



Writing for SQA

(A to Z version)

About this guide

Writing for SQA is for everyone in the organisation. Whether you are writing an email, a report, an assessment item, or a web page — this guide is for you.

The topics in the list on the next page are hyperlinks to explanations and examples that we hope you will find helpful. Most of the topics are no more than half a page in length but some extend to a few pages. If you can't find an entry for a particular topic, try using the Find function in the PDF version of this guide.

If you are new to SQA or are using Writing for SQA for the first time, we recommend that you start with:

- ◆ [Writing the name of the organisation](#)
- ◆ [Referring to SQA's qualifications](#)
- ◆ [Plain English](#)

If you have any questions, please email marketing@sqa.org.uk or contact one of SQA's editors.

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This 2022 version of Writing for SQA includes:

- ◆ updated guidance on accessible and inclusive writing, including [guidance on tables](#) and [supporting autistic people](#)
- ◆ advice on use of [ampersands](#)
- ◆ guidance on [setting up your email signature](#)
- ◆ guidance on [page numbering](#) in SQA documents
- ◆ how we should refer to [Next Generation Higher National Qualifications](#) in SQA documents
- ◆ additions to the [preferred spelling checklist](#)
- ◆ guidance on [nested headings](#)

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A or an?

Be guided by pronunciation. Use 'a' before words beginning with 'h', unless the 'h' is silent:

- ◆ a history, a hope, a Higher pass, a hotel
- ◆ an hour, an heir, an honours degree

Before abbreviations

Where the letters are sounded as letters, use 'an' before A, E, F, H, I, L, M, N, O, R, S, and X:

- ◆ an HNC, an HND, an SVQ, an SQA-approved centre

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Abbreviations and acronyms (initialisms)

Initialisms can be useful but too many of them in a document can make your writing hard to follow. Be consistent in the way you use abbreviations — for example, does 'IV' mean internal verifier or internal verification?

Avoid overusing abbreviations — they can make text harder to read for someone who is in a hurry or for someone who is not familiar with our shorthand.

When giving a name that is normally abbreviated to its initials give it in full the first time you use it, followed by the abbreviated form in parentheses (but not in a heading). For example:

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

An acronym is an abbreviation that can be pronounced as a word, for example scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus) or NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization).

Full stops

Full stops mark the ends of sentences. We do not use them in abbreviations or acronyms:

- ◆ BBC, IBM, HIE, UHI, Mr Blair, Dr Foster

See [Eq, ie, etc](#) for more on abbreviations.

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Accessible and inclusive writing

SQA communications, publications and everything else we write (content) should be accessible to everyone and should be written in language that is inclusive.

By 'accessible' we mean being able to physically access our content and being able to understand it. By 'inclusive language' we mean language that does not exclude anyone because of disability, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation. While we should all make every effort to write inclusively, writers and editors should also ensure that this does not affect any technical requirements of our qualifications.

When speaking to an audience, you can often recognise when someone isn't understanding something, and so you can modify or repeat what you are saying. However, if someone reads your text but can't understand it, then your message doesn't get across.

Writing for everyone

Over one in four adults in Scotland experience challenges due to a lack of literacy skills.¹ They can understand short, straightforward texts on familiar topics accurately and independently, and obtain information from everyday sources, but reading information from unfamiliar sources, or on unfamiliar topics, can cause problems.

Here are some things to look out for:

Sentence structure

Keep sentences short and uncomplicated. As far as possible, stick to a limit of one idea or instruction in each sentence. As a general rule, the more complex the information, the simpler the sentence structure should be.

Emphasis

Emphasising important words in **bold** type can help to clarify an instruction. However, this can become distracting if not used with care. It should be used consistently and should only be used when it is clearly helpful. You should avoid the use of italics wherever possible as it can be harder to read than roman text. Bold and italic emphasis will not be picked up by screen readers.

Consistency

If you need to use the same name, phrase or description more than once, be consistent and use the same phrasing or emphasis each time. Using different words to describe the same thing, or using different emphasis on the same word, may confuse some readers.

¹ [Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020: Strategic guidance](#)

Using SQA Normal

We recommend that you use the SQA Normal template to structure your documents. This will provide a consistent structure and make sure that your font, spacing and bullet points are accessible.

Font

For normal text, using arial font will make your document easier to read on screen and scale large or small quite well. For maximum readability, you should use a minimum font size of 11pt.

Bullet points

Sometimes the best way to present information is in a bulleted list. We suggest that you introduce a list with a lead-in phrase or clause followed by a colon, like this:

Bullet-point lists are:

- ◆ easy to read
- ◆ visually striking
- ◆ clean and neat

Tables

If you can navigate all the way through a table using only the Tab key, it should be screen reader accessible.

Some points to bear in mind when creating tables in Word are:

- ◆ avoid nested tables
- ◆ avoid cells that are split, merged or empty
- ◆ don't let rows break across pages
- ◆ if a table spans more than one page, repeat the header row
- ◆ try to keep your table as simple as possible
- ◆ your table should read from left to right

And here are some things to avoid:

The passive voice

Minimise use of the [passive voice](#). The active form is easier to understand.

Verb and/or adverb forms of the equivalent noun forms

Use verb forms rather than the equivalent (but longer) noun forms. For example: 'protect' is easier than 'protection', 'absorb' is easier than 'absorption' and so on.

Ambiguity

Avoid ambiguity — it can be a problem for someone with reading difficulties. Try asking a colleague to check if your meaning is clear.

Metaphors, idioms and jargon

Avoid metaphors, idiom and jargon wherever possible.

A **metaphor** is a word or phrase that says one thing **is** another thing, but it isn't literally true, for example 'It is raining cats and dogs'. An **idiom** is a word or phrase that has informally developed a specific meaning, for example 'off the cuff' and 'jump the gun'. **Jargon** is a special way to use words that is shared only by a certain group of people. Using jargon is often shorter than explaining ourselves, but it can also prevent others from joining in or understanding, for example: 'this candidate has been resulted'.

Many of the above suggestions share common ground with [plain English](#).

Supporting disabled people

People who are disabled face barriers on an everyday basis. This includes prejudice, negative stereotyping, lack of accessible transport, housing and information — and a lack of understanding of their needs and rights. Language can reinforce either positive or negative views of disability and can be linked to the two models of disability.

The **medical model** is the traditional view of disability and sees someone's impairment as the problem. For example, 'the candidate is wheel-chair bound and so cannot use the steps to access the centre'.

The **social model** sees disability as barriers that people experience. For example, 'the centre doesn't have a lift or ramp and so isn't suitable for a candidate who is a wheel-chair user'.

The social model also focuses on the language used when discussing disability and the impact that can have on attitudes. For example, 'the candidate is a wheel-chair user' is more positive than the 'candidate is wheel-chair bound'.

SQA favours the social model of disability. So ...

Do say...	Don't say...
disabled candidates*	the disabled or candidates with disabilities
people living with deafness	people suffering from deafness
non-disabled	able-bodied
has epilepsy	suffers from epilepsy
people with visual impairments; blind people; blind and partially sighted people	the blind
person with a mental health condition	mental patient

*'Disabled people' is the preferred term rather than 'people with disabilities' because it is based on the idea that disability stems from the barriers they face. Disability is an area where language is subject to debate and change. There is often concern as to whether words used are appropriate. Since language is constantly evolving the following is only a guide to what is preferred. It is important to remember that people have the right and choice to describe themselves as they wish.

See [Introduction to the Social and Medical Models of Disability](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk) from www.ombudsman.org.uk for more on this topic.

Ways to help readers who are living with a disability

Offer alternatives

Can you think of any barriers that might restrict your readers from carrying out a task or activity? For example, a task asking an IT candidate to use a mouse to carry out an action causes problems for someone with motor difficulties. Give alternative ways to carry out the task such as using the keyboard. SQA can produce material in audio, braille and other alternative formats for customers who are unable to access the standard formats (see the [assessment arrangements pages](#) of SQA's website). When a braille question paper is requested for the exam diet we publish it on our website afterwards as a past paper.

Be aware that your reader may be using a screen reader

Screen readers were invented to help people with visual loss but they are often used for supportive reading where a learner tries to read the text on-screen at the same time.

[JAWs](#) is an example of a screen reader used by those with severe visual impairment, but note that the [Scottish Voice](#) offers a text reader with voices in a Scottish accent.

Pictures

Only use images that complement the written text. Try not to rely solely on pictures to explain a particular point — someone using a screen reader could be disadvantaged. You must give any images a visual description as alternative text. In Word, right-click (if using a mouse) on your picture and choose 'Format Picture', then go to the tab called 'Layout & Properties' and enter the description under 'Alt Text'.

You should not exclusively use images as a navigation device, or to convey information. If you use images, you should also provide a text equivalent.

Colour

People with a visual stress issue can find that the use of coloured glasses, overlays or paper can improve reading fluency, comfort, comprehension, attention and concentration. However, someone using colour in this way could run into problems if colour is used in the original document. One solution is to include a numerical key together with colour.

Similarly, people who are colour-blind may need support in accessing a document that includes these red or green colours.

Be aware also that any meaning that colour is used to convey could be inadvertently lost if a document is printed in black and white.

Use Word styles

Use the 'Styles' function to apply heading styles in Microsoft Word. This will make the text accessible to someone using a screen reader.

[How to use Word styles](#)

Phrases to avoid

Never use 'click here' if you are supplying text for a web page. In fact, you should avoid using the word 'click' in general, as it assumes the reader is using a mouse to navigate the site. The same goes for phrases like 'use the box on the right' — screen readers and some specially configured browsers do not present content in columns, so the statement would not make sense to the person reading or hearing it.

Instead of 'click here', try to make your link text meaningful. For example:

'You can find more on [inclusive language](#) on the UK Government website Gov.uk' or '[See Gov.uk for more on inclusive language.](#)'

Guidelines for web accessibility

SQA's website, and all our web services, follow the [W3 Consortium guidelines for web accessibility](#), aiming for 'AA' standard.

[W3.org web accessibility quick reference guide](#)

[SQA's website accessibility page](#)

Supporting autistic people

Although a 'person-first' description is often seen as best practice, many autistic people prefer to be described as an 'autistic person', rather than a 'person with autism'. Surveys around the topic substantiate this view, including recent research (March 2022) that states that over 75 per cent of autistic people prefer this term. We recommend using this 'identity-first' approach when describing autistic people in your writing for SQA.

Supporting people who are from different cultures or whose first language isn't English

Only refer to people's religious or racial heritage if it is relevant to the point you are making. If this is the case, refer to 'family origin'. Be accurate: consider the difference in meaning between 'he is Pakistani' and 'he is British, of Pakistani origin'.

Describing people by their skin colour is only pertinent in a very few situations. The terms BME (black and minority ethnic) or BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) were common in 2020, but be aware that [they are not universally approved of](#). Be accurate and be respectful.

It is best to avoid metaphors, idioms and jargon when your audience includes people whose first language isn't English. Not because they lack literacy skills: they simply may not have come across your figure of speech before.

Also, be aware that many different languages are spoken in Scotland. Over 40 different languages are spoken by the pupils at Shawlands Academy.

Lastly, it is important to be aware that many deaf people regard [British Sign Language](#) as their first language (around 145,000 people in 2011).

Gender identity and sexual orientation

Aim to use gender-neutral language consistently throughout your writing. Avoid using 'he/she' and 'his/her' to denote uncertainty. Use 'they' and 'them'.

Remember that sexual orientation is different from gender and gender identity:

- ◆ Sexual orientation is about who you are attracted to.
- ◆ Gender identity is about who you are.
- ◆ In the Equality Act, sex can mean either male or female, or a group of people like men or boys, or women or girls.
- ◆ Stonewall uses LGBT. Our Rainbow Network has indicated they prefer LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer or questioning, intersex and others).

The terms 'homosexual', 'bisexual' and 'transsexual' are, according to Stonewall, regarded as outdated. Avoid 'straight' and other euphemisms.

If you aren't sure — ask! Promoting equality is something SQA takes very seriously. [SQA's equality home page](#)

Links

[UK government guidelines when writing about disability](#)

[Stonewall glossary of terms](#)

[Equality and Human Rights Commission advice on sex discrimination](#)

Further reading

[Writing Around the World: A Guide to Writing Across Cultures](#) by Matthew McCool

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Ampersands

Always use 'and' instead of an ampersand '&', except in:

- ◆ company names, for example Marks & Spencer, Tiffany & Co.
- ◆ widely accepted abbreviations, for example Q&A, R&D
- ◆ titles of books, TV shows, movies and songs where an ampersand is already used, for example Eats, Shoots & Leaves, Law & Order
- ◆ academic references, to cite sources in brackets with more than one author, for example Johnston, Ferguson, & Mete, 2021)

You can use ampersands to show that an 'and' is part of a listed item's name and not a separator, for example 'rock, pop, rhythm & blues, and hip hop'.

Apostrophes

Apostrophes have two functions:

- ◆ They indicate possession, as in:
'Overall, **candidates**' results in this subject show much improvement.'
- ◆ They show that a letter (or more than one) has been missed out, as in:
'I very much regret that I **didn't** respond to your email.'

Apostrophes are never used to show that a noun is plural (this is known as the greengrocer's apostrophe), as in:

- ◆ apple's and pear's 45p
- ◆ room's 24 and 25

The plural form of SVQ is SVQs, **not** SVQ's.

Difficult apostrophes

These are the rules on when to use **'s** [apostrophe s] and when to use **s'** [s apostrophe] in cases that can cause confusion:

Singular words that end in the letter **s** take **'s** [apostrophe s] in the possessive:

- ◆ this chair is my boss's
- ◆ James's wombat
- ◆ the princess's didgeridoo

Their plurals take **s'** [s apostrophe]:

- ◆ bosses' cars
- ◆ the candidates' evidence is assessed and verified on an ongoing basis

Plurals that don't end in **s** take **'s** [apostrophe s] in the possessive:

- ◆ children's books
- ◆ sheep's clothing

It's very difficult, especially when you're in a hurry, to get all of your *its* and *it's* right. Use **its** when you mean the possessive and use **it's** when you mean 'it is'.

- ◆ Every dog has its day.
- ◆ It's a disaster!

No apostrophe

There is no apostrophe in the name of a decade:

- ◆ the **2020s** not the **2020's**

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Appendices

An appendix is a useful home for something that you think is helpful to understanding your text, but for which there is no room inside the text. It might, for instance, take up too much room, or it might disrupt the flow of what you are saying if you were to put it in the body of the text.

However, appendices have their disadvantages.

First, if your readers need to read the information in an appendix before they can understand what you are saying, they will find themselves continually flicking backwards and forwards between the appendix and the text.

Secondly, if they don't need to have the information that is in the appendix, they may well ignore it altogether.

Before adding an appendix to your document ask yourself if what you are proposing is really so important. After all, if it were that important, you would want to put it in the main body of the text.

The sorts of thing you might want to put in an appendix include:

- ◆ health and safety requirements
- ◆ a list of legislation that has a bearing on what you have said
- ◆ statistics, included for the reader's interest
- ◆ a list of other publications to read
- ◆ forms that your readers might need to copy and use (though worked examples are, as a rule, better included with the text)

Appendices do have a role, but they can be overused. Exercise caution if you're considering adding an appendix to your document.

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Audience

Deciding who you are writing for is one of the most important aspects of writing. You might have several audiences in mind but which is the main one? Ideally, once you have decided on your primary audience you should state explicitly what it is and then address that audience directly. This will allow you to [prefer the active voice over the passive voice](#) — which almost always makes your text clearer for your reader.

If you have more than one audience and neither has priority, say learners and teachers, then perhaps you should consider separate documents for each audience.

If that is not feasible you may find it helpful to think about three categories of text within a single document:

- ◆ common text that meets the needs of both audiences
- ◆ detail for learners — make this clear in headings
- ◆ detail for teachers — again, make this clear in headings

The size of each category depends on your particular document.

Another approach could be to build explanations into your text so that the needs of both audiences can be met — but you need to be careful that you don't alienate your primary audience with unnecessary detail. You might be able to avoid that last objection by hyperlinking to explanatory text elsewhere, but overuse of this technique can make things too awkward for your less knowledgeable readers.

See the [Clear and Confident Writing SQA Academy course](#) for more on audience.

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Brackets

Brackets can be round (), square [], curly {}, or angled <>.

Oxford recommends using round brackets for digressions, explanations, cross-references, and references; and retaining square brackets for when you want to supplement original text. At SQA, we usually only use curly and angled brackets in STEM subjects.

Try to avoid setting brackets within brackets in regular text, but if you need to then it is OK to use round within round (like this (yes, really)).

Punctuation

The rules for punctuation between brackets are the same as for punctuation within quotation marks:

- ◆ A complete sentence inside brackets within another sentence does not take an initial capital or a full stop.
- ◆ A complete sentence within brackets that is not part of another sentence takes an initial capital and ends with a full stop within the brackets.

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Bullets

Bullet-point lists are:

- ◆ easy to read
- ◆ visually striking
- ◆ clean and neat

To capitalise or not to capitalise ...

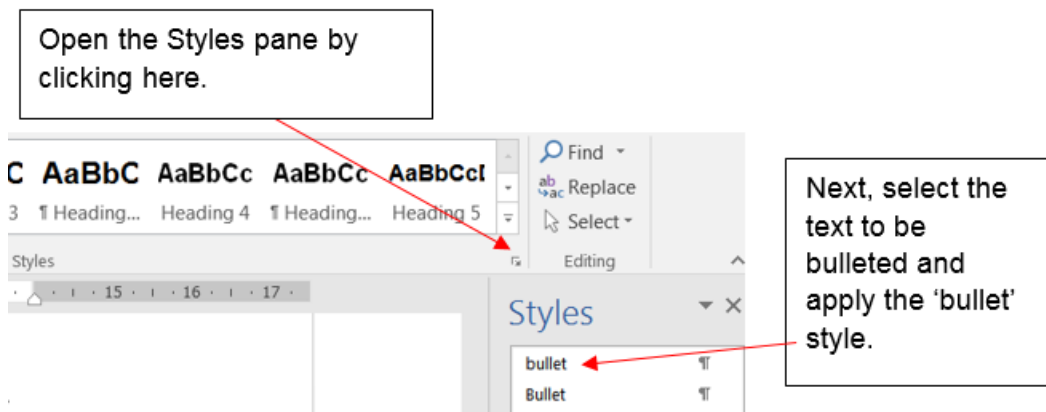
Bullet points should not be capitalised when they are incomplete sentences that cannot be read on their own without the stem. In this case, they should not finish with commas or semi-colons. (The statement 'Bullet-point lists are:' is the stem of the list in the example above.)

Bullets should be capitalised, and end with full stops, when the text forms a complete sentence that can exist on its own. For example:

'There are numerous benefits of using bullet points:

- ◆ They are useful for lists, allowing the reader to determine the main points easily.
- ◆ They break up long sections of text. This will help improve the readability of the document.'

How to format a bullet-point list



If you are using the SQA Normal template, this will set a diamond bullet as shown in the examples on this page.

If you need to have a sub-list of bullets, use the 'Second order bullet' style in the Styles pane. This will give you a long dash (technically, an em dash) as a bullet.

‘Bullet-point lists are:

- ◆ easy to read
 - each point starts on a new line
 - there is no unnecessary detail to absorb’

For Mathematics, use a square bullet for second-order bullets to avoid any possible confusion with minus signs.

For Computing, use a circle if a third-order bullet is needed.

We recommend that you restructure your text to avoid third-order bullets if possible.

Grammatical sense

A list of bullets should also make grammatical sense: decide whether the bulleted text should continue your original sentence or start a new one, and stick with your decision.

For example, here’s how the bullets at the top of this section should **not** look:

‘Bullet points are:

- ◆ easy to read
- ◆ they are striking, visually
- ◆ bullet points are clean and neat’

Bullet points are a useful way of making text stand out on the page, but you also have to be wary of overusing them — too many bullet points can make text harder to read. If you have more than three separate sets of bullets on a page (that is, bullets in more than three paragraphs) it may be time for a rethink.

[Oxford Dictionaries on bullet points](#)

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Can or may?

If you want to say that it is possible for candidates to be assessed by examination, don't say 'candidates may be assessed by examination' unless you're giving people permission (which implies to the reader that you are in a position of authority and superiority). 'May' can also express a vague possibility, as in 'it may rain this afternoon, or it may not'.

'Can' expresses simple capability, and is almost always the word you want. So say 'candidates can be assessed by examination' or 'you can contact our Customer Contact Centre on ...'

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Capital letters

SQA's rule for when to use capitals, and when not, is:

- ◆ if it is the title of a specific person or thing, it takes title case
- ◆ if it's a more general name, it doesn't

Title case means initial capitals on main words only; **sentence case** means an initial cap on the first word; and **lower case** means no capitals at all. Most of the time, we use lower case.

As well as words that take capitals in everyday English (such as the names of people and places), things that always need capitals when we're writing for SQA are:

- ◆ names of qualifications
- ◆ unit and course titles
- ◆ the name of the subject of an SQA qualification
- ◆ publication titles (but not types of publication)

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

See [SQA's Guide to Using Capital Letters](#) for detailed guidance and examples.

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Clear and Confident Writing course

The [Clear and Confident Writing course on SQA Academy](#) consists of six 30-minute modules:

- ◆ Using Plain English
- ◆ Know your Audience
- ◆ Tone of Voice
- ◆ Editing and Proofreading
- ◆ Corporate Horror
- ◆ Plain English in Practice

These topics are covered in Writing for SQA, but the interactive SQA Academy course provides more detail along with activities to help ensure our writing is clear and concise for our target audiences.

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Colons and semi-colons

Colons

There are two uses for a colon. The first is to introduce a list of things: group awards, courses, units, and performance criteria, for instance. The second is to link two phrases of equal weight in one sentence, where there is an idea of progression: as there is here.

You can also use an em dash in these circumstances, for example:

- ◆ The letter was brilliant: it used plain English and was easy to read.
- ◆ The letter was brilliant — it used plain English and was easy to read.

You should not use a colon if you already use ‘include/including’ to indicate that further information will follow. In the example below both are used, which is incorrect.

‘There should be an awareness of the main historical characters: including Kenneth McAlpin, Macbeth and Duncan ...’

It should read:

‘There should be an awareness of the main historical characters, including Kenneth McAlpin, Macbeth and Duncan ...’

Semi-colons

Semi-colons are used to distinguish between the items in a list where it would be confusing to do so by using simple commas, as in this example:

‘SQA works in partnership with education, business and government to ensure that its qualifications are: relevant to the needs of students and employers; flexible enough to adapt to changing economic circumstances and technological change; and recognised throughout the UK, Europe, and beyond.’

If you find yourself using a sentence like this, though, it is almost always better to use a list of bullets instead.

Semicolons also join connected ideas in a sentence, often replacing the word ‘and’ or ‘but’:

I spent two hours doing the sum; I couldn’t work it out.

Don’t use a colon followed by a hyphen (:-).

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Copyright

This is a quick reference guide that aims to address the most important aspects of the [Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988](#).

If you require more detailed information on the use of copyright and trademarks, please refer to [SQA's Copyright Guidelines](#).

What does copyright protect?

Copyright is an intellectual property right which can subsist in literary works, dramatic works, musical works, artistic works, films, sound recordings, broadcasts, and typographical arrangements of published editions.

How long does copyright last?

Copyright in a literary, dramatic, musical or artistic work (including a photograph) generally lasts until 70 years after the death of the author (or from the date of creation/public release for anonymous works). Different periods of copyright can apply to different types of work.

Who is the copyright owner?

The author of a work is the first owner of any copyright in it, except where the work is made by an employee in the course of their employment, in which case the employer is the first owner (subject to any agreement to the contrary).

What is fair dealing?²

'Fair dealing' is a legal term used to establish whether a use of copyright material is lawful or whether it infringes copyright. There is no statutory definition of fair dealing — it will always be a matter of fact, degree and impression in each case.

For copying to constitute an infringement of copyright, it must involve the use of a substantial part of the protected work. Whether the part used is substantial is measured qualitatively (not quantitatively). This is a matter of fact which will vary from case to case. In some cases, a newspaper headline or a famous line from a book or song could be regarded as a substantial part.

Factors that have been identified by the courts as relevant in determining whether a particular dealing with a work is fair, include:

- ◆ Does using the work affect the market for the original work? If a use of a work acts as a substitute for it, causing the owner to lose revenue, then it is not likely to be fair.
- ◆ Is the amount of the work taken reasonable and appropriate? Was it necessary to use the amount that was taken? Usually only part of a work may be used.

² Source: Intellectual Property Office Online (2014) *Exceptions to copyright: Guidance for creators and copyright owners* www.gov.uk/ipo

Dashes

Dashes have two similar uses:

- ◆ You can put an explanatory phrase — like this one — in long dashes (technically called em dashes) in the middle of a sentence. You can't, though, use more than one pair of dashes in a sentence. You can use brackets instead of dashes.
- ◆ You can link two equally important phrases with a long dash where you don't want to start a new sentence — much as you might use a colon. It is better to use a long dash than a colon in these circumstances.

Two possible keyboard shortcuts for a long dash are:

- ◆ Alt 0151 using the numeric keypad with 'Num Lock' switched on, or
- ◆ Alt Ctrl Minus sign (on the numeric keypad)

Two possible keyboard shortcuts for a short dash are:

- ◆ Alt 0150 using the numeric keypad with 'Num Lock' switched on, or
- ◆ Ctrl Minus sign (on the numeric keypad)

See [Range of years](#) and [Numbers](#) for when to use a short dash or en dash.

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Dates and time

Dates should not include an ordinal suffix (in other words no **1st**, **2nd**, **3rd**). Our style for dates is <day number> <month> <year>: 1 June 2020. A way to remember this is to remember that the units of time start small (1) on the left, and end up big (2020) on the right.

Ensure dates appear in one line and are not separated by a line break. For example, writing '1 June 2020' would be fine, whereas writing something like '1 June 2020' isn't as straightforward to read and could disrupt the flow of a reader.

Our style for times is the twelve-hour clock with 'am' or 'pm'. Give the value in figures separated by a stop and with a space before 'am' or 'pm', as in these examples:

- ◆ 'I suggest we meet at my office at 12.30 pm on 23 May. Please let me know whether this is suitable.
- ◆ If it is not suitable, I'll also be available on 26 May from 10 am to 1 pm and from 2–3 pm.'

Note: there is no need to include zeroes if the time is on the hour.

24-hour clock

If you are working on a STEM document and need to adhere to ISO 8601 then use the 24-hour clock with a colon separator. For example: 'The next assessment is at 14:30.'

Range of years

If you have to give a range of years (for instance if you're talking about an academic session), use a short dash, and miss out the first two characters if they're the same in both dates. So, 2019–20, but 1990–2020.

Alternatively, you can use 'from' and 'to' to show the range, as in 'from 2019 to 2020'; but you mustn't mix the two methods as in 'from 2019–2020'.

Two keyboard shortcuts for a short dash are Ctrl Minus sign (on the numeric keypad) or Alt 0150 (with Num Lock switched on).

Seasons of the year

There's no need to give an initial capital to the names of the seasons — spring, summer, autumn or winter — unless they are occurring as part of the proper name of something, for example *Summer Lightning*, *The Lion in Winter*. In ordinary use, lower case is better, for example 'let's discuss this again in the spring'.[\[Back\]](#)

eg, ie, NB, etc

The Government's digital service (GOV.UK) has started to [remove Latin abbreviations such as 'eg', 'ie', NB and 'etc' from its web pages](#) because they make reading difficult for some readers and can confuse screen readers.

We are also now following this approach and in main text suggest replacing 'eg' with 'for example', 'ie' with 'that is', and 'NB' with 'Note:'. However, for tables where space is limited we'd suggest the continued use of 'eg' and 'ie'.

Both 'eg' and 'ie', if you choose to use them, should follow a dash — eg like this — or a comma, ie like this, or should appear in brackets. You shouldn't give them full points — ie don't use 'i.e.'.

If you need to use an abbreviation for 'and so on', you should write 'etc' (not &c. or etc.).

You should, though, use 'etc' with caution — don't just put one in to be on the safe side, or when you can't think of anything else to go in the list. Have a real reason for it.

You must also avoid using more than one of these abbreviations in any clause — you should never write:

eg English, French, German, Gaelic, etc

Write:

English, French, German, Gaelic, etc

or:

eg English, French, German, Gaelic

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our Centre News updates. Please contact communications@sqa.org.uk to discuss your requirements.

Signing-off

If you were writing a letter and you had opened it with 'Dear colleague' the traditional sign-off would be 'Yours faithfully' but is there any need to use such an archaic term in an email? Well, as always, it depends on who you are writing to, but in most business emails you can probably drop it altogether. However, don't just finish your message without some form of sign-off. Try to say something that reflects the content of your email, but if that is not feasible, you could try 'Thank you' or 'Regards' or 'Hope you find this helpful'.

You should always sign-off emails with your name. This is important even if you are responding from a team mailbox because it lets your customer or colleague know who has actually attended to their query and who they should contact if they need to phone. They may also want to thank you personally.

PS — you can use a 'post script' if you want to draw attention to something that you've already mentioned or to provide further information.

Email signatures

An email signature provides valuable information and looks professional and trustworthy. Here is an example of what you should include:

Your name

Your business area

Your directorate

t: phone no | **m:** mobile no | **e:** [email](#) address | **w:** <http://www.sqa.org.uk>

Scottish Qualifications Authority

Lowden, 24 Wester Shawfair, Dalkeith, Midlothian, EH22 1FD

The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow, G2 8DQ

To create an email signature in Outlook:

- 1 Open a new email message.
- 2 On the Message menu, select Signature, then Signatures.
- 3 Under Select signature to edit, choose New, and in the New Signature dialogue box, type a name for your signature.
- 4 Under Edit signature, create your email signature.

Further reading

[The Essential Guide to Crafting a Work Email](#) (Harvard Business Review)

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Emphasis

Keep emphasis to a minimum or you won't be able to see the wood for the trees. If you want to emphasise text in a professional document — use **bold**, not *italic* or underline — AND DON'T USE CAPITALS because it means you are shouting at your reader. You can also use bold to highlight new terms in learning and teaching materials. Don't use underlining to emphasise text, as screen readers won't be able to read it.

Don't use italic if you are writing web page text — italic text is harder to read on screen.

You can remove the need to use italics for emphasis by using short sentences and placing important information at the beginning of a paragraph (frontloading). This will make your text more accessible to people using screen readers.

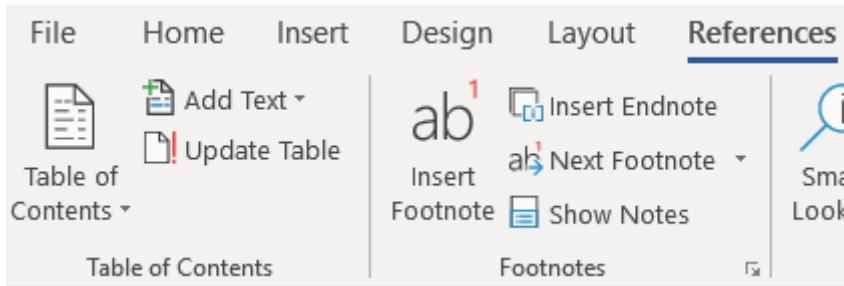
It is important to note that italics are not good practice for web copy and will be removed before publication.

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Footnotes

Avoid giving footnotes in any piece of writing that is for public consumption. Footnotes can appear intimidating, so it is better to give whatever information you want to convey in the body of your text and, if possible, limit footer text to version and page numbers.

If you have to use a footnote, go to the References tab in Word and select Insert Footnote. Your footnotes should be the same font size as your body text.



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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.

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-ise or ize?

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.

'Analyse' also takes an 's', not a 'z'.

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Its or it's?

The difference between **its** and **it's** is that **its** is possessive, and **it's** is a short form of **it is**.

- ◆ The one thing about Scotland I don't like is its weather.
- ◆ Oh look, it's raining again.

Beware of situations where these two are easily confused:

- ◆ The great thing about the SVQ is its adaptability.
- ◆ The great thing about the SVQ is that it's adaptable.

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Jargon

Highly specialised language with many technical terms is not always easy to avoid, but there are steps you can take to minimise the bafflement readers feel. There may be other words for 'articulate' (in the specialised sense in which we use it) and for 'implementation'. Please try to find alternatives.

We also have a tendency to say things like 'the entering of candidates for examinations' when we could just as easily say 'entering candidates for examinations'. Avoid this sort of construction, because it can seem pompous and mystifying.

Don't write ...	the recording of evidence the entering of candidates the implementation of SQA qualifications the use of
Do write ...	recording evidence entering candidates implementing SQA qualifications using

[Plain English Campaign's 'A to Z of alternative words'](#)

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Mathematics

Use MathType to set equations in Microsoft Word.

If you don't have access to MathType, 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: $x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$ <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, for example $ax^2 + bx + c = 0$. This also holds for superscripts and subscripts, for example $a_n = 1$ for $n = 1, 3, 5 \dots$

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

Use bold, non-italic Times New Roman for vectors, for example $\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b} = \mathbf{c}$

Please leave a single space either side of an operator such as + or ×.

Units are set in lower case, even if they are based on someone's name, for example watt, kelvin, volt and their abbreviations are capitalised: 100 W, 273 K, 240 V. But note the temperature unit 'degree Celsius' (°C) contains a capital letter — see BSI (2013) *Quantities and units*, BS EN ISO 80000-1:2013 (page 26).

Please either use Insert > Symbol for multiplication signs and degree symbols or use the keyboard shortcuts below. Don't use the letter 'x' or superscript 'o'.

Keyboard shortcuts

First make sure that Num Lock on your numerical key pad is switched on. Then holding down the Alt key, type the four-digit codes on the numerical key pad.

Raised decimal point	·	Alt 0183
multiplication sign	×	Alt 0215
division sign	÷	Alt 0247
minus sign (en dash)	–	Alt 0150
degree symbol	°	Alt 0176

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Money, weights and measures

Money

The pound sign (£) and the pence sign (p) must never be used at the same time. Use £0.84 or 84p — but keep to one style within a document.

There must always be two digits after the decimal point, unless there are no pence, when the amount can be typed like this: £7.

This rule also applies to the euro and cent, the US dollar and cent, and all other currencies.

Weights and measures

Insert a space between the number and the unit of measurement, for example:

- ◆ 25 mm
- ◆ 89 g
- ◆

Percentages

Use either 25% or 25 per cent — but keep to one style within a document.

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Nouns

Collective nouns

Words such as Government, Scottish Enterprise or HM Inspectorate sometimes look as if they're plural, but we treat them as singular. So, for instance, you should say:

'the Government is doing this' not 'the Government are doing this'.

The same is true for 'SQA':

'SQA is responsible for ...' not 'SQA are responsible for ...' (though, of course, you can say 'we are responsible for ...')

Nouns as adjectives

Please try not to use nouns as adjectives. In the phrase 'candidate evidence judgement record', every word is a noun, as is every word in 'school curriculum unit information pack'.

At best, this sort of construction is unattractive. At worst, it can be confusing, or even incomprehensible. This is because there are several possible ways for readers to guess the meaning. Is a 'candidate evidence judgement record' a record of candidates' judgements about evidence, a record of judgements about evidence of candidates, a record of judgements about candidates' evidence, or a record of evidence judgements about candidates? Are some, or all, of these the same? It takes unnecessary time and effort to work this out.

The best thing to do is to try to break up the string of nouns. This may involve using a couple of extra words here and there, but you will find that the sense you want to convey comes across more clearly. The two examples we gave earlier would be better given as: 'a record of judgements of candidates' evidence' and 'an information pack for schools on units in the curriculum'.

Nouns as verbs

Similarly, try to avoid turning nouns into verbs, which can also be confusing. For instance, instead of 'mainstreaming e-assessment', try 'making e-assessment mainstream'.

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Numbered lists

Use the following format. It is similar to that used for question papers but with smaller spacing:

- 1 Use arabic numbering with no point and a tab of 0.63 mm.
 - (a) Use letters with opening and closing brackets for sublists. Indent, tabs and hanging indent are 0.63 mm.
 - (i) Sub-sublists use lower case roman numbers with opening and closing brackets. Indent is 1.27. Tabs and hanging indent are 0.63 mm.

Please avoid using the auto-numbering function in Word — insert your numbers manually. This is especially important for headings, and even more important if you are including any cross-references. The reason for this is that auto-numbering falls off as soon as we change the paragraph style or paragraph attributes (as we often do while editing), and doesn't import into typesetting applications (such as InDesign).

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Numbers

The rules for giving numbers in non-science subjects are:

- ◆ The numbers one to nine should be written out in full, as they have been here unless they are part of a series of numerical data (see below).
- ◆ The numbers 10 and above should be given as figures. If numbers less than 10 and more than 10 appear together in the one sentence, make them all figures.
- ◆ Use figures in tables and equations.
- ◆ For numerical data, always give exact amounts in figures — this applies to money, quantities, and time, as well as to the credit value of a qualification, or its level.
- ◆ For STEM subjects, set four-digit numbers close up without a comma (like this: 1500). And set numbers with five digits or more with a thin space (6 pt) in place of a comma separator (for example: 50 000). One way to set a thin space is to key the number 2009 where you want the space to appear, then select the 2009 and key Alt + X. You might want to then copy the space and paste it into other instances.
- ◆ Use the comma separator for all other subjects and non-science contexts (for example: 1,500 or 15,000 or 150,000).
- ◆ At the beginning of a sentence, always either write the number out in full, even if it is greater than 10, or recast the sentence. Recasting the sentence is the better option for numbers that are greater than 100. Marks are an exception: they are always written using figures — even if they appear at the start of a sentence.

Do say ...	Don't say ...
'Results have shown improvement this year. Thirty-one candidates achieved grade C.'	'Results have shown improvement this year. 31 candidates achieved grade C.'
'The number of candidates achieving grade C was 31,607'.	'Thirty-one thousand six hundred and seven candidates achieved grade C'.

Note that compound numbers written out in text (thirty-one, sixty-seven, and so on) should be hyphenated.

To show a range of values, use a short dash with no space between the figures (for example 3–15 curriculum, 100–150 candidates). The keyboard shortcut for a short dash is Alt 0150. (You need to have Num Lock on.) Note that a short dash is slightly longer than a hyphen, which has its own key.

Decimal points are on the line, not raised.

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Obliques

The oblique symbol (also known as a solidus, stroke or forward slash) is often used to denote alternatives, for example:

‘Tea/coffee will be available at 3.00 pm.’

But does the oblique mean ‘and’ or ‘or’, or both?

Traditionally, it has meant ‘or’, but it is best to make your meaning clear by using ‘or’, ‘and’ or ‘and/or’.

If possible, you should reword your text to avoid using an oblique. For example, you could replace ‘written and/or oral recorded evidence’ with ‘written or oral recorded evidence or both’.

Dates

Obliques are sometimes used in dates (for example: 2019/20) but SQA house style is to use en dashes (as in 2019–20). See [Dashes](#) for more on this topic.

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Page numbering

Pages in SQA documents should be numbered consecutively 1, 2, 3, etc. Do not use the style 'Page 1 of 22, Page 2 of 22'. Page numbers should be inserted in Word as follows:

- 1 Select Insert > Page Number, and then choose the location and style you want (Bottom of page, Plain number 3).
- 2 If you don't want a page number to appear on the first page, select Different First Page.
- 3 If you want numbering to start with 1 on the second page, go to Page Number > Format Page Numbers, and set Start at to 0.
- 4 When you're done, select Close Header and Footer or press Esc.

Page numbering in SQA documents should be right sided and 11pt font size.

Phone numbers

Put a space between the area code (for example 0141 or 0131) and the next three digits, then another after those, for example 0141 278 1000 or 0131 561 1000.

For mobile phone numbers, where there's no area code as such, insert a space after the first five digits to leave a group of six to the right.

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Photographs

If you are providing photographs for a document, please supply 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 [Shutterstock](#). You can collect anything suitable into a 'lightbox' for later reference or select and drag low-resolution copies into a Word file. You need to register to use the lightbox facility.

Note: there are different accounts in use across the organisation. Speak to Procurement to find out if your business area already has an account.

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Plain English

Plain English is about writing clearly and concisely with your reader in mind. It allows you to say what you mean, in a way people will understand.

Using plain English is also part of promoting equality, because by writing in a simple and straightforward way, we're not (deliberately) excluding anyone. It allows us to fulfil our duties to abide by equalities legislation.

Plain English is an ideal way to demonstrate the 'enabling' and 'trusted' parts of our corporate values.

Use short sentences

Express one idea, simply, then stop. Don't try to cram too many ideas in one sentence. Break down what you have to say into smaller bits, and express each bit as a separate sentence.

If you find that you are writing many sentences which contain more than 30 words, it is likely that your readers are going to find them confusing.

Addressing readers

As you write, think about your reader and how you can make the document useful for them. Make it clear who you are writing to in the subject line or introduction then address your target reader as 'you' throughout the text.

Do say...	'Don't say...
'You should keep candidates' work for verification.'	'Centres should keep candidates' work for verification.'

If it's something you wouldn't consider saying in speech, then don't write it down.

Prefer active to passive

Try to mostly use an **active construction**, that is, one where **A** does **B**:

'The teacher (A) spoke to the class (B).'

A passive construction is one in which **B** is done by **A**:

'The class (B) was spoken to by the teacher (A).'

There are, of course, some things that are better expressed as passives. You can use the passive voice to avoid placing blame or to soften a statement. For example:

'...the invoice for this event has not been paid' may produce a more positive reply than '...you didn't pay our invoice'.

But passives do depersonalise text and make it seem very remote from the reader. The more passives there are in a text, the more this is reinforced. The effect this has is to give readers the impression that we are bureaucratic and distant (which is not the way we are at all).

Do say...	Don't say...
'We decided ...'	'It has been decided ...'
'We recommend ...'	'It is recommended ...'

Similarly, avoid constructions like 'centres are advised ...'.

More on active and passive

Find out more about how to write in plain English from the [Plain English Campaign](#) and from the Plain English module of the [SQA Academy Clear and Confident Writing course](#).

See our [equalities web page](#).

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Planning and structure

The first thing to think about is 'Who is going to read my document?' As you go through the planning, writing and editing process, think about your **target reader** and how you can make the document useful for them.

Secondly, consider the **purpose** of your document — why your reader will use it. It could be to report, to inform, to explain, to ask, or to persuade.

Thirdly, what do you want your reader to do with the information you are giving them? In other words, what will be the **impact** of the document? For example, it may be to adopt a product, to implement or explain a new policy, to plan the content of lessons, or to carry out assessment according to revised procedures.

Planning

It might help you if you think of what you have to say as a story. Imagine yourself explaining whatever it is you're writing about to an audience and having to make them follow your line of thought. It might help to number your points to check that they follow one another in a logical order.

The plan you make will probably form the basis of your sections when you come to write. Here's an example of a plan for a fictitious publication for learners, the Guide for the Group Award in Picture Framing:

- 1 Introduction: who the guide is for
- 2 An explanation of the units, their purpose and structure
- 3 What you will need to do the group award
- 4 What will happen when you do the group award
- 5 How to gather evidence
- 6 How to record evidence
- 7 What happens next
- 8 What you can do after you've done the qualification
- 9 More information/contacts

If you find you can't write a plan like this, you're probably not yet ready to write your document. You will have to sit down and think again, or ask for advice.

Sections (or chapters)

Long documents should be divided into self-contained sections. You should use each section to say everything you have to say about an aspect of your subject matter. If you are writing a section on, for instance, assessment instruments, don't let what you have to say about assessment instruments spill over into your section on verification.

Similarly, you mustn't repeat chunks of text from one section in another. It may well be, for instance, that what you've said in your portfolio-building section about the amount of evidence needed in a portfolio has a bearing on internal verification, but that is no reason to quote it in full. Use a reference — for example 'see page xx', or 'see section 13, 'Building a portfolio''.

Subsections

Sections of a document can be divided into subsections. For instance, you might have a section on Core Skills in your guide for teachers for Higher Latin, and each of the five Core Skills could have its own subsection.

Numbering subsections or paragraphs can be useful for referring readers to particular bits of your document, but it also gives documents a very bureaucratic feel. A better and friendlier way to enable readers to find their way to the bit they want to look up, if they're interested in recording evidence, for instance, is to have a subheading saying 'recording evidence' and a listing on the contents page.

Don't number your paragraphs or subsections like this:

1
1.1
1.2 etc

unless it is in, for example, a committee paper or an agenda.

Reading what you are writing

Almost as important as having a plan is reading what you have written. Once you have started, go back as often as you like and look at what you have said. Particularly, look for places where you have repeated yourself, or where you have contradicted yourself.

If you have a clear idea of what you have already said, you will minimise the risk of getting confused. This will save editing time, and help you keep down the number of words you use.

If you need advice on planning and structuring a particular document, contact SQA's editors at marketing@sqa.org.uk.

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Plural(s) or singular(s)

Try to avoid using '(s)' when you're talking about something that could be either singular or plural. It can be a useful shorthand in a simple list of bullet points, but most of what we write is made up of sentences, with verbs and so on. One problem with using (s) is that the verb or verbs you're using won't agree with the subject of the sentence. For instance, the sentence:

'Check that your label(s) are attached as shown in the diagram.'

can be read as 'Check that your label are attached ...', which is a grammatical error of the kind that makes us look silly and causes complaints. To make this correct, you'd need to write:

'Check that your label(s) is (are) attached as shown in the diagram.'

Worse, it can make the sentence unnecessarily hard to understand — and that's especially true when there are lots of instances of '(s)':

'Check that your candidate(s) has (have) submitted his or her (their) script(s) and not his or her (their) rough working sheet(s).'

It's best to choose either singular or plural and stick to it — in the vast majority of cases the meaning will be clear. If you really need to specify that there can be one or more of the thing you're talking about, try recasting your sentence so that you can use an expression like 'one or more'. Most of the time, though, this isn't necessary.

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Quotation marks

Always use single quotes (') when citing speech or quoting from a text. Double quotes (") can only be used for quotes within quotes, like this:

'So I said to him, "What do you think you're doing?" and I meant it, I can tell you.'

You are unlikely to need to use this sort of construction often when writing for SQA.

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Quoting from other documents

When you're referring to an SQA publication for the first time in a document, give its title and hyperlink the title to the web page that it appears on. Never lift chunks out of the other publication and repeat them in your document — use a reference, for example 'see *Guide to Assessment*, page xx'.

The main reason for not quoting large chunks of text from other publications is that the publication you are quoting from may be out of date long before the one you are writing.

In a situation where you don't think your reader will have access to the document there is overlap with, you can quote very short passages (say no more than two sentences), or paraphrase its arguments, but please keep this to a minimum.

See also [Referencing](#).

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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, 2012, p302).

or

'Hannagan (2012) 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. (2012) *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) <article 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 you convert any web addresses in your document to working hyperlinks.

For example:

'Academic Services, (2007) BU guide to citation in the Harvard style: brief guide, Poole: Bournemouth University. Available from:
<https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/discover/library/using-library/how-guides/how-cite-references> [accessed 06 March 2019]'

or

SQA, (2019) *Your Exams 2019* (BD7899), Glasgow: Scottish Qualifications Authority. Available from:
https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/SQA_Your_Exams_2019.pdf
[accessed 06 March 2019]

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Referring to SQA's 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, for example A or B or pass. Only use 'award' when referring to the specific qualifications called awards (such as the Safe Road User Award). Use 'group award' when referring to SVQs, HNCs, etc.

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

Mentions of SQA Advanced Qualifications, SQA Advanced Diploma, SQA Advanced Certificate must always include the 'SQA' at the beginning. This is a legal requirement, to protect our intellectual property.

If you are giving a qualification a number as well as a name, give the number first, then the title and use initial capitals (title case), as in this example:

(DR30 35) Audio Electronics 2

When referring to Next Generation Higher National Qualifications in a document, you should use:

Title

Next Generation Higher National

First text instance

Next Generation: HN (NextGen: HN)

All other instances

NextGen: HN

Capitals in the name of a qualification

Use initial capitals for the names of qualifications, but don't capitalise words like 'and' or 'for'.

- ◆ National Qualifications
- ◆ National Progression Awards
- ◆ National Certificates
- ◆ National 4 and National 5
- ◆ Higher
- ◆ Advanced Higher
- ◆ Higher National Diploma
- ◆ Higher National Certificate
- ◆ Higher National Qualifications
- ◆ Scottish Vocational Qualifications

- ◆ Skills for Work
- ◆ SQA Advanced Qualifications
- ◆ SQA Advanced Certificate
- ◆ SQA Advanced Diploma
- ◆ National Courses
- ◆ National Units
- ◆ Higher National Unit
- ◆ Higher National Group Award

Also, capitalise 'Unit' and 'Graded Unit' if they appear in the unit name as indicated on APS, for example 'Audio Visual Technology: Graded Unit 1'.

Level of a qualification

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.

Since September 2016, names of SVQs (if they have an SCQF level) have followed the following convention:

SVQ <name> at SCQF level <x>

For example:

SVQ Activity Leadership at SCQF level 5

Grades

We use 'grade' with a lower case 'g' to mean 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,...), not roman (I, II, III,...). Grades at Higher and Advanced Higher are given letters. These are always written as capitals, for example A, B, C.

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Repetition

Repetition is a problem in two ways:

Redundancy: we have a tendency to try to tell our readers the whole story all the time. We will, for instance, tell them about verification, which makes us feel we have to tell them about the whole quality assurance system. This in turn makes us want to explain the approval criteria, even if we have already done so. If you've explained internal verification once, there's no need to explain it again — use a cross-reference.

Stylistically: a simple style check you can do before handing over your finished copy is to read over what you have written to see whether there are certain phrases or words you have overused. Just looking at a printed page often helps you see at a glance whether there's anything obvious you've repeated.

If, for instance, you've started four consecutive sentences with 'SQA', the text would read better if you changed at least two of these.

Similarly, if you're presenting a list of options that are expressed in similar language, try to vary them. If bullet points start with the same word or phrase, move this back into the stem (behind the colon introducing the list).

Do say...	Don't say...
'In addition, many people have found that the new qualifications are: 1. great 2. brilliant 3. flexible 4. very good indeed'	'In addition, many people have found that: 1. the new qualifications are great 2. the new qualifications are brilliant 3. the new qualifications are flexible 4. the new qualifications are very good indeed'

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Should and must

'Should' means a recommendation, or a piece of advice. 'You should listen to what this guide is saying' is not an order, but a way of urging you to take note. 'Must', on the other hand, means compulsion, and the lack of alternatives, as in 'you must signal your intention to pull out before manoeuvring away from the kerb'.

You must not be afraid of using 'must', if it is appropriate to do so. If, for instance, people in centres have to submit results using a certain form, tell them so. 'You must use form 1 for submitting results.' Don't feel that you have to use 'should', simply because it seems politer — it could cause confusion.

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Spelling checklist

This is an alphabetical list of words we use a lot, and some special features they have — it may be that they're often misspelled, or that they can be confused with something very similar.

See [SQA's Guide to Using Capital Letters](#) on SharePoint for rules about when we should and should not use an initial capital.

Write the word like this and note that it's
adviser	not advisor (though some SVQ standards-setting bodies use the -or spelling)
back up or backup	two words for use as a verb; one word for a noun or adjective
benefit	benefiting, benefited (don't double the 't')
cafe	not café (in British English)
centre-devised	always hyphenated
closed-book	hyphenated when you're talking about a kind of assessment (another kind is open-book)
competence	not 'competency'; competences in the plural (not competencies)
conducive	not condusive
consensus	not concensus
consortium-developed	always hyphenated, and never 'consortia-developed'
convener	(ends in '-er') for someone chairing an SQA meeting, but some local authorities use 'convenor' for council leader
co-ordinator	always hyphenated
criteria	the plural of 'criterion'
cross-marking	always hyphenated
Curriculum for Excellence	without an 'a' or 'the' prefix, and should be written out in full in formal documents (not 'CfE')
despatch	not dispatch
e-assessment	'E-assessment' at the start of a sentence
e-business	'E-business' at the start of a sentence
e-commerce	'E-commerce' at the start of a sentence
flyer	not flier
email	no longer 'e-mail' — use 'Email' at the start of a sentence
end-user	hyphenated
enrol	enrolling, enrolled, enrolment (but use 'entry' for candidates)
feedback	not feed back, except where you're using 'feed back' as a verb
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

Write the word like this and note that it's
Gàidhlig	Gaelic for Gaelic — use Alt 0224 on your keyboard's number pad to get the à (Num Lock must be on)
helpdesk	all one word
internally-assessed	hyphenated when it comes before 'units', for example 'internally-assessed units'; not hyphenated when it comes after a verb, for example 'these units are internally assessed'
licence	with a 'c' for the noun, for example 'driving licence', but with an 's' for the verb, for example 'licensing laws'
logbook	not log book
log in, login	'log in' is a verb (log in to the system) and isn't hyphenated; 'login' is a noun 'don't share your login'
meta-skills	always hyphenated
nationally-recognised	always hyphenated
NextGen: HN	not HN NextGen
ongoing	not hyphenated
online	one word, no hyphen — 'offline' should be written the same way
per cent	not 'percent'
phone	not necessary to write 'phone
practice	with a 'c' for the noun, for example 'piano practice', but with an 's' for the verb, for example 'practising the piano'
pro forma	two words, no hyphen — or can you just use 'form' instead?
re-assessment	lower case
re-sit	not resit
SQA co-ordinator	lower case, except when the title of a particular individual
standards-setting body	all lower case, and hyphenated
subject-specific	always hyphenated
target	targeting, targeted (don't double the 't')
timescale	one word, no hyphen
up to date	without hyphens except when preceding a noun, for example 'the qualification is up to date', but 'the up-to-date qualification'
web page	two words
website	one word, no hyphen
wifi	but Wi-Fi in technical contexts
word-process	always hyphenated
work-based	always hyphenated
www.sqa.org.uk	our URL (website address) — always hyperlink; if it's at the end of a sentence, put the full stop in

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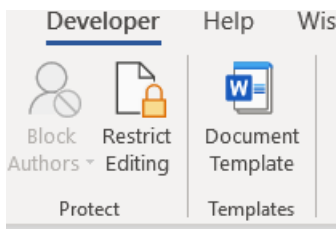
Templates

SQA's standard Word template is called 'SQA Normal'. We recommend that you use it for most types of document other than letters. You can find it on the network at <\\sqa3-hanover\Templates>

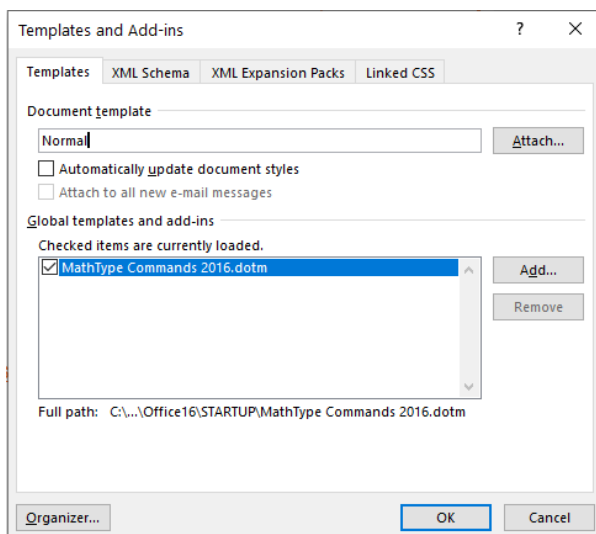
The folders contain standard templates for particular teams. The folder called 'General' has various letter templates.

The SQA Normal template is at the foot of the window.

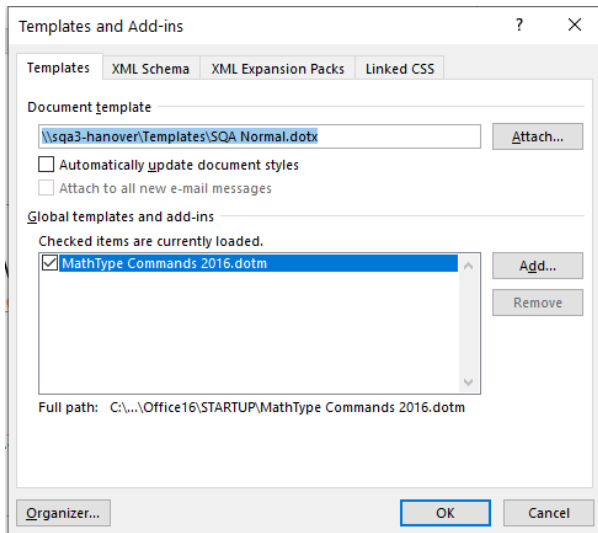
To attach a Word document to SQA Normal, go to the Developer tab then Document Template.



You should see this dialog box:



Select Attach then browse to <\\sqa3-hanover\Templates>. Select SQA Normal and then Open.



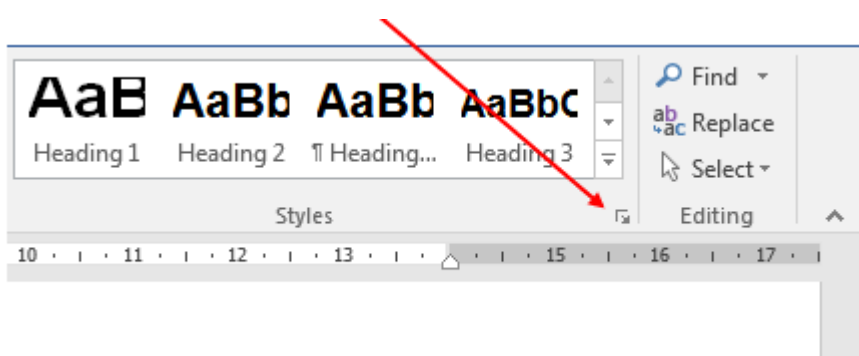
Select 'Automatically update document styles' then OK. Save your document. It is now attached to SQA Normal and any text or heading styles that were set up in the original document should have changed to those used by SQA Normal (see SQA Normal styles below).

Important!

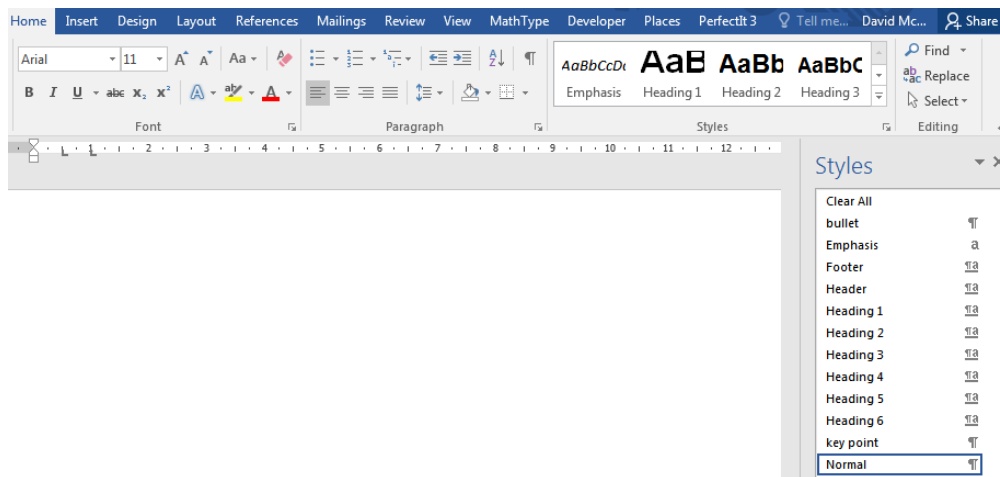
Before doing anything else, you should retrace the path to the last dialog box and **untick** the option to 'Automatically update document styles'. If you don't do this and you pass the document to someone else, then the document may update styles again to the default template on your colleague's machine.

SQA Normal styles

In the ribbon, select the small downward-pointing arrow at the bottom right-hand corner of Styles.



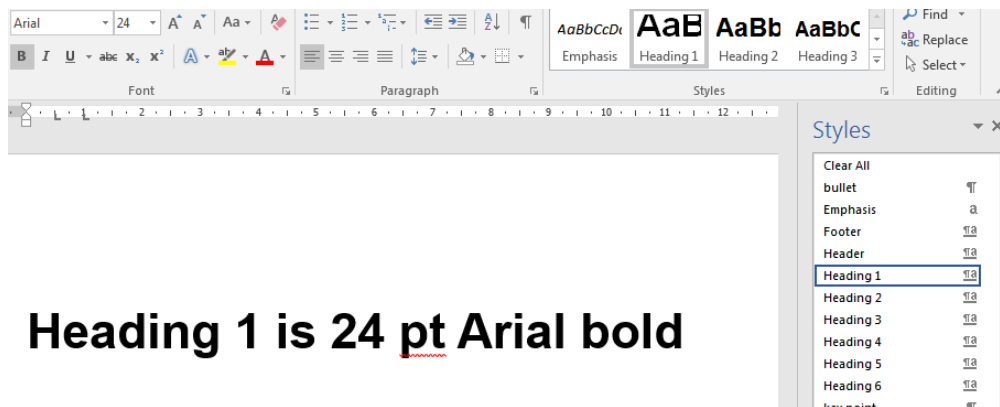
This opens the Styles pane, which includes all our standard heading styles.



To apply a heading style, key in your heading text then select the text. Next, go to the Styles pane and click on the heading you need:

- ◆ Heading 1 is 24 pt Arial bold
- ◆ Heading 2 is 18 pt Arial bold
- ◆ Heading 3 is 14 pt Arial bold
- ◆ Heading 4 is 12 pt Arial bold
- ◆ Heading 5 is 11 pt Arial bold

If you need a bulleted list, select the list then click on 'bullet' in the Styles pane.



Using heading styles in this way makes your document more accessible — screen readers can identify the various heading levels so blind users can understand the structure of your document. Heading styles applied in this way also enable you to automatically create a contents page. Go to the **References** menu and look under the **Table of Contents** tab.

Nested headings

Accessibility guidelines say that your first heading in a sequence should be a heading 1 and that all the following subheadings should follow consecutively: H2, H3, H4, H5. The headings are then said to be 'nested'.

There may be times, however, when you have a good reason not to follow an H1 with an H2 or an H2 with an H3. Two instances of this are when:

- ◆ you don't want a heading to appear in a Word-generated contents list
- ◆ you have a heading for specific content that appears in different sections of your document and sometimes the heading for the specific content falls after, say, an H1 and sometimes after an H2 — but you think it would be most helpful for the reader to see the same level of heading for this content as they move from section to section through the document

Both these examples will fail the nested-headings test in an accessibility checker, which will then deem your document as non-compliant with equalities legislation and so SQA could, possibly, face an unlimited fine.

At the time of writing (March 2022), we are seeking advice on this point, but in the meantime we will treat the above instances as exceptions as long as headings otherwise follow a logical order.

Forcing nested headings

If you are working on a document that starts with, say, an H2. You can change it to an H1 by selecting the dropdown arrow on the H2 style in the Styles pane, choosing 'Select all instances', and then applying the H1 style to all the instances. Next, go to the dropdown menu to the right of the H1 style and select 'Modify'. Then adjust the font size to match the size of the original heading (18pt if it was an H2). You then should repeat this process for all the other heading levels in your document.

Note: If you want to preserve the 'look' of your original document exactly you may have to adjust the 'Before' and 'After spacing under Modify > Format > Paragraph.

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That or which?

This is a source of confusion, and there's no hard and fast rule. It helps your reader, though, if you use 'that' to introduce a defining clause:

'The dogs that barked in the night did not recognise the thief.'

And use 'which' to introduce a describing clause:

'The dogs, which barked in the night, did not recognise the thief.'

In the first example, 'The dogs that barked' suggests there were other dogs that did not bark. In the second, we can be more confident that all the dogs barked (and the comma between 'dogs' and 'which' helps). If you use 'that' and 'which' in this way you can help your reader work out whether or not all the dogs barked.

A good rule of thumb is that, if you're in any doubt about whether to use 'that' or 'which', you should use 'that'. However, when writing about a person or people, you should always use 'who' or 'whom'.

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Titles of people involved with qualifications

Positions or roles of SQA employees and appointees are set in title case when referring to individuals. But use lower case when referring to positions or roles in general. Here are some examples:

‘Sam Smith, Qualifications Manager, was recently appointed to the ...’

but

‘SQA qualifications officers are responsible to a qualifications manager.’

Or

‘Fiona Robertson, SQA’s Chief Executive, recently attended ...’

but

‘The Scottish Government invited the chief executive to attend ...’

‘Overall, external verifiers found that the centres sampled had a clear understanding of the requirements for ...’

‘A nominee represents their school/college and local authority (where appropriate) in assisting SQA with the maintenance of national standards of the qualifications within their subject area.’

Referring to the people who take our qualifications

The people who are taking our qualifications are ‘candidates’, but only when they’re taking the qualifications, for example 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 ‘learners’ if they are at school or college and ‘trainees’ if they’re doing workplace training. ‘Students’ is a suitable alternative for learners at college. It’s also fine to talk about more specific roles (for example apprentices, trainee hairdressers, fitters) if your document is very specific.

The process of entering candidates for qualifications

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.

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

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Tone

Tone is about how we ‘sound’ to our readers. It is important because if a reader finds your tone to be too arrogant, condescending or pedantic then they might not value or act on what you are saying.

You might think that you have expressed your ideas well, but try to remember that you are not writing for yourself. Try to invoke the idea of ‘walking in the shoes of your audience’ — it can be a very helpful approach to find the right way to say something.

We want all our audiences to think of SQA writing as **clear, confident** and **approachable** — and, depending on what they are reading, possibly also **inspiring**.

Be clear

We want our readers to grasp what we are saying quickly and easily. You can do this by using:

- ◆ short words
- ◆ short sentences
- ◆ short paragraphs
- ◆ the active voice

Do say this ...	Don't say this ...
‘Ask learners to explain their solution in their own words.’	‘The learner should be required to give meaning to the determined solution in everyday language.’
‘Candidates do not always complete the task.’	‘Issues of candidate task completion are being experienced.’

As a guideline: if it’s something you wouldn’t consider saying in speech, then don’t write it down.

Be confident

Writing that is formal and detached and that favours the passive voice can sometimes be seen as over-cautious or lacking confidence.

SQA wants you to state your position with certainty and assurance. Avoid unnecessary words and use practical, straightforward language to convey ideas. Readers are less likely to be confused.

- ◆ Get straight to the point.
- ◆ Be direct.
- ◆ Say what you mean without too many conditions.
- ◆ Use words your readers would use.
- ◆ Use technical language in context but avoid jargon, abbreviations and acronyms.
- ◆ Check facts.
- ◆ Proofread for typos.

Do say this...	Don't say this...
'Remember that you can only provide technical assistance to your candidates. You are not allowed to help with the content.'	'It was again apparent, in some instances, that centres were either not aware of the guidance or may have misinterpreted it. Teachers are further reminded that the function of their role in dealing with the externally assessed assignment is purely one of administration and supervision.'
'You must acknowledge all material from sources like books, TV and the internet. Your teacher or lecturer can tell you how it's done.'	'It is essential for all candidates to ensure that they are meticulous in referencing their sources. Information on the appropriate method to use to show references can be obtained from teaching staff.'

Be approachable

Your writing needs to convey meaning to everyone who needs to act on it so that they then respond in the way that you intended. So avoid words or phrases that might confuse or even antagonise your audience and choose words and phrases that show you are one person communicating with another. Some SQA writing reads as if we are lecturing a group, but even if you are broadcasting a message to a wide audience it can help to write as if you are 'talking' to an individual.

You can even use this approach for procedural documents which are written for people in centres who are doing the organising and administration that running our qualifications demands. Once you've made this plain in an introduction, there is no reason why you shouldn't then address these people as 'you' throughout the text, rather than referring to 'centres'. So, don't say: 'Centres should retain

candidates' work for verification', if it would be just as easy to say: 'You should retain candidates' work for verification'.

Similarly, a lot of what we write is written for teachers and lecturers. If you're writing for teachers and lecturers, say so and then address them personally — call them 'you', not 'teachers/lecturers'. They may pay more attention to what you have to say, and will find it easier to understand.

- ◆ Think about who will read your writing.
 - Why are they reading it?
 - What task are they trying to complete?
 - What information will help them?
 - What order should it go in?
- ◆ Follow accessibility guidance.
- ◆ Be inclusive.
- ◆ Use 'you' and 'we'.
- ◆ Be positive rather than negative.
- ◆ Ask the reader questions.
- ◆ Use contractions — we're, can't.

Do say this...	Don't say this...
'You should keep all candidate work for verification.'	'Centres should retain candidates' work for verification.'
'So, exam day has finally arrived and you've prepared for it as much as you can. Here are some tips to help you do the best you can.'	'SQA has gathered relevant information together to assist candidates at the point of sitting exams.'

Further reading

The Tone of Voice module of the [Clear and Confident Writing course on SQA Academy](#).

MailChimp is an email service provider that helps marketing departments send bulk emails to clients, customers, and other interested parties. You may find MailChimp's guidance on voice and tone useful:

<http://voiceandtone.com/>

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Web pages

People don't read text on a website in the way that they read printed material. They scan, rather than scrutinise. They pick out headings and key words, rather than read everything chronologically and line-by-line. They also tend to spend less time reading online than they would reading print.

Also, because of the nature of the internet, the order in which we present information on the site may not be the same order in which it is read by the user. They may jump to a specific location within the site from a link or search result, and so not have the background knowledge of the preceding pages.

So when producing information for online publication, the first thing you need to ask is: what is the most appropriate way to display your information? Would it be better for the reader if it was:

- ◆ a single web page or series of web pages forming a section of the website
- ◆ a separate stand-alone website
- ◆ an interactive application
- ◆ a file that users can download or print and read at their leisure?

General tips and best practice

All web pages should be self-contained and self-explanatory. If a reader lands on a page with no knowledge of the preceding pages, they should still be able to make sense of the information provided.

- ◆ Use plain English and keep specialised terminology to a minimum. If someone has to reread a sentence or phrase to clarify the meaning, then the text is not fit for purpose.
- ◆ Use headings and subheadings that provide information to your reader.
- ◆ Aim to have one key idea in each paragraph. Structure paragraphs so that the conclusion or key idea is in the first sentence and then provide more detail in the sentences that follow.
- ◆ Keep text to a minimum.
- ◆ Use bulleted lists to break up the information so that readers can easily find what they are looking for.
- ◆ Introduce information appropriately and use titles that explain the context. It's not enough to provide a link or document title, for example 'SQA workshop presentation' — as it could be referring to any workshop that has been held by SQA.
- ◆ Don't repeat information on a web page — provide a link to the initial source.

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Wikipedia

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

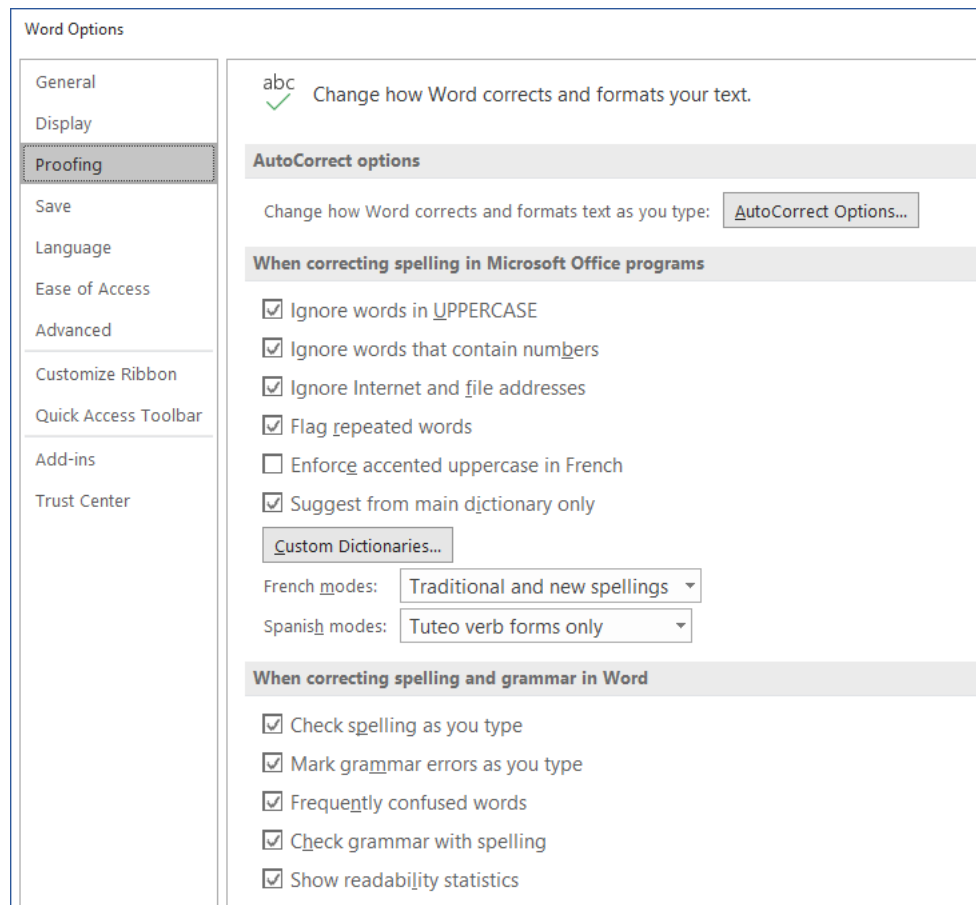
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Copyrights#Reusers.27_rights_and_obligations

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Word — readability statistics

Flesch readability statistics are based on the average sentence length, the number of difficult words, the number of passive sentences, and paragraph length.

You can take your checking a bit further with a little application that will tell you how readable your writing is. Go to File > Options > Proofing and make sure that the 'Show readability statistics' option is ticked.



Then the next time you run the spellchecker, a window like the following will appear:

Counts	
Words	60
Characters	315
Paragraphs	2
Sentences	3
Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	1.5
Words per Sentence	20.0
Characters per Word	5.1
Readability	
Flesch Reading Ease	52.5
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	10.8
Passive Sentences	0.0%

You can ignore the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level, which is based on the reading ages attained in US school grades. The important figure is above this. The higher the figure (it's a percentage), the better. You should be aiming for 40 and over for an audience of teachers, 50 and over for the general public, and 60 or over for learners. If your score is low, you can use the information under 'Averages' to improve it.

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Word — spellcheck

Always use the spellchecker, though you'll have to decide whether the suggestion offered is indeed correct. Remember we use 'organise' not 'organize'. Before you use the spellchecker, please make sure that your document's language is set as UK English (go to File > Options > Language).

Word Options

Set the Office Language Preferences.

Choose Editing Languages

Add languages to edit your documents. Editing languages set language-specific features, including spelling, grammar checking, and sorting.

Editing Language	Keyboard Layout	Proofing (Spelling, Grammar...)	
English (United Kingdom) <default>	Enabled	abc Installed	Remove Set as Default

[Add additional editing languages] Add

Let me know when I should download additional proofing tools.

Choose Display Language

Set the language priority order for display (Ribbon, buttons, tabs, and other controls) and Help.

Display Language	Help Language
1. Match Microsoft Windows <default>	1. Match Display Language <default>
2. English	2. English

Set as Default Set as Default

[Get more display and Help languages from Office.com](#)

Caution!

Word's checking tools cannot catch words that are spelled correctly but which don't make sense. 'Learner' instead of 'learner' is a common slip that isn't detected by a spellcheck.

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Words we prefer to use

How many words should I write?

If there is one basic principle for writing clearly, it is this: **keep it short and simple**. This applies to words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and, especially, to documents. Say what you want to say in as few words as you can, then say no more — saying more tends to confuse the issue.

What's a good word to use?

This is a difficult question to answer in detail. We can't give you a list of words to choose from and say 'don't use any others', because the words you use will depend on your subject matter, and how comprehensibly you are using them depends on their context. In general, though, good words are plain, simple and easy to understand.

You have a degree of freedom to choose whether to use only short words or mainly short words but a few big ones, depending on your audience. If you're writing for candidates with learning difficulties, for instance, the words (and sentences, and paragraphs) you use must be easy to read. If you're writing for teachers and lecturers, you can use more complex constructions. The important thing is to be as direct and unambiguous as possible. Everyone would rather have a simple text to read than a difficult one.

What's a bad word?

Any word is bad if people aren't going to understand what you're trying to say with it. There is, for instance, little point in using a word like 'architectonic' in a piece of writing, because no-one reading it will know what you mean. Similarly, it's all very well knowing what 'lugubrious' means, but are you using it just to show off? Why not use 'sad' or 'mournful' instead?

Try to avoid using big words derived from Latin (words ending in '-tion', '-ment' or '-ise' for instance) if you can think of a simpler way of saying what you want to say. So, if you can say 'help' instead of 'contribution'; or 'carry out' rather than 'implement', do so.

A guideline: the more syllables there are in a word, the more reluctant you should be to use it.

Words to think twice about before using

Many newspapers and publishers have 'hate lists' of words which are so overused that they would appear in every single story unless the paper took drastic action to prevent it. A paper will ban these words from ever appearing in print. Read *The Sunday Times* and see if you can spot an occurrence of the words 'major' or 'current'. There should be very few in this paper. 'Very' can also be used unnecessarily.

We are not banning the words in this list. We are saying please try not to use them as they are a) hugely overused, and b) often a sign of sloppy thinking or writing.

a number of: This is a vague, woolly, and bureaucratic phrase. Don't use it — say 'some' instead. If you absolutely must use it, remember that it takes a plural verb, not a singular — 'a number of people are concerned' not 'a number of people is concerned'.

'Candidates will already have developed ~~a number of~~ **some** of the skills, behaviours and knowledge.'

appropriate: This word often means nothing, as in the phrase 'SQA staff will give the appropriate advice and guidance'. If you say we will give people 'appropriate advice', does this mean that they sometimes get inappropriate advice from us, or that they think they might? Instead of using the word, either say what the appropriate advice might be, or miss out the word altogether.

articulate: This really means 'to say', but is sometimes used to mean 'to lead on to', or 'to progress'. Please use the simpler alternatives.

associated: should never be used as an adjective. The phrase 'this performance criterion and its associated evidence requirements', for instance, is confusing because you wonder which evidence requirements for the performance criterion are the associated ones, and which are not.

at this point in time and its cousin **at this moment in time** raise most people's hackles. Don't use them.

implementation: We use this word to mean 'setting up' qualifications so that they can be delivered or 'putting them into practice' so that candidates can take them. Don't use 'implementation' to mean teaching, training or assessment.

in relation to: This crops up all the time in phrases like 'SQA's policy in relation to ...'. You should always be able to replace it with 'on' or 'about', or to miss it out altogether.

'Self-awareness ~~in relation to~~ of relationships...'

indicate: can sometimes be replaced by 'show'.

inform: can almost always be replaced by 'tell'.

particular and **specific:** These are very widely used, but very rarely mean anything. If you feel a temptation to use either of them, read your sentence over and ask yourself what 'particular' means in 'the particular candidate'. Usually you will be able to dispense with it altogether. The same goes for 'specific'. This may seem like quibbling, but, as we've said before, using words which add nothing to the meaning of a phrase makes that phrase harder to understand.

relevant: One of the most overused words in our vocabulary. In a phrase like ‘after consultation with relevant staff’, what meaning does the word add? Do people regularly consult with irrelevant staff?

with reference to: can be replaced with ‘about’

within: means ‘inside’. Don’t use ‘within’ if you mean ‘in’. You almost always mean ‘in’. There is no meaningful sense in which anything can be ‘within’ a qualification, or ‘within’ a context. You can, though, be within a building, and things can happen within an organisation (if they happen exclusively inside it).

General ‘think twice’ list

This think twice list applies more generally than to our publications. It’s based on Plain English Campaign guidelines for, well, plain English.

Try not to write:	Instead, write:
additional	more
as indicated above	as we’ve already said, or see the section on ...
as itemised below	here is a list
as mentioned previously	as we’ve already said
as regards/with regard to	about
assist	help
by means of	by
capability	ability
consequently	then
consist of	be made up of
constitutes	is, makes, builds up to
effect (as verb)	make, do
facilitate	help
for the purposes of	for
function	role, work, job
further	more
have responsibility for	be in charge of, deal with
in accordance with	under, following
in addition	also, as well
in conjunction with	with
in order to	to
in relation to	about, of
legislation	law, laws
necessitate	cause
obtain	get
prior to	before
proficiency	skill
regarding	about, on, to, of
relating to	about, on, to, of
require to	need to, have to

Try not to write:	Instead, write:
sufficient	enough
terminate	end, stop, finish
therefore	so
undertake	do, try for
until such time as	until
utilise	use
with reference to	about
within (unless you mean 'inside')	in

Going forward, we need to address the issue of clichés. Its literally not rocket science but a little thinking outside of the box will address the issue.

Every underlined term in the previous paragraph has been nominated as a ‘most-annoying cliché’. It is best not to use them because tired terms switch off attention — which leads to readers missing your message.

[Plain English Campaign — Clichés](#)

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Writing about people

When you're speaking about people other than your readers (whom you should always address as 'you'), speak about them in the plural. This will apply, for instance, when you're speaking about candidates in a guide for teachers and lecturers.

There are two reasons for this. If you speak about them in the singular, you will find yourself using phrases like 'the candidate can progress to other qualifications', which is objective and depersonalised, and makes the candidate sound like a thing rather than a person. Also, you will get into trouble when you're using pronouns and find that you are having to say 'he or she' all the time. Using the plural gets around this because you can use the neutral 'they'.

Do say ...

'**Candidates** will carry out a practical exercise to show **they** can accurately complete the registration procedures for six bookings.'

Don't say ...

'Each **candidate** will carry out a practical exercise to show **he/she** can accurately complete the registration procedures for six bookings.'

Note: it's not wrong to use 'they' for a single person (for example to say 'if a candidate is ill, they might be eligible for special consideration') and it allows us to use language that is gender neutral.

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Writing the name of the organisation



If your document has our logo on it, 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'.

Do say ...	'You can complain to SQA if you think that a centre has done something wrong.'
'Don't say ...	'You can complain to the SQA if you think that a centre has done something wrong.'

Internal communications

If you need to refer to the offices in Dalkeith and Glasgow, use 'SQA Lowden' and 'SQA Optima'.

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