Writing for SQA

Part A: SQA's house style

Contents

1 Plain English

We *must* use plain English in all our written communications. This is the most important of all our rules.

See Part B for the reasons why plain English is important, information on what 'plain English' means, and advice on using it.

2 Writing about SQA and our qualifications

This section gives the rules that apply only to us. It covers the way the names of our qualifications should be written, for instance, and the special terminology we use.

The name of the organisation

Committee papers and letter-headed papers have 'Scottish Qualifications Authority' in the title, so you can refer to 'SQA' in the text. Elsewhere, though, give the name in full when you first use it. After this, you can say 'SQA'. Don't use 'the Authority', as it can be confused with 'education authority', and might be taken as pompous.

When giving the name in its abbreviated form, use 'SQA' not 'the SQA'.

Qualifications

When you're talking about SQA's 'product', use 'qualifications'. Don't use 'award', as this is used to refer to the grade a candidate achieves, eg A or B or pass.

Only use 'Award' when referring to the specific qualifications called 'Awards' (such as the Safe Road User Award). You can also use 'Group Award' when referring to SVQs, HNCs, etc.

If you are giving a qualification a number as well as a name, give the number first, then the title:

D321 12: Mathematics 1 (Higher)

Give the name in italics, and use initial capitals (title case), as in the example.

The names of the qualifications — capitalisation

- ◆ National Qualifications
- ◆ National Courses
- ◆ National Progression Awards
- ◆ National Certificates
- ◆ National 4 and National 5
- ◆ Standard Grade (not Standard grade)
- ◆ Access 1, 2 and 3
- ◆ Intermediate 1 and 2
- ◆ Higher
- ◆ Advanced Higher
- ◆ Higher National Unit
- ◆ Higher National Diploma
- ◆ Higher National Certificate
- ◆ Higher National Qualifications
- ◆ Scottish Vocational Qualifications
- ◆ Skills for Work

If you're discussing Higher National Qualifications, use initial capitals on all three words. (This makes it the same as National Qualifications and Scottish Vocational Qualifications.) Even if you are discussing Units or Courses in a general sense, use initial capitals. The one exception to this is where you're talking about college courses in a generic way, eg 'This depends on the course of study you intend to follow'.

Give the names of parts of qualifications — Outcome, Performance Criterion, etc — in initial capitals. This helps people to navigate through your text.

Qualifications: grades and levels

Grades

Remember that 'grade' with a lower-case 'g' means the level of award made to a candidate.

Where qualifications have numeric levels, or can be awarded at numeric grades, always give these in Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc), ie not Roman I, II, III, etc.

Grades at Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2, Higher and Advanced Higher are given letters. These are always written as capitals, ie A, B, C.

Levels

When you're talking about the level of a qualification — whether it's the SQA level or its level in the SCQF — the word 'level' doesn't need a capital (unless it's at the beginning of a sentence, of course).

We now describe all our qualifications by giving their SCQF level.

Remember that the old SQA 'levels' (eg Access, Higher), aren't really levels — they're the names of qualifications. If you want to talk about levels, you should always give the SCQF level. It's fine to talk about 'Access Units at SCQF level 3', but don't say 'National Units at Access 3 level'. SVQs still have levels, though (1–5).

Names of SVQs (if they have an SCQF level) should use the following convention:

SVQ <level> <name> at SCQF level <x>

For example:

SVQ 2 Activity Leadership at SCQF level 5

Types of qualifications

SQA has three families of qualifications: National, Higher National, and Scottish Vocational. Always use 'family' to describe these (not 'block', for instance).

Titles of people involved with qualifications

As well as using initial capitals for our qualifications, we also use them for appointee titles. So, use Principal Assessor, Examiner, Marker, Invigilator, Lead Auditor, etc. Note that you should also use 'Committee' when referring to one of SQA's committees.

Words we always have to use

Candidates, learners, students

The people who are taking our qualifications are 'candidates', but only when they're taking the qualifications, eg in the exam hall, or being assessed in their workplaces. You'll use the word 'candidate' most often when you're talking about assessment or certification.

At all other times, you can refer to these people as 'students' if they're at school or college, 'trainees' if they're doing workplace training, or 'learners' if you're writing a more general document and 'students' or 'trainees' isn't suitable. It's also fine to talk about more specific roles (apprentices, trainee hairdressers, fitters, etc) if your document is very specific.

What happens to them

Candidates are 'registered' only once and are subsequently 'entered' for 'qualifications'. Usually, they will go on to receive an 'award' in a qualification. SQA 'charges' centres for entries. We pay 'fees' to appointees.

Where

The places (schools, colleges, workplaces, etc) where candidates do the qualifications are called 'centres'. We no longer use the term 'presenting centres'.

Other people we deal with

'Stakeholders' are people and organisations who have an interest in our qualifications — candidates, centres, parents, government, representative organisations, SQA staff.

Some stakeholders are our 'customers'. It is acceptable for us to use this word to describe people and organisations who are using our products and services.

3   Spelling, capitalisation, and special words

Quick reference

This is a list of words we use a lot, and some special features they have — it may be that they're often mis-spelled, or that they can be confused with something very similar, or that there are rules about when they should and should not be written with an initial capital. Some of them have been dealt with elsewhere in this guide.

Write the word like this …	… and note that it's
added value	lower case, except as Added Value Units
adviser	not advisor (though some SVQ standards-setting bodies use the -or spelling)
Arrangements	capital 'A' when referring to 'the Arrangements document' for a qualification, but not when you're just talking about accommodation arrangements
assessment exemplars	not initial capitals
assessment planning	not initial capitals
assessor	lower case
awarding body	not initial capitals, unless part of an organisation's title, eg SQA Awarding Body
benefit	benefiting, benefited (don't double the 't')
CD-ROM	all caps, and has a hyphen
centre	lower case
centre-devised	always hyphened
closed-book	hyphened when you're talking about a kind of assessment (another kind is open-book)
competence	not 'competency'; competences in the plural (not competencies)
convener	(ends in '-er') for someone chairing an SQA

	meeting, but some local authorities use 'convenor' for council leader
conducive	not condusive
consensus	not concensus
Core Skills	initial capitals, but 'skills' on its own is lower case
core Units	with a lower case 'c', but see 'Units'
Course specifications	lower case 's'
Courses	initial capital when you're talking about National Courses — not relevant to HN; no capital when you're talking about someone's course at college or university
Credit	initial capital when referring to 'Credit level' in Standard Grade; not capital when talking about the value of qualifications, eg '3 credits'
criteria	the plural of 'criterion'
curriculum areas	expressive arts, health and wellbeing, languages, mathematics, religious and moral education, sciences, social studies, and technologies (but subjects within these curriculum areas have initial capitals)
Curriculum for Excellence	without an 'a' or 'the' prefix, and should be written out in full in formal documents (not 'CfE')
Element	initial capital when you're talking about parts of Standard Grades, but not when you're using it more generally (eg various elements of the qualification)
e-assessment	not E-assessment (except at the start of a sentence)
e-commerce	not E-commerce (except at the start of a sentence)
e-business	not E-business (except at the start of a sentence)

e-mail	not E-mail (except at the start of a sentence), and not email; see 'Other spelling rules' on p15 for more information
end-user	hyphened
enrol	enrolling, enrolled, enrolment (but use 'entry' for candidates)
estimate	lower case, even when you're writing about submitting estimates of performance (in NQs)
Estimate Report	the title of a report issued to centres by Data Management, and therefore takes initial capitals
Evidence Requirements	initial capitals — part of a Unit
Examiner	initial capital — title of an appointee
experiences and outcomes	lower case
external verification	lower case
External Verifier	initial capitals
fax	not necessary to write out 'facsimile'
focus	focusing, focused (don't double the 's')
forum	forums in the plural, except when talking about Roman architectural features, when you can use fora
Foundation	initial capital when referring to 'Foundation level' in Standard Grade
further education	no initial capitals, but FE when abbreviated
Gàidhlig	Gaelic for Gaelic — use alt 0224 on your keyboard's number pad to get the à (NumLock must be on)
General	initial capital when referring to 'General level'
Grade Descriptions	initial capitals — part of Standard Grade
Grade Related Criteria	initial capitals — part of Standard Grade
Graded Units	initial capitals; these are part of Higher National Group Awards — used to be called Integrative Assessments

Group Award	initial capitals
Helpdesk	all one word, with an initial capital when it's SQA's Helpdesk
Higher	initial capital when referring to the level in National Qualifications, eg Higher Geography
higher education	no initial capitals, but HE when abbreviated
internal verification	lower case
Internal Verifier	initial capitals
internally-assessed	hyphened when it comes before 'Units', eg internally-assessed Units; not hyphened when it comes after a verb, eg these Units are internally assessed
internet	lower case (except at the start of a sentence)
Knowledge Evidence Requirements	initial capitals — part of a qualification
Knowledge and Understanding Requirements	initial capitals — part of a qualification
level (as in level 6, Higher level)	lower case
liaise	not spelled 'liase', despite what your spellchecker says
licence	with a 'c' for the noun, eg driving licence, but with an 's' for the verb, eg licensing laws
Literacy	upper case when referring to the new qualification
mandatory Unit	lower case 'm', upper case 'U'
Marker	initial capital — title of an appointee
National Courses	title of a qualification, so takes initial capitals
National Occupational Standards	initial capitals
National Qualifications	title of a qualification, so takes initial capitals

National Units	title of a qualification, so takes initial capitals
nationally-devised	always hyphened
centre-devised	always hyphened
nationally-recognised	always hyphened
Numeracy	upper case when referring to the new qualification or the Core Skill
consortium-developed	always hyphened, and never 'consortia-developed' (which doesn't make sense)
observation checklists	no capitals
ongoing	not hyphened
online	one word, no hyphen — 'offline' should be written the same way
optional Unit	lower case 'o', upper case 'U'
Outcomes	initial capital because it's the name of part of a qualification
per cent	not 'percent'
Performance Criteria	initial capitals because it's the name of part of a qualification
Performance Evidence Requirements	initial capitals, because it's the name of part of a qualification
phone	not necessary to write 'phone
practice	with a 'c' for the noun, eg 'piano practice', but with an 's' for the verb, eg 'practising the piano'
Principal Assessor	initial capitals — title of an appointee
pro forma	two words, no hyphen
Project-based National Courses (PBNCs)	initial capitals, with one hyphen
Range Statement	initial capitals, because it's the name of part of a qualification
re-assessment	lower case; see 'Other spelling rules' on p15
Scottish Government	initial capitals; no longer the Scottish Executive;

	not written with a capital 't' when you write 'the Scottish Government'
Scottish Group Award	title of a qualification, so takes initial capitals
sector skills council	lower case, except when it's part of an organisation's name
senior phase	lower case
Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work	initial capitals
Standard Grade	initial capitals, because it's the name of a qualification
standards-setting body	all lower case, and hyphened
subject-specific	always hyphened
SQA Co-ordinator	initial capitals, and Co-ordinator is hyphened
target	targeting, targeted (don't double the 't')
timescale	one word, no hyphen
Units	initial capital when referring to National Units, Higher National Units, or SVQ Units — eg the Units that make up this qualification are…
Unit results	lower case 'r'
Unit specifications	lower case 's'
up to date	without hyphens except when preceding a noun, eg 'the qualification is up to date', but 'the up-to-date qualification'
web page	two words
website	one word, no hyphen
witness testimony	lower case
www.sqa.org.uk	our URL (website address — always put it in bold and as a hyperlink; if it's at the end of a sentence, put the full stop in but don't make it part of the hyperlink)

Other spelling rules

♦ The prefix 're-' usually takes a hyphen before a vowel: re-assess, re-establish, re-evaluate, re-examine, re-open, re-order, re-organise, re-use (all hyphened).

♦ If you're using 'e' for 'electronic', always give it a hyphen. Many people use 'email', but if we don't use the hyphen it gets very confusing when we talk about 'eenabling eassessment in egovernment and ebusinesses'.
Treat 'e-' words as you would any other — capitalise the 'e' at the beginning of a sentence (ie don't say 'e-Mail is a great way to communicate…').

♦ 'Pre-' takes a hyphen before a vowel: pre-arrange, pre-existing, pre-ordained.

♦ 'Co-' takes a hyphen before an 'o': co-operate, co-ordinate (unless you're talking about coopers or chicken coops).

♦ Words that have the -ise ending (to rhyme with 'eyes') are spelled with an 's' (recognise, customise, advertise, homogenise), not with a 'z'. Make sure you have spelling set to English (UK), rather than English (US), so that Word doesn't try to correct any -ise endings.

Capital letters

The general rule is to set titles with all initial capitals (title case) and headings with an initial capital on the first word only (sentence case).

Titles

Titles of publications and qualifications should be given initial capitals (which means capitalising nouns, verbs and adjectives). Titles of publications, and Unit titles, should also be in *italics* and should follow SQA's house style generally. For example:

Guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance
Scottish Group Award
Online Communication: Coaching, Guidance and Support

Capitals are useful as signposts, and to help distinguish between different kinds of thing (eg the subject History taught in school, the history of the school, for instance). Don't use them, though, in an attempt to add weight or authority to what you're saying, or because a word seems important.

Words that don't need capitals include:

♦ centre
♦ candidate
♦ awarding body (unless as part of a name, eg SQA Awarding Body)

Talking about subject areas

It's best always to capitalise the name of the subject area of a qualification, even when you're referring to the qualification more obliquely. The reason for this is that it helps readers to find their way about your text, and it can make text easier to understand. So, when you're speaking about the teaching of Mathematics in schools, give it a capital M (and give History, Geography, Physics, etc capitals too):

♦ Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) in Road Haulage and Distribution at level 2 (the proper title); the level 2 Scottish Vocational Qualifications in Road Haulage (even though this is not the proper title), this Road Haulage SVQ
♦ an NPA in Care at Intermediate 2, a Skills for Work Course in Care
♦ Higher History, a Higher in History

Abbreviations and acronyms

When giving a name that is normally abbreviated to its initials, or an acronym, give it in full the first time you use it, followed by the abbreviated form in parentheses. For example:

'Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) is responsible for economic regeneration in that region. HIE's role also extends to…'

When not to use capitals

Don't use capitals to make what you're saying seem more important to your readers, or more official. It doesn't work, and it can make us seem more bureaucratic than we really are.

Foreign words

Try to avoid using words from other languages that haven't been fully naturalised into English, because they make it hard for people who don't know the language in question to understand.

If you must use, say, a Latin word, assume that it has been fully adopted into English, and treat it as an English word, if possible. The only exceptions to this general rule are some scientific and mathematical terminology; and Latin words ending in '-a', which tend to take '-ae' plurals.

Specific foreign words and their plurals

The plural of 'forum' is 'forums' (unless you're writing about ancient Roman town planning features).

The plural of 'consortium' is 'consortiums'. (People do use 'consortia', but often incorrectly, giving rise to 'consortia-developed Higher National Qualifications', which is logically impossible.)

'Syllabus' causes enormous confusion. There's no evidence for 'syllabus' actually being a Latin word (it doesn't look like a Latin word), or a Greek word, so we can't begin to tell what its classical plural might have been. In English, it's always 'syllabuses' in the plural.

It's perfectly acceptable in modern English to use 'data' as a singular ('the data shows us that uptake is increasing…'). It's very strange to see its Latin singular (datum) used outwith scientific journals, and unusual to see 'data' being used as a plural — except in Computing texts.

4   Subject-specific rules

Mathematics

We use Equation Editor and MathType to set equations in Microsoft Word.

If you don't have access to these, or similar, programs please don't try to emulate complicated layouts in Word using the tab key and the space bar. Use brackets to indicate the structure of equations and formulae, and don't indent anything.

For example:

$x = [-b \pm \sqrt{(b^2 - 4ac)}]/2a$ <Display>

We will then set this as:

$$x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

Alternatively, just handwrite the equations.

If you intend to set at least some of the mathematical content of your text, then please format your text as follows:

Use italic for variables and algebraic constants, eg $ax^2 + bx + c = 0$

This also holds for superscripts and subscripts, eg $a_n = 1$ for $n = 1, 3, 5\ldots$

Use roman for labels and for: sin, cos, tan, lim, det, log, ln, e, i, Re, Im

Use bold italic for vectors, eg $\boldsymbol{a} \times \boldsymbol{b} = \boldsymbol{c}$

Units are set in lowercase, even if they are based on someone's name, eg watt, kelvin, volt, celsius

But their abbreviations are capitalised: 100 W, 273 K, 240 V, 100 °C

Note: the keyboard shortcut for the degree symbol in Windows applications is alt 0176 (with NumLock switched on).

5   Publishing issues

Copyright

The right to copy a creative work resides with the originator during his or her lifetime and with the heirs to their estate for 70 years after their death.

If your document includes material sourced from an external publication, then that material will probably require copyright clearance. By 'material', we mean:

♦ text
♦ tables
♦ diagrams
♦ photographs
♦ music
♦ web pages
♦ works of art

You **must** identify **all** material that is not your own — no matter how small or insignificant it may seem, no matter what medium it is in, and no matter what its source.

Using copyright material without obtaining permission could have serious financial consequences for SQA — and damage our reputation.

Please use the SQA Identification of Copyright form, available on the Publishing Portal, and submit it along with your document. If you intend to alter an extract of copyright text, please include the amended version with the Identification of Copyright form.

We will then seek permission to use the copyright item. Clearing copyright can be a lengthy process so please submit all requests for copyright clearance as soon as possible. However, please note that permission is not always obtainable — even for educational publications.

If you're submitting a copyright request for an image, ask yourself whether the image you want to include really adds to the publication.

For more information, please see the Copyright section on the Publishing Portal.

Fair dealing

You may have heard of the term 'fair dealing'. Fair dealing refers to the use of copyright material for:

♦ individual research
♦ private study
♦ criticism and review (eg Jones (2005) suggests that … but research by Smith (2007) has shown that …)

The 'criticism and review' option might be relevant to some SQA publications. The Society of Authors and the Publishers Association have said that:

a single extract of up to 400 words or a series of extracts (of which none exceeds 300 words) to a total of 800 words would usually be regarded as 'fair dealing'.

However, the words **must** be from a prose work, they **must** be acknowledged, and they **must** be quoted in the context of 'criticism or review'. You cannot just lift 400 words from a publication or website and use them because they cover a topic particularly well or because they provide an interesting insight. For more information go to: http://www.societyofauthors.org/publications/quick_guide_permissions/.

Copyright in assessments

The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (c. 48) is clear about the use of copyright material in examinations:

32 (3) Copyright is not infringed by anything done for the purposes of an examination by way of setting the questions, communicating the questions to the candidates or answering the questions.

This does not include assessment exemplars. Assessment exemplars may be used for practice, so our policy is to obtain permission for copyright items used in assessment exemplars and specimen papers.

Wikipedia

Wikipedia is a popular source partly because the content is free to use — but there are conditions that need to be adhered to:

The licenses Wikipedia uses grant free access to our content in the same sense that free software is licensed freely. Wikipedia content can be copied, modified, and redistributed if and only if the copied version is made available on the same terms to others and acknowledgment of the authors of the Wikipedia article used is included (a link back to the article is generally thought to satisfy the attribution requirement; see below for more details). Copied Wikipedia content will therefore remain free under appropriate license and can continue to be used by anyone subject to certain restrictions, most of which aim to ensure that freedom. This principle is known as copyleft in contrast to typical copyright licenses.

Here is the link: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Copyrights

However, that is not all…

You may copy and distribute the Document in any medium, either commercially or noncommercially, provided that this License, the copyright notices, and the license notice saying this License applies to the Document are reproduced in all copies, and that you add no other conditions whatsoever to those of this License. You may not use technical measures to obstruct or control the reading or further copying of the copies you make or distribute.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Text_of_the_GNU_Free_Documentation_License

This means that every publication that includes Wikipedia material must include a copy of the GNU Free Documentation License and that Wikipedia content cannot be used in documents published only on SQA Secure — because access to SQA Secure is controlled.

Google Images

Many writers find Google Images to be a useful source of photographs. However, these images are protected by copyright and we will usually have to seek permission to use them. Even where an image is identified as free for educational use, it does not mean that it can be published without permission.

For more information on Google Images go to:
http://www.google.com/help/faq_images.html

Referencing

You should provide a list of references to books, journals, and websites mentioned in your text to help your readers identify and locate them. You can do this in footnotes, or a bibliography — try to keep your text as uncluttered as possible.

Harvard referencing

SQA uses the Harvard (author, date) system.

In the main text

Give the author's surname, the year of publication, and possibly a page reference in the text, and then list the full reference at the end of your document. For example, a citation in the text might look like:

'Disciplinary procedures should be in writing' (Hannagan, 2002, p302).

or

'Hannagan (2002) says that disciplinary procedures should be in writing.'

In the bibliography

For a book, the reference in a bibliography would then appear as:

<author's surname>, <initials> (year of publication), <title>, <edition (if not the first)>, <place of publication: publisher>, <page number (if relevant)>

 For example:

'Hannagan, T. (2002) Management concepts and practices, 3rd ed, Harlow: Prentice Hall, p39'

A journal article should appear as:

<surname>, <initials> (year of publication) <title of article>, <journal title>, <volume> (issue), <page numbers>

For example:

'Evans, W.A. (1994) Approaches to intelligent information retrieval, Information processing and management, 7 (2), 147–168'

An internet reference should appear as:

<*author's/editor's surname>, <initials> (year) <title>, <place of publication: publisher>. Available from: <URL>

*Note that the author may be an organisation, and place/publisher may not always be ascertainable — provide as much detail as possible. It is also best practice to add [date last accessed] but we will not use this in final publications.

Links to websites can be short-lived, so check that any web links are current at the time of writing. Make sure that any web addresses in your document are converted to working hyperlinks.

For example:

'Academic Services, (2007) BU guide to citation in the Harvard style: brief guide, Poole: Bournemouth University. Available from: http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/library/citing_references/docs/Citing_Refs.pdf [accessed 1 June 2011]'

Diagrams, maps and graphs (line illustrations)

Please provide a clear drawing of each illustration on a separate sheet of A4. The drawings can be basic but should include all the features that you want to appear in the final illustration.

SQA's graphic artists are professionals, but they may not be specialists in your subject. Please therefore annotate your drawings with descriptions and instructions to help them as much as possible, circling any text that is not meant to appear in the final illustration as a label. Remember to number each drawing and indicate its position in the text.

If you wish to supply a photocopy as an artist's reference, please indicate that it is to be used as a reference only. Also, please provide directions to the artist as to how our illustration and labels should be amended to avoid infringing copyright.

If you have the skills to use a drawing program such as Illustrator, please contact the Communications team before you start work to agree file formats and to arrange a trial run. We need to be sure that we can open and work with your completed drawings.

Illustrations can be expensive and time-consuming to prepare. Please try to ensure that any you request contribute to your publication and are not simply 'filler art'.

Photographs

If your document needs photographs, contact the Communications team — there may be a suitable image already on file. Failing that, photographs should be supplied as JPEG files at the highest resolution your camera can work at.

Stock photography websites can be a good source of high-quality images. They are particularly good for images of everyday items and situations. If you need this kind of image for your publication, try browsing http://www.istockphoto.com/index.php. You can collect anything suitable into a 'lightbox' for later reference or click and drag low resolution copies into a Word file. You need to register to use the lightbox facility.

Formatting

Please keep all formatting of any document to a minimum. There's more advice about this on the Publishing Portal under 'Guidelines for producing your publication'.

Contents list

There's no need to provide a contents list, though it's often helpful with a longer document if you can provide a running order. Don't bother to insert the page numbers — we'll deal with this once the document has been edited and laid out.

Index