.

consultant nurses
Use nurse consultants.

continence products
Continence pads, not incontinence pads.

contraindication
No hyphen.

cross-infection
Hyphenate.

day care

diabetes, type 1; type 2
Use lower case t and a numeral.

diseases, infections, viruses, illnesses, syndromes and conditions
Avoid describing people as “sufferers” or writing that they “suffer from”. Also avoid saying someone “is” something, for example “Jane is dyslexic”. Instead use, “people with...” or “Jane has...”.

Be careful to be accurate when describing something as a condition or an illness etc, they are not necessarily interchangeable, if you are in doubt ask a nursing adviser.

Where illnesses and conditions are named after a person, their name should be capitalised and a possessive apostrophe used. For example Alzheimer’s disease, Down’s syndrome.

For other illnesses or conditions use lower case. For example, chickenpox, diabetes, tonsillitis.

drugs
usually known by two names: generic and brand – for example: diazepam (generic) and Valium (brand) are the same thing. Use the generic name (all lower case) unless the brand is relevant to what you are writing. Brand names have initial capital.

Dosage – write like this: a dose of 500mg three times a day, not 500mgs x 3 daily.

drug misuse
Not drug abuse.

ehealth
Lower case.

faeces

fallopian tube

female genital mutilation
Lowercase, FGM thereafter.

First steps for health care assistants
Shorten this to First steps after first use.

fetal/fetus
Not foetal/foetus.

fitness to practise, fit to practise
No hyphens.

Flu
Acceptable abbreviation for influenza.

Focus
Focus, focused, focusing.

frontline
One word.

gall bladder
Two words.

gallstone
One word.
**genitourinary**

One word.

**geriatrics**

Still a branch of medicine but avoid in other contexts.

**guidelines, guidance**

Guidelines are specific clinical advice – use if they have been published by the Department of Health, for example. Guidance is more general.

**haemorrhage, haemorrhaging**

HAI

Stands for health care-associated infection, not hospital-acquired infection. Spell out at first mention.

**hay fever**

**hanged, hung**

The patient was found hanged; the sheet was hung out to dry.

**health care**

Not healthcare.

**health care assistant**

But abbreviate to HCA. Also beware of local variations such as health care support worker.

**health practitioner**

Internally, this member category has been altered to nursing support worker. You can still refer to HCA and other relevant terms, e.g. local variations such as health care support worker, but as RCN members they are identified as nursing support workers.

**hospitals**

Cap up proper names – for example, Derby District General Hospital, but the district general hospital in Derby.

**hyperthermia, hypothermia**

Hot; cold.

**immune to**

Not immune from.

**independent sector**

Lower case.

**infection prevention and control**

Lower case.

**infrared**

One word.

**inpatient, outpatient**

One word.

**international year of the nurse and midwife**

Lower case.

**International Council of Nurses**

Spell out at first mention, then ICN.

**ITU**

Intensive treatment unit; seems to be interchangeable with ICU, but be consistent.

**IV**

Intravenous, but no need to spell out.

**key worker**

Two words.

**learning disabilities**

Not learning difficulties.

**Long term**

In the long term – no hyphen; long-term planning – hyphenated.

**mental health**

Avoid gratuitous use of terms such as “schizophrenic” – for example, “a schizophrenic approach to mental health policy”. Similarly “the mentally ill”. Use “people with mental health problems” instead. “A person with schizophrenia” rather than “a schizophrenic”.


**misuse**
Of alcohol, drugs, rather than abuse.

**nasogastric**

**National Health Service**
NHS or health service is usually sufficient.

**needlestick**

**neonatal**

**newly registered nurse**
Not newly qualified nurse.

**next of kin**
No hyphens.

**NICE**
National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. Spell out at first mention, thereafter NICE rather than Nice to avoid confusion.

**NMC**
Nursing and Midwifery Council. Spell out at first mention.

**nurse**
Only use when referring specifically to registered nurses. Otherwise use “nursing” or “nursing staff”.

**nurse consultant**
Rather than consultant nurses.

**nursing students**
Rather than student nurses. Note that the RCN’s student membership also includes midwifery students.

**nursing support worker**
Internally, the health practitioner member category has been altered to nursing support worker. You can still refer to HCA and other relevant terms, e.g. local variations such as health care support workers, but as RCN members they are identified as nursing support workers.

**on call**
Two words.

**outpatient, inpatient**
All one word.

**practice (noun)**
She developed her professional practice in a GP surgery.

**RCN Principles of nursing practice**
RCN Principles of nursing practice, after which lower case eg principles of nursing practice, principles – not RCN principles

**practise (verb)**
she practised her professional skills; fitness to practise

**PREP – post registration education and practice**
Predecessor of revalidation, no longer in use

**racked**
With pain. Not wracked.

**radiographer**
Takes x-rays.

**radiologist**
Reads x-rays.

**registered midwife**
Lower case.

**registered nurse**
Lower case.

**revalidation**
Lower case.

**Sars**
Severe acute respiratory syndrome.

**schizophrenia**
Never use to mean “in two minds”. Avoid “schizophrenic” – use “person with schizophrenia”. 
scientific names

For example, *Escherichia coli* – initial cap, and italics.

side-effects

Hyphenated

specialty

Not specialty when referring to a field of practice.

wellbeing

All one word.

wheelchair

Say, if relevant, that someone uses a wheelchair but avoid “wheelchair-bound” or “in a wheelchair”.

World Health Organization

Uses American spelling of organisation.

x-ray

zero-hours contracts

Digital language

Android

As in Android phone, as opposed to an iPhone. Better to use smartphone as a generic alternative.

app

Lower case, no quote marks. An acceptable abbreviation for application, typically for a mobile device.

Blog, blogger, blogged, blogpost

All acceptable terms.

click here

Don’t say this when linking online, see website addresses and hyperlinking.

digital

use instead of e where possible; a digital resource, a digital screen; a digital device

e-

can be added in front of a word to indicate a digital product, but use digital where possible.

Use hyphens only if necessary for clarity, and no capitalisation: ejournal, ebook, email, e-library. As terms come into common usage the hyphen is no longer necessary.

Consider if it’s meaningful to highlight the fact that it is digital – would you refer to your paper portfolio as opposed to your e-portfolio?

ejournal, ebook, e-library

see e

e-mail

no hyphen

e-mail addresses

no full stop if email address comes at the end of a sentence, likewise see website addresses. Avoid using someone’s name and then repeating it in the email address: email David Nightingale at david.nightingale@rcn.org.uk; instead say email david.nightingale@rcn.org.uk

Facebook, Facebook page, Facebook group

Facebook groups and pages have followers (not fans), who post content for people to like, share or comment on.

Make sure the context is clear if you are talking about likes and comments, so 100 people liked it on Facebook (no quotes)

Google

Google (company/site), googled, google (verb)

Google is a search engine; I google to find out what I am looking for.

Google Maps

is the full name of the service, or you might read a Google map

Google Street View

three words
hashtags, hashtagged
used on social media to identify significant keywords or phrases, eg #FundOurFuture. It’s fine to capitalise a phrase to make separate words easier to read. Don’t write hashtag in front of the symbol – say ‘use #FundOurFuture’ (not: ‘use the hashtag #FundOurFuture’).

homepage
of a website. One word

hyperlinks
see website addresses

information technology
spell out at first mention, then IT

internet
lower case

italics
do not use for digital formats. See titles for how to use in print

minisite
An area of the website that has its own navigation, usually used for regions, countries or campaigns

keywords
one word

linking
see web addresses

Login/log in
Log in when you are doing it eg Log in to your computer.
Login when you are describing it e.g. your login is your username.

online
No hyphen

Pinterest, pinboard, pin it, repin
Users spend a lot of time pinning images to their Pinterest pinboards, other users may repin this content if they like it

platform
Describes technology used as a base on which applications are processed. Don’t use to describe digital information or content - just use website or minisite

portal
Avoid this term, just use website or minisite

program
only in reference to computers

retweet
see Twitter

shortlink
See web addresses

smartphone
one word

subdomains
see web addresses

tablet
generic term for iPad etc

trending
happens on digital platforms such as Twitter, be clear which platform you are speaking about.

Twitter, tweet, tweeting, tweeter
users spend time tweeting for others to like, reply or retweet. People follow others on Twitter.
a Twitter handle is the unique identifier for each user and starts with @, for example @theRCN (no full stop if this comes at the end of a sentence).
When quoting tweets, try to capture the flavour and convey the immediate impact of an event. Don’t correct the grammar, spelling or style unless necessary for clarity
Website, email and print – adding links

website addresses and hyperlinking

rcn.org.uk is sufficient - no need to include www, http// and no full stop if it comes at the end of a sentence.

web navigation should be in sentence case on our website

web page titles should be in sentence case on our website.

Include web addresses that make it as easy as possible for your user to read and find what you are referencing.

Don’t say “search for indemnity” unless you are running a dedicated campaign on Google Adwords, as search engine algorithms change.

Hyperlink over relevant words that describe where you are taking them (not click here).

Don’t write out the full website address in web copy.

Hyperlink directly to the most relevant destination page or document.

Deeplinks are fine, but make sure you check hyperlinks on your page regularly.

External hyperlinks on our website should open in a new window.

Hyperlinks to other rcn.org.uk pages should open in the same browser window.

When linking to a document make it clear in the link text that the user will be downloading a document, either by including the type in brackets, ie (pdf), (ppt). So: our dementia nurse specialists report (pdf) highlights...”, or download our practical guide Dementia: commitment to the care of people with dementia in hospital settings.

for email

Place hyperlinks in buttons wherever possible, rather than use in-text links in the message text. This makes the call to action (CTA) clearer for the user.

Use twenty characters including spaces maximum in buttons so that the words in the button don’t go onto two lines.

Use action words, read more, find out more for button text, don’t use click here.

See website addresses and hyperlinks for more information

for print

Use short links where possible, like rcn.org.uk/indemnity.

If it’s a long address, refer users to the website homepage instead – most users are confident in searching on the web and it’s hard to read and type in long addresses.

Addresses can be broken at a sensible point if you need to turn a line, exceptions to these apply in references – where you should write out the full address, followed by the date it was last accessed.