Copywriting style guidelines

November 2025

HOWDEN

This guide is designed to help us write consistently from one place to another. It lists our house rules, answers some common questions and points to useful resources to help elevate your writing.

But remember, a style guide is just that – a guide – and there'll be times when it makes sense to modify our style for a particular audience, channel or region.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

We often use acronyms, and sometimes need to spell them out in full. This will depend on the audience (consumer, business, specialist) and their familiarity with the term. If in doubt, spell it out.

Spell out the acronym the first time you mention it and include the short version in brackets immediately after. Then use the short version for all subsequent references within that piece of copy.

> In 2021, we announced our ambition to become plastic neutral with the support of Seven Clean Seas (SCS). In partnership with SCS, we've now removed 164,676kg of plastic from our marine environment.

If an abbreviation or acronym is well known and immediately recognisable, don't worry about spelling it out. It's fine to use it as is.

> CEO
> PLC
> B2B
> EU
> UK
> US (note: not USA)

When abbreviating the terms 'for example', 'that is' and 'et cetera', we precede them with a comma. We use a full stop at the end for 'etc.' and also between letters for 'e.g.' and 'i.e.'.

> We have many specialist products, e.g. marine and cyber insurance.
> It's a household brand, i.e. everyone knows it.
> Consider your car, house and holiday cover, etc. as well as any business insurance needs.

These common abbreviations have no full stop:

Mr	Mr.
Mrs	Mrs.
Ms	Ms.
Dr	Prof.
Prof	Dr.
UK	U.K.
US	U.S.
vs (short for versus)	vs.

Accents

We don't use accents on foreign words that are in common usage in the English language.

Cliche Naive Facade	Cliché Naïve Façade

If you're writing or citing text in a foreign language, you should include accents as appropriate.

> He stayed at the Grand Hôtel Nouvel Opéra in Paris

Active voice

We always use the active voice where possible – it's more direct and describes what's happening more concisely.

✓ Sanjay identified a number of risks

Here, 'Sanjay' is the subject of the sentence and he's performing the action (identifying the risks).

In passive voice, the subject of the sentence has the action done to it. Passive voice is less direct and gives the brain more to process before getting to the point of the sentence.

✗ A number of risks were identified by Sanjay

Here, the risks have become the subject of the sentence but the action (being identified) is being performed on them, so they're passive.

It's ok to use passive voice if you particularly want to emphasise the action over the subject.

✓ Millions of tons of plastic are dumped in our oceans each year

Or if you want to avoid placing blame.

✓ The house was broken into

Ampersands

We use ampersands sparingly; we prefer to write ‘and’ in full. But there are times when ampersands are acceptable, or even preferable.

> Legal & General
> D&O
> M&A

Company team names and specialist areas with ‘and’ use ampersands as standard.

> Employee Benefits & Wellbeing
> Brand & Marketing
> Howden’s Diversity & Inclusion commitee

But when we refer to the services those teams provide, we use ‘and’ in full and don’t use title case (initial capitals).

✓ The committee sees that our diversity and inclusion policies are put into action

✗ The committee sees that our Diversity & Inclusion policies are put into action

See ‘Casing’ for more about team and product names.

If space is restricted – e.g. in lists of multiple items or in pieces of collateral with limited word counts (social, charts, etc.) – it’s fine to use ampersands. But aim for consistency – so if you need to use them, use them throughout.

Apostrophes

We use apostrophes to show when two words are shortened into one. This is called a contraction.

> We're (we are)
> They'll (they will)
> Won't (will not)

And we use them to show possession.

> Christopher's book
> Jude's studio

But we don't use them with possessive pronouns.

> Its, his, hers, theirs, whose, etc.

We often see apostrophe mistakes with homonyms (words that sound the same but have different spelling).

Its vs it's

> Its cover was completely faded
>
> Here, 'its' is a possessive pronoun – the phrase is describing the colour of it – and no apostrophe is necessary.

Whose vs who's

> Whose book is this?
>
> Here, 'whose' means 'to whom' and doesn't have an apostrophe.

> Who's coming for dinner?
>
> Here, 'who's' is shortened from 'who is' and needs an apostrophe to show where the two words have been contracted into one.

Apostrophes continued

And we don't use apostrophes with plurals.

Ifs and buts	If's and but's
Terms and conditions	Term's and condition's
FAQs	FAQ's
Q&As	Q&A's
CEOs	CEO's
MDs	MD's
SMEs	SME's
MGAs	MGA's

These are plurals – no apostrophe needed.

Dos and don'ts	Do's and dont's / do's and don'ts

These are plurals – the only apostrophe needed is to show where 'do not' has been shortened into a single word – 'don't'.

The 1970s	The 1970's

We don't use an apostrophe in pluralising dates.

The '70s	The 70's

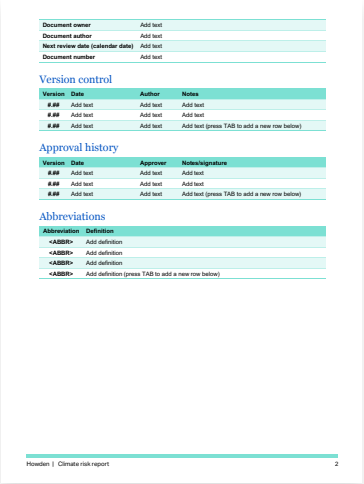
In this example, 'the '70s' takes an apostrophe because it replaces the missing digits from the longer-form '1970s'.

Note: Lloyd's of London takes an apostrophe, whereas Lloyds Banking doesn't.

Bold, italics and other text treatments

We never use bold in titles. We use font type and size to define typographic hierarchy (as set in the templates installed on your computer).





We don't use capitals for emphasis.

Nor do we use bold to emphasise words in running text. It tends to look messy and makes the copy hard to read. You could use bold to highlight the first word or two in a list of bullet points (as long as you do the same for every bullet), but we don't use bold in the middle of a sentence.

If we must emphasise a word or phrase in running text, we can use italics sparingly.

We use italics to denote the titles of books, films, reports and major works.

> Our report draws on data from *The Guardian* and *The Independent*

Titles of short works, such as articles, poems, songs or essays, should be in single quotation marks.

> 'If' is a poem by Rudyard Kipling

When referencing a quote in running text, the source should be italicised.

> In last month's article, *The Future of Risk,* we discussed the evolution of parametric insurance products

Brackets

When using brackets, or parentheses, the punctuation mark should be inside the brackets for sentences contained entirely in parentheses. The full stop or comma goes outside for sentence fragments in brackets within a longer sentence.

> (I built the house myself.)
> I built the house (all by myself).
> I built the house (all by myself), and it's home.

Bullet points

Bullet points help to show information in list form.

- Laptop
- Mobile
- Chargers

You can use numbers to give the items in your list a hierarchy.

1. Laptop
2. Mobile
3. Chargers

Short and simple-sentence bullet points should start with a capital letter but have no full stop.

- Group personal accident
- Damage to stables, buildings, contents and property
- We offer a wide range of specialist services all over the world

If you're introducing a bulleted list with running text, follow that text with a colon.

A valuation will consider many factors to determine a figure.
Some of these include:

- Listed building status
- Modern methods of construction
- Extensive outbuildings such as garages and sheds

If the items in your list are long or complex sentences, or comprised of more than one sentence, punctuate them as you would running text.

If there are short or simple sentences among the long or complex ones in a list, you should punctuate them all for consistency.

Here are a few facts you may not know about Birmingham's sporting pedigree:

- Lawn tennis was invented in Birmingham. Major Harry Gem created the game with JBA Perera in a back garden in the city's suburb of Edgbaston, 150 years ago. The Edgbaston Archery & Lawn Tennis Association is the oldest tennis club in the world.
- The Football League began in Birmingham when William McGregor of Aston Villa FC invited other clubs to play regular games of football in 1988.

Sub-bullet points

We use standard bullet points (solid dots) for primary bullets, hollow dots for secondary bullets and solid squares for tertiary bullets. (These are the default settings for Microsoft Word.)

- We start with solid ‘dot’ bullets
  - Then we use hollow dots
    - Then solid squares

Casing
When to use capital letters

We never capitalise entire words. Using CAPITALS for EMPHASIS in running text can feel SHOUTY and AGGRESSIVE.

See ‘Bold, italic and other text treatments’ for ways to create emphasis in your text.

Casing
Proper nouns and common nouns

Seasons are always lower case: spring, summer, autumn and winter.

Countries, continents, nationalities and other proper nouns are title case (with initial caps): France, Asia, Spanish and Diwali.

King Charles is a proper noun, but kings and queens in general are common nouns.

President Kennedy is a proper noun, but presidents and prime ministers in general are common nouns.

Lots of countries have a navy, which is a common noun. In the UK, it’s called the Royal Navy, which is a proper noun.

Casing
Our company and brand truths

Howden is a name, so we write it in title case.

We write our brand truths in lower case – or with an initial cap if starting a sentence.

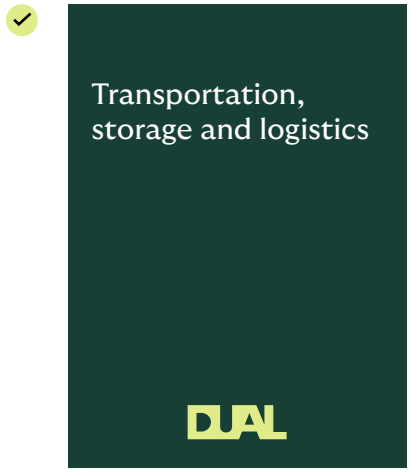
> Collective power is one of our brand truths
> Insurance can be a force for good

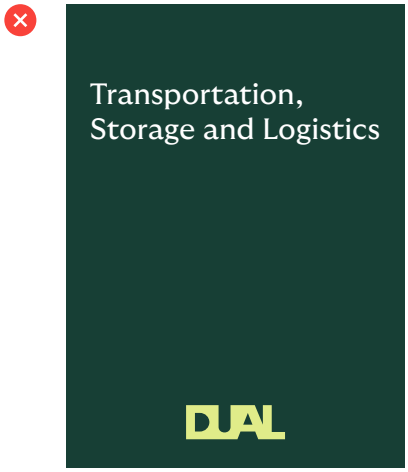
Casing
Titles, headings and sub-headings

We always write document titles, headings and sub-headings in sentence case. They should never be written in title case or in a mixture of upper and lower case. The only words that should take an initial capital are the first letter and any proper nouns.









Casing
Team names

Our company's teams, departments, formal groups and committees should be capitalised, with the word 'team' or 'committee' always in lower case.

> I work in the Brand & Marketing team
> He was invited to the next meeting of the Working Parents group
> She headed up Howden's D&I Action committee

Always include the word 'team', 'division' or 'committee', etc. in running text so it's clear that you're talking about a formal group.

If you're producing communications where our logo and branding are visible, it should be obvious that you're referring to Howden, so use 'our' wherever possible – e.g. 'our Brand & Marketing team' rather than 'Howden's Brand & Marketing'.

Of course, if you're writing an article for publication elsewhere, you may need to reference Howden from time to time to make it clear that you're talking about us.

When writing generally about the services our teams provide, we should use lower case.

> We provide brand and marketing support to the wider group
> We offer a range of commercial property products

Note: we talk about our 'employees', 'colleagues' or 'people' – never 'staff'.

Casing
Job titles

Job titles should be capitalised when they appear in signatures, quotes or captions.

> John Baker, Senior Underwriter
> Jane Dunn, Finance Director
> Joe Smith, Vice Chair

But, when writing generally about job roles, we should use lower case.

> Our new senior underwriter is John Baker
> Jane Dunn attended a conference for finance directors
> Joe Smith has taken on the role of vice chair

Note: we say ‘chair’ rather than ‘chairman’, ‘chairwoman’ or ‘chairperson’.

Just because we give something a name, it doesn’t mean it should be capitalised as a proper noun. If we appoint ‘happiness heroes’ or ‘community impact champions’ for an internal campaign, these wouldn’t take title case.

Casing
Product names

We always refer to insurance products and services in lower case. This applies whether it’s a generic type of insurance or a specific DUAL product or service.

✓
Professional indemnity cover
Digital assets insurance
We cover fine art
Ask us about Howden cyber insurance

✗
Professional Indemnity Cover
Digital Assets Insurance
We cover Fine Art
Ask us about Howden Cyber insurance

Note: the exception to this rule is our information system, which we sometimes use on a front cover to denote a product area or business specialism. In this case, the specialism is written in title case and preceded by Howden, e.g. Howden Professional Indemnity.

Casing
Product names continued

If you think you may need to use initial capitals, ask yourself whether you're referring to a division or team (i.e. how we organise ourselves) or a product or service offering. Divisions and teams, etc. take initial capitals (e.g. Sport & Entertainment team) but products and services should be in lower case (e.g. marine insurance).

> From tax and contingent risks through to environmental liability and transactional due diligence, we offer our clients a range of flexible solutions

Note: it's fine to use capitals for recognised acronyms such as M&A (mergers and acquisitions).

Casing
Groups and boards

When referring to Howden, we rarely say 'Howden group'. It's just 'Howden'. When we do use the word 'group', it's never capitalised.

✓ Howden is a global insurance group
We're all part of the Howden group

✗ Howden is a global insurance Group
We're all part of the Howden Group

When it comes to our executive boards, these are always lower case.

✓ The Howden board meets once a quarter
The board will discuss Howden's strategy

✗ The Howden Board meets once a quarter
The Board will discuss Howden's strategy

Casing
Events

Event names may be written in title case.

> Global Group Giving Month
> Festive Jumper Day
> Pride Month

Casing
Legal

If you're writing a legal piece of text, such as a policy document, there may be certain 'defined terms' that need to be written in title case. Ask the Legal team for guidance.

Collective nouns
Singular or plural?

When using collective nouns like ‘team’ and ‘group’, there are no strict rules as to whether they should be singular or plural. Use the sense of the phrase to make your judgement.

If it’s clear that it stands for a single entity, use the singular form. If the phrase is referring more to the constituents of that collective, opt for the plural.

> Our executive leadership is in agreement
> Our Employee Benefits team are happy to help
> The teaching staff is highly qualified
> The local police are very helpful

Collective nouns
Our company

Howden is singular. We are plural.

When we refer to Howden as a business, we use the singular form.

> Howden is a global insurance group

When we talk about who we are and what we do, we use the plural form.

> We’re an experienced group of insurance experts

When put together, they’ll look like this.

> Howden is an international insurance group made up of experts with the freedom and support to do what we do best.

Colons and semicolons

Colons

We use colons before introducing new information that explains or builds on something that precedes it.

> We're motivated to do the best thing for everyone: our clients, our business and each other.
>
> In this example, the information after the colon builds on the information that comes before it. It doesn't function as a sentence in its own right.

We never use colons at the end of headings or sub-headings – they're not needed. The text's hierarchy will be denoted by font style and size, and line spacing.

Semicolons

We use semicolons to join closely related independent clauses that aren't linked by a word such as 'and' or 'but', etc.

> We can hold our meeting in the cafe on the ground floor; Fridays are pretty quiet down there.

Note: when a word follows a colon or semicolon in a sentence, it doesn't take a capital letter unless it's a proper noun.

Commas

A comma is a punctuation mark that separates words, clauses or ideas within a sentence. Think of it as a soft pause; if you're reading your text aloud, a comma is where you'd stop to take a breath.

There are lots of language rules around how and where to use commas. Grammarly is a helpful resource for all things comma-related. Here are a few of the most common uses, plus a note on our house style.

Use a comma before extensions such as 'etc.' and 'and so on'.

> He packed his laptop, mobile and chargers, etc.

Use commas to separate independent clauses when they're joined by any of these coordinating conjunctions:

> and
> for
> nor
> yet
> but
> or
> so

> I've not seen the report yet, but I'll read it this afternoon.

Always use a comma after introductory clauses, phrases or words that come before the main clause.

> At Howden, it's our people that set us apart.

Commas are also used to separate clauses, phrases and words that aren't essential to the meaning of the sentence.

> This style guide, which was produced in 2024, is designed to help us write consistently in our brand voice.

Commas continued

Commas are also used to separate clauses, phrases and words that aren't essential to the meaning of the sentence.

> This style guide, which was produced in 2024, is designed to help us write consistently in our brand voice.

Note that, in this case, you need two commas because they work as a pair – rather like brackets or parentheses. Consider whether you could take that part of the sentence away and the rest would still make sense. If so, you need a pair of commas, as shown above and illustrated below.

> This style guide (which was produced in 2024) is designed to help us write consistently in our brand voice.
>
> This style guide is designed to help us write consistently in our brand voice.

We also use commas to separate items in a list containing three or more elements.

If a list is short or simple, we don't use a comma after the penultimate item – we simply use 'and'.

✓ We have offices in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico.

✗ We have offices in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico.

If a list is long or complex, we can use a comma after the penultimate item to make it clearer and easier to read. This is known as a serial comma, or Oxford comma, and is commonly used in US English.

✓ Flood modelling considers an array of variables, such as distance to a water source, types and frequency of flooding (including heavy rainfall and river overflow), property characteristics, and the cost to rebuild.

Our carrier partners rely on our underwriting teams to take initiative, lean into the challenges of an increasingly complex world, and innovate.

Contractions

More and more businesses use contractions like ‘it’s’, ‘you’re’ and ‘we’ll’ to make their communications sound more human. At Howden, we do the same – using them whenever they feel natural.

✓ We’re warm and approachable

✗ We are not stuffy and formal

En dashes

En dashes (–) are sometimes useful in place of commas. They can help us draw breath, emphasise a point or introduce new information.

> In our commitment to sustainability, we believe that a thriving business must prioritise the wellbeing of people, communities and the global environment – both now and for future generations.
>
> Climate change, natural disasters, energy transition, poverty and inequality all need big ideas and superhuman efforts – plus the investment capital to match.

English variations

As a multinational company, we speak to our audiences in many different languages – and in different versions of the same language, like British, Australian and US forms of English.

Always use the local spelling convention for your audience. And be consistent. Don't mix 'programmes' with 'programs', 'postcodes' with 'zip codes' or 'colours' with 'colors'.

Please also note that, in the US, it's common to:

- Capitalise the first letter after a colon
- Use the Oxford comma in a list
- Use an em dash without spaces

But we never use dots for abbreviations (e.g. Dr or Mr) or when writing 'US' to shorten 'United States'.

Forward slashes

We sometimes use a forward slash as a short form of ‘or’ or ‘and’ – especially in labels or captions.

We also use it to show pronouns in our email signatures.

If there’s just one word either side of the slash, we don’t include a space. If the slash divides more complex terms, you can use your judgement and include a space for legibility.

> She/her
>
> Team/committee
>
> Long term / short term
>
> With the minimum requirement / with optional extras

Hyphens

Hyphens are shorter than en dashes and should be used when combining two or more words.

This includes numbers…

> Thirty-five per cent
> Benjamin will soon be twenty-three

…prefixes…

> He kept in touch with his ex-colleagues
> Her work was sub-standard

…and many types of ‘compound modifiers’ when used together before a noun or participle. In this case, the hyphen joins two words to make them work like an adjective.

> The company reported record-breaking results

But

> The company’s results were record breaking

> Private-sector wages have risen over the past year

But

> Wages in the private sector have risen over the past year

> Amy’s long-term plan was to become an accountant

But

> Amy’s plan for the long term was to become an accountant

> We’re a people-first company

But

> We put our people first

Note: adverbs ending in ‘–ly’ don’t take a hyphen.

> Read our frequently asked questions for more detail

We also use hyphens to indicate a range or span of numbers.

> 20-30 years

Numbers

We write numbers from one to ten in words, and numbers from 11 upwards in digits.

> The company had three offices
> The report was 33 pages long

But if a sentence contains a mix of numbers, both below and over ten, we use all digits for ease of reading.

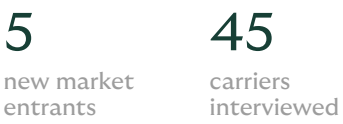
> The lift will stop at floors 3, 7, 12 and 15

And if a sentence starts with a number, we always spell it out as a word, even if it's a single digit.

> Fifty people accepted the invitation

It's fine to use all digits in some cases, including:

Charts, tables and infographics.



Social posts, meta descriptions and other text where space is limited.

> Improve your LinkedIn profile in 5 easy steps

When describing a series.

> Session 1
> Session 2

Numbers over 1,000 should be written with commas – this makes them easier to read.

> 2,500

Note: in most European countries, it's standard to use a point instead of a comma to denote thousands, and to use a comma instead of a decimal point for fractional numbers. Follow the local protocol for your market.

Numbers continued

Very large round numbers (over 1 million) should combine digits with a word such as million or billion.

> 6 million
> 5.6 trillion

To denote numbers over a certain figure, we can use any of the following:

> More than 100
> Over 100
> In excess of 100

100+ may be used in graphics.

Numbers
Currency

Names of currencies should always be in lower case (pound, dollar, euro, krone, yen, etc.).

> pound £
> one penny 1p
> two pence (up to 99 pence) 2p
> five cents
> ten francs
> £10 million £10m
> £5 billion £5bn
> £1 trillion £1trn

You can use either currency symbols or ISO codes, as long as you're consistent.

We tend to use symbols in marketing materials with designed visual graphics, but it's fine to use ISO codes in longer written pieces, such as articles.

It's also fine to use just a $ symbol (without specifying US$ or A$, for example), but only if writing solely for an audience in that respective region and/or referring solely to that particular type of dollar. If you're writing for audiences in different regions, or you're referring to different types of dollar, you need to specify the dollar every time.

Numbers
Currency continued

US dollar	US$	USD
Australian dollar	A$	AUD
Canadian dollar	C$	CAD
New Zealand dollar	NZ$	NZD
Hong Kong dollar	HK$	HKD
Singaporean dollar	S$	SGD
British pound	£	GBP
Euro	€	EUR
Swiss franc	₣	CHF
Danish krone	kr	DKK
South African rand	R	ZAR
Indian rupee	₹	INR
Japanese yen	¥	JPY
Mexican peso	$	MXN

Don't use 'k' to abbreviate thousands; write the full figure instead.

✓ £100,000

✗ £100k

Don't repeat the currency symbol in number ranges, but do repeat the quantity.

✓ £10m-20m
£5,000-6,000

✗ £10m-£20m
£10-20m
£5,000-£6,000
£5-6,000

Don't use decimal points for round numbers, unless you have non-round numbers in the mix.

✓ £6
£6.00-6.50

✗ £6.00
£6-6.50

Numbers
Fractions and percentages

We spell fractions in running text and always hyphenate them.

> Three-quarters of respondents agreed
> Some two-fifths of the village was flooded

It's fine to write fractions as digits in charts and diagrams where space is limited. But be consistent. Use the % symbol in tabulated lists and charts, etc.

> 3%
> 33%

Numbers
Fractions and percentages continued

In running text, use ‘per cent’ if the number is written in words, but use the % symbol if the number is written in digits.

> Three per cent
> 33%

Numbers
Ranges

We use hyphens to indicate a range or span of numbers.

> 20-30 years

If we’re writing about an academic or financial year, we separate the two years using a hyphen and abbreviate to the minimum number span.

> 1999-2000
> 2021-22

Always use ‘to’ instead of a hyphen if showing a range in written text.

> The report will be finalised in three to four hours

Numbers
Roman numerals

We use Roman numerals sparingly – e.g. in historic or literary references (Act II), for certain events or awards (Super Bowl LVIII), and for monarchs or popes (King Charles III).

Numbers
Telephone numbers

Phone numbers should include the international dialling code and follow the local protocol.

> +44 (0)20 1234 1234
> +1 (123) 123 1234
> +61 (0)2 1234 1234
> +33 (0)6 12 34 56 78

Numbers
Time and date

We use the 24-hour clock, with the hour separated from the minutes by a colon.

> A reception will be held from 18:00 to 19:30 in the Members' Room

We never use 'am' and 'pm' abbreviations with the 24-hour clock.

If necessary, we establish the time zone with the relevant label – e.g. GMT, BST, CET, etc.

> 14:00 GMT
>
> 12:25 CET
>
> Carl's plane is due to land in London at 10:15 BST, giving him plenty of time to get to his lunch meeting at 12:30

If we refer to several different time zones in the same text, we use labels wherever necessary to avoid confusion.

> Carl's plane is due to leave Paris at 18:45 CET, arriving in Singapore at 01:45 local time (SGT)

Dates should appear in day-month-year order. We don't use ordinals (1st, 3rd, etc.) and there's no need to precede a date with 'the'.

> 2 October 2023
>
> Monday 2 October 2023
>
> We launched our campaign on 2 October 2023

Note: if you're writing for a US audience, the order is month-day-year, with a comma after the day.

> October 2, 2023

Numbers
Time and date continued

It's fine to leave out the year unless it's needed for clarity or to avoid ambiguity.

> They were married on 2 October 2023
> The 2025 exhibition will take place on 16 and 17 July
> Our next monthly meeting is on 8 June

We use a hyphen to denote a span of dates.

> The event is on 6-8 November 2024
> The event is on 29 May - 2 June 2024

Numbers
Units of measurement

We always use digits for units of measurement, even for those of ten and under.

> 25 metres
> 25m
> 5 kilometres
> 5km

Punctuation

We don't use full stops in:

- Titles
- Sub-headings
- Labels (e.g. for infographics)
- Bulleted lists (unless they contain long, complex or multiple sentences – see 'Bullet points')

When text appears supplementary to a label, it will usually be punctuated with a full stop.

Global reach

We have the global knowledge and reach to deliver results for you.

Creativity

We think creatively to find the solutions to your business challenges.

An exception to this will be where the supplementary information follows a colon.

- Capacity: £10m depending on business line

Quotation marks

Double

We use double quotation marks to denote quoted text or speech.

> David Howden said, “We’re thrilled to partner with a brand that shares our values.”

Single

We use single quotation marks to emphasise a word or term, or to use it in a nuanced or made-up way. Also to cite a piece of work or document.

> We prefer simple words like ‘use’ instead of ‘utilise’
> Her tone was a little ‘off’
> We’re creating a ‘launch-in-a-box’ toolkit
> ‘Understanding retention’ is a useful guide for beginners

Together

If we need to show a quote within a quote, we use single quotations marks inside the double quotation marks.

> Jane said, “I read an interesting article this week called ‘The Future of Insurance’.”

If a full stop or comma is not part of the quoted text, it should be placed outside the quotation marks.

> Here’s an interesting report called ‘The Future of Insurance’.

But when citing a complete quoted sentence, the closing quotation marks go before a comma or full stop.

> “The report confirms what we predicted last year: markets have seen eight per cent growth.”

Simple words

We use simple, accessible, everyday language wherever possible. Don't try to be overly formal with long or flowery words. It makes us sound stuffy.

✓	✗
so	therefore
use	utilise
like	such as
while / among	whilst / amongst
before	prior to
people	individuals
make sure	ensure
we need	we require
on	upon
started / founded / launched	established
most	the majority of
for more information / for details	for further information

Spaces

The old practice of using two spaces after a full stop originated with the typewriter, where double spacing made it easier to see where a new sentence began. Today our computers automatically use proportionally spaced text, and so one space is standard practice.

Spelling

Certain spellings are easy to get wrong. Watch out for these words that are commonly misspelled or otherwise incorrectly written.

focused	focussed
benefited	benefitted
targeted	targetted
start-up	startup / start up
ongoing	on-going / on going
email	e mail / e-mail / Email
internet	Internet
website	web site / web-site / Website
cyber	Cyber

Translations

As a general rule, we shouldn't translate the names of companies or organisations, either in full or in part. Nor should we italicise them. If you want to include a translation for clarity, just add the translation in brackets after the word or name.

URLs and email addresses

When quoting a URL or email address, quote it with ‘at’ before and always use lower case.

If a URL comes at the end of a sentence, punctuate it with a full stop as you would with any other sentence.

> Read more on our website at howdengroup.com. Or, if you have any questions, email us at brand@howdengroup.com. We’ll be happy to help.

Word play

We never ‘play’ with the Howden brand name. We need to protect our credibility.

- Howden how-tos
- HowTeam
- How-do
- Howden-ise

Resource bank

Check your writing

Spelling and grammar

Always run the spelling and grammar checker in the application you're using. If you're overwriting an existing document or collaborating on a document with other authors, tick the option to check all spelling and grammar errors, including those that have previously been ignored. This picks up any issues that may have crept in on previous versions. If you've been using tracked changes, always view the document in 'simple markup' or 'no markup' mode before publishing to check formatting.

Accessibility

Check your content to make sure it's easy for everyone to access and edit. In Microsoft Office applications, switch on 'check accessibility' so it's always running when a document is being edited. If material is to be published elsewhere, you may want to run your core text through Word first.

Proofing language

Check or set the proofing language for your Microsoft documents by clicking 'review' in the top menu, then 'language' and 'set proofing language'. Do this when setting up a new document or overwriting an existing one to ensure spelling and grammar suggestions are relevant.

Before you print, send, publish or post

Editing

Edit your writing ruthlessly, whether by trimming, polishing or sharpening. Avoid repetition. Cut out anything superfluous. Keep sentences simple. Avoid long paragraphs. And use single-sentence paragraphs sparingly.

Proofreading

Read through your writing several times. Read it backwards. Run a grammar checker. Get someone else to read it. Read it through again. Take a break after editing and read it one more time. Fresh eyes make all the difference.

Resource bank continued

Reference tools

Dictionary

There are various online versions of English-language dictionary. For British English, we recommend Collins, which is great for word definitions (to make sure you're using the right word in the right way) and has a range of helpful grammar resources. It also has foreign language editions. For US English, we suggest Merriam-Webster and, for Australian English, Macquarie or Oxford.

Reverse dictionary

When a word is on the tip of your tongue but you just can't find it, a reverse dictionary may have the answer. Type a definition in the search box and the reverse dictionary will give you a list of those most closely matching your search query.

Thesaurus

The online thesaurus is a Microsoft Office tool packed full of synonyms (words that have the same or similar meanings) and antonyms (the opposite). Use it to avoid repeating the same word in a sentence or paragraph, or for inspiration to help you make your text more powerful (or more compelling... dynamic...persuasive...commanding...robust... authoritative...). It's also handy if you're preparing speeches or presentations, not just written text.

Grammar checkers

Grammarly

Grammarly is an online platform that assesses text for readability, spelling and grammar. There's a free level, which is largely for web-style readability, and a paid level, which scans your text for construction, context, spelling and punctuation.

Grammar.com

Grammar.com is a free, less in-depth resource for swift checking of spelling, grammar and writing clarity. It also has a glossary and some useful notes on sentence structure.

Additional resources

- AP style book
- Fowler's New Modern English Usage
- The Guardian Style Guide (UK English)
- New Oxford Style Manual
- Oxford English Dictionary
- Oxford Style Guide

Queries and support

Tone of voice guide

For more about how we write and sound as Howden, see our tone of voice guide in Canto.

If you have any questions about Howden's tone of voice or copywriting style, please email us at brand@howdengroup.com.