

INSEAD

Writing style guidelines

Introduction: why we need writing style guidelines

The recommendations that follow are designed to supplement our recent visual identity guidelines. Both documents are important. Elegant design and well-written text contribute to making INSEAD appear professional and authoritative to the outside world.

The guidelines that follow are aimed mainly at those commissioning, writing or editing copy for INSEAD brochures and websites. However, we hope that they will be equally useful for our colleagues who write case studies, internal messages, job advertisements and other forms of written text. They're designed to help rather than become a burden.

Most organisations that resemble INSEAD have some kind of 'house style' documents such as this one. But at INSEAD we have particular challenges. It's hard to maintain high standards of English in such an international environment. Also, most of what we write is about business – a world that's famous for its impenetrable jargon. At the same time, we're writing for an international audience with varying levels of English. All the more reason to define the way we'd like to write.

If you're still unconvinced, look at the competition. We are up against the top US schools, LBS and, increasingly, other UK schools, notably the business schools of Oxford and Cambridge. These institutions do not tolerate poor English. As an international institution, we are free to lower our *internal* standards, but not the face we present to the world. Our brochures, websites, newsletters, flyers, mailings and e-mailings must be every bit as professional as those of the competition.

Of course, it's difficult to create rules for good writing. Opinions vary greatly. But most people would agree that it's important to be:

- clear
- concise
- consistent
- correct.

Of course, that's much easier said than done. The pages that follow are designed to provide some support, inspiration and even entertainment. But we know they can only go so far. We in the communications department are also here to consult and – time permitting – provide practical help. In return, we look forward to developing these guidelines over time, based on your feedback.

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September 2006

Section 1

Clear and concise – the hard part

If only it was as easy to follow the simple rules below as it was to write them...

General advice

- Always start by thinking of your audience – what would interest them, persuade them and above all keep them reading.
- Try to avoid jargon, wherever possible. We're a business school so a certain amount of **leveraging our position as a thought leader** and the like is permitted - even expected. But do try to minimise use of jargon. Technical terms are permitted, but only if the intended audience is known to understand them.
- Similarly, avoid using too many idiomatic expressions. These seem to be particularly popular in Singapore, where a classroom is not **full** but **chock-a-block**. Idioms are fine when you're talking but again, minimise usage when writing for an international audience.
- Political correctness is tricky. At INSEAD we tend to pride ourselves on rising above this phenomenon. But our readers may have certain expectations and more people will be offended by political *incorrectness* than the inverse. Take each case individually. For example, French readers might be surprised to **handicapped** is no longer acceptable in the UK or US, but they won't be shocked to read **disabled** instead. **Otherwise abled**, on the other hand, might sound fine to some Americans but will confuse many non-native speakers!<<see also page XXX>>
- Use concrete examples to illustrate abstract ideas. Sometimes it's better to attract people's attention by putting the examples first. This is certainly what journalists are taught to do.
- Avoid long sentences and unnecessarily long words. Alternate longer sentences with shorter ones.
- Don't repeat the same word too many times in the same paragraph. The beauty of English is that we have more words than any other language in the world, so we can usually choose from plenty of synonyms. On the other hand, too many obscure synonyms start to draw attention to themselves and start to distort meaning. Journalists are taught to use the verb **say** every time they quote someone.
- Use short paragraphs, headings and bullet points to break up text, especially when writing for the web.
- Reread everything you write and eliminate any repetition.

- Avoid phrasal verbs (eg **go up, come on, get along**). They can be ambiguous and difficult for non-native English speakers to understand.
- Active constructions are far more powerful than passive ones.
- Some writing needs to be formal, while other types of text benefit from a friendly and personal tone. Work out what's appropriate for each case, but take note that written English has become much more familiar in recent years. Even the *Harvard Business Review* uses contractions (eg **won't, can't, shouldn't**). We have to move with the times.
- Use quotes and first-personal stories to support your arguments. These also enable you to vary your style slightly to match the voice of the person quoted – thus allowing you to break some of the rules above! On the other hand, don't be frightened to change exact wording if you're preserving the meaning. You should always seek approval from participants and clients to use quotes, anyway, and people generally don't object to you improving the way they sound.
- In less formal contexts, it's often a good idea to engage the reader by talking directly to him or her as 'you'. Similarly, you can use 'we', when talking about INSEAD. But be careful not to mix up the first, second and third person.
- Ultimately, aim for a neutral style that doesn't draw attention to itself. Draw colour and interest from what you're saying, rather than the words you use. Make sure it's your *message* that emerges from your sentences, rather than the cleverness of your own writing.

<<quotes from some famous people about writing>>

Section 2

Consistent and correct – not so much difficult as hard work

General advice

- Any text that is to be read by a significant number of people should ideally be written and/or edited by a native speaker. Interpret this as you will, but being a native speaker is not about nationality.
- Remember, however, that even native speakers can make mistakes. And some just aren't interested in the English language at all. Approach people who care for advice.
- Even if you're a native speaker, beware of Franglais and Senglish! Both are contagious.
- Even if you're a native speaker, there's no shame in using a dictionary.
- The lists on the following pages aren't exhaustive. You may need to draw up your own 'style sheet' when producing a document - with additional terms specific to the subject matter.
- There are no English-language regulators. Usage defines what is correct and the language is in constant flux, not to mention subject to many international variations. In general, it's easy to spot publications that haven't been produced to professional standards by their lack of consistency. It's harder to be consistent than correct.

The big question: British or American?

INSEAD's standard, school-wide standard has always been British English. This doesn't reflect any belief that US English is inferior. It's just that we have to choose one form of the language in order to be consistent. And INSEAD's campuses are in the EU and Singapore, where British English is the norm. So, British it is.

We realise that it's very difficult for Americans to write in anything other than US English. We therefore don't expect individual letters, presentations or academic publications to be in British English. Nor when quoting an American would we suggest using British vocabulary (**autumn** for **fall**, **trousers** for **pants**, **aubergine** for **eggplant**). For an ad or mailing aimed purely at a North American audience, it may also be appropriate to use US English. Finally, a mass email from an American dean, expressing his individual point of view isn't going to shock anyone if it's written in US English (though we will be working on him!).

But, for printed brochures, web pages, mass mailings and communications aimed at a wider readership and expressing a collective 'INSEAD' voice, we ask you to use British English. If you don't, you risk making INSEAD look unprofessional and incoherent.

And if you still object, ask yourself this. Would any potential participant or client from the US object to us using British English? Given our international message and proclamations of diversity, it's arguable that the kind of Americans we're targeting might actually prefer us to use the British form of the language!

A–Z of house style

Abbreviations

- If something is referred to frequently it can be abbreviated. Type it out the first time it is mentioned with abbreviation in parentheses (round brackets) and then use abbreviation subsequently. If it only occurs once don't bother with the abbreviation unless it is a vital piece of information.
- Where the acronym is more well-known than the full form (for example, **MBA** or **BBC**), don't spell it out. However, always write **Executive MBA** out in full.
- Always bear in mind the audience. If they would understand the abbreviation, then it's probably acceptable.
- No full points to be used at all. For example, **MBA, PhD, BBC, am, pm.**

Accents

- Be very careful, first that all accents, especially in people's names are included correctly.
- Also check that these are then transferred correctly by the designer, if he or she is working on a Mac.

Apostrophes

- Common blindspots: **it's/its; their/they're**. Note that **it's** is the abbreviated form of **it is**. The possessive adjective is **its**.
- Apostrophes are not used for plurals. The plural of **MBA** is **MBAs**.
- However, apostrophes are occasionally inserted for aesthetic reasons or to avoid ambiguity (eg **do's and don'ts, crossing the i's and dotting the t's**).
- For a name ending in an 's' that is pronounced (eg **James**) we use the 's possessive (eg **James's** not **James'**).

Bullet points

Short items that are not complete sentences use lower case and no punctuation at the end of the lines, full point at end of last line.

Example

Questions typically fall into a few key areas, including:

- behaviour-based questions
- open-ended questions
- skill-based questions
- company questions
- personal questions.

Treat long bullets as full sentences and punctuate as you feel appropriate.

Example

Remember:

- Be brief and punctual.
- Handle requests for salary by stating you are negotiable and that you are willing to discuss the issue in the interview.
- Use good quality paper for your CV and cover letter.

Sometimes you can bend the rules (eg have closing punctuation and opening caps even without complete sentences) – as long as you keep it consistent within the publication.

Capitalisation

The list below doesn't cover every eventuality. The main thing is to be consistent within your publication. Keep your own style sheet if in doubt. As a general rule, British English increasingly favours the lower case. In US English, more capitals are used.

- Organisations take upper case initial when their full name, or something pretty close to it is used, eg **Oxford University**, but thereafter references to **the university** should be in lower case.
- **INSEAD** is always in uppercase throughout. But refer to **the school** (try not to call it **the institute**) in lower case. In the *Financial Times* and other editorial contexts, you will see **Insead** (but **IMD**). This is not a mistake or preferential treatment for IMD but simply follows their own rule that only acronyms with a three letters or fewer can appear in capitals. Our rule is simpler. We refer to companies and organisations as they refer to themselves.
- Check company names rigorously for use of capitals, ampersand (&) or **and, plc** or **Plc**. Use the company's own corporate website if in doubt. Beware of cases where the logo is in upper case (for example **AVIVA**), but the name isn't. (The company writes about itself in its own communications as **Aviva**.)
- Degree subjects or academic disciplines take initial lower case (with the exception of English, French, German, etc).
- Job titles and descriptions – see specific entry below.
- Expressions abbreviated with upper case take initial lower case unless a proper name: **small and medium-sized companies (SMEs)**, but **the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)**.
- Captions and titles – see specific entries below.
- In English, any country or nationality is written with a capital, regardless of part of speech or whether it's referring to a the language. **French, France, French people**. But there are some exceptions, like **french windows**, where the word has passed into the language and 'forgotten' its origins.
- Days of the weeks and months have capital letters, eg **Monday** and **April**, but seasons do not, eg **winter**.

Captions

- As a rule INSEAD brochures and websites do not caption photos, but it may be necessary or helpful to do so in some cases.
- If captioning, keep it short and explanatory with a capital letter for the first word and no full point at the end: eg **Opening ceremony for MBA programme**
- Because captions are often added at a late stage they are neglected and are often punctuated inconsistently or have typos.
- If proofreading, query missing captions if you feel photos do not make sense alone.
- Check contracts with photographers to see whether acknowledgement is required for photographs, but try to make such acknowledgements once only and at the back of the brochure or the bottom of the web page. For example: **Photographs © Robin Grierson, except for those on pages 9, 12 and 13 © Contextes.**

Collective nouns

Keep an eye out for mixtures of plural and singular. A **government**, a **company**, a **partnership** and a **country** are all singular. For example, **The partnership is generous – it gives good holidays.** If you do think plural sounds better in a particular instance make sure all instances are plural.

Commas

Commas should help to remove ambiguity and make the message clear. There are no hard and fast rules beyond this. The tendency in modern British English is to minimise use of commas, but they can help non native-speakers to understand longer sentences.

Some tips:

- It is generally sufficient to join two main clauses with an **and** or **but** and no comma, but sometimes clarity requires one. Use your judgement.
- They tend to travel in pairs around clauses. For example, **The graduate, as far as we know, completed his training successfully.**
- Use consistently or omit consistently (eg after and before **however**, or after an adverb at the beginning of a sentence: **Sometimes, it rains in Fontainebleau.**)
- They are rarely required before **and**, although there are exceptions for complex sentences and clarity. For example: **The product comes in three varieties: yellow, yellow and black, and green.**
- Two complete sentences cannot be joined by a mere comma! Use a semicolon or full stop instead. For example: **The first half is concerned with place; the second is concerned with time.**

Company/firm

- Accountants, lawyers and civil engineers (ie organisations which were traditionally partnerships) are always firms.
- **Organisation** or sometimes **employer** are useful umbrella expressions.

Company names

- Getting them exactly right matters. Spaces, capitals, ampersands may seem like details, but why annoy a client or recruiter unnecessarily?

- Common errors: **JPMorgan; PricewaterhouseCoopers; Vodafone**. More in the word list.
- **AG, SA, NV** after company names are always in capitals. **Plc, plc, PLC**, depending on how the company likes it to be spelled.

Compass points

- Points of the compass are lower case: **south, north**, etc.
- Use capitals when part of a recognised geographical name or a region (eg **the South of France**).
- Hyphens in points of the compass: **south-east, north-west**, etc but there are exceptions, winds as in **southeasterly**

Currencies

- Most references in INSEAD publications will be in euros.
- If talking about an amount in another currency it is preferable *not* to convert it, as exchange rates can change so quickly. If you feel it's necessary to convert from an obscure currency, put the converted sum in brackets (probably in euros), but try to give the date of the conversion or the exchange rate at the time so that readers can make their own conversion.
- **euro, euros (pl)** – lower case 'e', but use the symbol in print publications. For e-mails and online, you may feel safer using the word in full, as symbols can be scrambled by computers in different countries.
- For dollars, specify the country, eg **US dollars, US\$, Singapore dollars, Sing\$**.
- In English the currency symbol always comes *before* the amount (eg **€700**), but the word in full comes after (**700 euros**).
- Some examples **€118 million, €2.2 million**

Dates

- Write **1990s**, rather than **nineties** or **'90s**. Never use an apostrophe (**1990's**), unless you want to indicate possession, which is rare for a year!
- Write out dates in the format **26 October 2004**. Avoid using superscripts (^{st, nd, rd, th}) and commas. Exception: **9/11** or **September 11th**
- Use an en dash to indicate time span (**2000–2006**), but **to** is always preferable. Exception: **the academic year 2005/06**.

Ellipses (...)

- Keep an eye out for whether these have been scrambled in translation from PC to Mac.
- Following a word there is no space between the word and the first dot. Preceding a word, leave a space (eg **He was going to start ¼ his new job.**). If a new sentence follows, don't add an extra full stop.
- Note that an ellipsis is not used in English to mean 'etc'.

Ethnic origin

- **Blacks** as a noun is no longer acceptable to mean **black people** or **people of African origin**, but **people of colour** may confuse those not versed in American usage. **African Americans** can be used to refer only to people of American nationality.

- Similarly the word **oriental** (whether noun or adjective) should never be used to describe ethnic origin. Use **Asian, South-East Asian** or specify countries of origin.

Gender

- Either 'he' or 'she' on its own will not do, when you mean 'people in general'. Avoid: **he/she s/he** and **(s)he**. Use '**he or she**' or think of an alternative.
- Avoid **businessman** – it conjures up negative and old-fashioned images. Talk instead about **executives, business customers** or whatever seems relevant for the context.
- A woman can be a **Chair, Chairman** or **Chairperson**, depending on what she prefers.

Hyphens and dashes

Hyphens:

- When in doubt, check the dictionary for any words that could be one word, two words or hyphenated and, where possible, avoid floating hyphens (eg **fifth- and sixth-century art**).
- Hyphens can be used between words to avoid any confusion or ambiguity (eg **deep-blue sea** is different in meaning to **deep blue sea**).
- Use them in compound adjectives used attributively (eg **she worked part time** needs no hyphen, but **I am a part-time student** does).
- However, don't hyphenate adverbs (eg **the superbly written article**).

Dashes:

- There are two kinds: en-rules (–) and the longer em-rules (—). INSEAD only uses the former, but em-rules are very common in US publishing.
- Spaced en-rules are generally used for parenthetical remarks. You've probably noticed how Word converts a hyphen automatically when you use it this way, but beware the instances when it doesn't. To insert an en-rule, go to the 'insert' menu, select 'symbols' and then click on the 'special characters' tab. You may also find a keyboard shortcut. Try to avoid using them too often – a maximum of once per paragraph is recommended.
- Unspaced en-rules often stand for 'to' or 'and', as in **1997–98** and **INSEAD–Wharton Alliance**. But in general, if you mean 'to', say so: **1997 to 1998**.
- Always check carefully these have been picked up by the Macs.

-ise -ize spellings

Use -ise

Infinitives

Don't split them if you can easily avoid it. **I want to learn the rules quickly** *not* **I want to quickly learn the rules**.

Italics

Put the following in italics:

- Titles of books and substantial periodicals, eg *Blue Ocean Strategy* and *World Business*
- Titles of TV programmes, films, plays, operas, etc.
- Newspaper titles. However, do not include 'The' in italics unless it is part of the title (if in doubt check a recent masthead): *Financial Times* but *The Times* and *The Economist*.
- Names of ships and aircraft.
- Non-English (including Latin) phrases not yet naturalised (eg **salami** but *sine qua non*).
- Names of parties in legal cases, but not the 'v.' (eg *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*).

Leave the following unitalicised:

- Titles of chapters, articles, sections are put in single quotes and not in italics. You might choose to put these in bold/a colour for emphasis but don't be tempted to use italics.
- Websites. Often written in bold for clarity and emphasis.
- Plural or apostrophe 's' (eg **in *The Economist's* article on business education...**).

Job titles

- Capitalise unless you're using in a generic sense with a definite or indefinite article. For example: 'Imran Smith, **Managing Director**, A.N. Company Ltd', but 'Imran Smith is **a director** of A.N. Company Ltd'.
- Use the English form of the job title if you have it, otherwise use the title in its original form (with lower case if this is the convention in the language concerned). Beware of translating job titles yourself, unless you're absolutely sure of the English equivalent.

Less/fewer – general rule:

- Less for quantity of uncountable nouns (**less money, less sugar**).
- Fewer for number of countable nouns (**fewer houses, fewer doctors** = all plural nouns).

Like/such as/as if

- Don't use **like** to mean **as if** (eg **It looks as if he's finished** *not* **It looks like he's finished**).
- **Like** excludes. **Such as** includes. **Cities like Bangalore are wonderful** means the writer is talking about cities similar to Bangalore, but not necessarily Bangalore itself. **Cities such as Bangalore** includes Bangalore.
- From California to Cornwall and Canberra, the word 'like' has slipped into youth speak to mean 'said' or absolutely nothing at all. **I was like, 'You can't mean it'. It was like so cool.** This is never allowed in written English and should probably be taken out of quotes too.

Measurements

- Use standard abbreviations (**km, lb**, etc) but use **litre, mile** and **million** in full to avoid confusion.
- No full points in units of measurement and no plurals for those abbreviated (eg **30km**, but **30 miles**).
- Leave no gap between the numeral and the unit of measurement (eg **2km**).

- Check temperatures carefully to ensure that they appear correctly (eg is **300C**, **30°C** or should it be **300°C?**).
- Try to use metric units, wherever possible. Examples: **m²** and **hectares**, rather than square yards and acres. British people and Americans are getting used to these new-fangled terms quite quickly.

Names and titles

- Put a full point after initials (eg **J. Frank Brown**), but only use initials if the person concerned has expressed a preference. If there are two initials, put a space between them (eg **Cees J. A. van Lede**).
- Asians and mainland Europeans tend to be much more formal than British and American people, when it comes to titles. In general, INSEAD is not a formal place, so we tend to omit titles and use first names the second time someone is referred to. We can announce that **J. Frank Brown took up his appointment as Dean of INSEAD in 2006**, but all subsequent references on the same page or in the same section of a brochure will probably refer to **Frank**, rather **Brown**, **Mr Brown** or **Frank Brown**. However, always be sensitive to the context. An invitation, for example, requires more formality, as might a programme for an event in Asia or a press release.
- Use **Dr** (no dot) and **Professor** (never **Prof.** or **Prof**) where appropriate, but this can become repetitive where faculty members' job titles appear after their name.
- When listing, for example, board or committee members omit **Mr**, **Mrs** and **Ms** and non-English forms of the same, but include other titles such as **Baron**, **Sir**, **Professor** and **Dr**, as well as non-English variants, such as **Dr Ing** or **Prof Dr**.
- Note that Asian names are frequently (but not always, depending on individual preference) written with the family name appearing first. For purposes of alphabeticisation, it's essential to find out which is the surname. For example **Lee Hsien Yang** should be alphabeticised under 'L'.
- Always check that the capitals are in the right place. **Alexis von Busekist**, **Arnoud De Meyer** and **Ludo Van der Heyden** are good examples.
- Check for accents and umlauts. Use the umlaut form, rather than adding an 'e' for German names.

Nationality

- All nationalities should be referred to by their proper names, ie British, Japanese and Germans, not slang terms, which can be offensive. When quoting other people it may be acceptable to relax the rule if no offence is likely to be caused. For example, a British participant might talk about **Brits** or a French alumnus might joke: "I was the **froggy** engineer in my group."

Numbers

- Write out up whole numbers one to **ten**, **11** or more in numerals. However, if numbers above and below ten appear close together then standardise to all numerals or all written out (eg There were about **10 or 15** professors in the room.).
- If it isn't a whole number (eg **9.25**), write in numerals.
- Note that English uses a full point not a comma to indicated decimal places.
- Avoid starting sentences with numbers. It's usually easy to change the sentence order round.
- Use a comma to denote thousands rather than a space (eg **1,000** or **20,000**).

- It's fine to use a hyphen with numbers (eg **62-year-old man**).
- Clarify **billion** if you feel it's necessary for your audience. A thousand million has become standard in the UK, but a 'billion' in France is still a million million.

Participles

Over use of present participles is a common trait among amateur writers and estate agents. For example, **'On finishing my MBA, and having been offered a job and having successfully negotiated the taking up of my position.'** **'When I accepted the job and began work'** is better.

Percentages

Use the % symbol, but write out **per cent** in electronic communications if you're worried about the symbol being scrambled.

Place names

- Country names should always be written in English, not the local form.
- Towns are less important. The main thing is to be consistent. Either anglicise or localise them all. If you say **Munich** instead of **München**, say **Dunkirk** instead of **Dunkerque**.
- Check spelling of place names!
- Ensure there is no confusion and be precise. The **United Kingdom** consists of Great Britain (England, Wales, Scotland) and Northern Ireland. **The British Isles** can mean the UK plus the Irish Republic. Never use **English** to mean British. **Ireland** is the island as a whole. **The Republic of Ireland** is the country (but doesn't include **Northern Ireland**). Use **the Netherlands** rather than **Holland**, but be careful to alphabetise under 'N' not 'T'.
- Make sure you're up to date with newly created countries, such as **Montenegro**.
- Never describe places in a parochial way or one which presupposes a certain geographical position. For example, British people often refer to the rest of Europe as **the Continent** or the area to the south-east of London as **the South-East**.

Pronouns

- **One** sounds dreadfully old-fashioned in English and is used mainly by the British Queen. **You** sounds better to mean 'people in general', but beware of mixing up **I, you, we** in a single paragraph. Sentences like the following need to be rewritten: **When I started work you really had to watch out for any mistakes one might make.**
- It's polite to put yourself last. **Johann, Jean, John, Ian and I travelled to Saudi Arabia.**
- Remember the difference between a subject and an object. It's **between you and me**, not **between you and I**.

Quotations

- In text always use single quotation marks (‘’) and check they are curly not straight when they come back from the designer. Use double quotation marks for a quote within a quote (“”).

- If the quote is a full sentence then put the full point inside the quote marks. Introduce with a comma, or, for dramatic effect, a colon (eg **She stated, ‘Participant numbers are up this year.’**).
- If the quote isn’t a full sentence then put the full point outside the quote marks (eg **She tells us that participant numbers are ‘up this year’.**)

Spaces

- In English, there are no spaces before colons, semi-colons and question marks, only after them.
- Traditionally, typists placed two spaces after a full point. This is no longer a convention and looks dreadful in print, so eliminate systematically.

Telephone numbers

- Always express with the international dialling code, using a '+' and no space with the optional '0' in brackets.
- No dashes or full points, only spaces between sets of digits. Place those spaces according to the conventions in the country concerned, wherever possible.
- Examples of the format to follow: **+33 (0)1 60 72 40 00** (French number); **+65 6799 5388** (Singaporean number); **+44 (0)20 7385 3708** (London number).
- Use the following abbreviations with a colon before a number:
Tel: +33 (0)1 60 72 40 00
Fax: +65 6799 5399

That/which

- Strictly speaking ‘that’ is for defining clauses and ‘which’ is for non-defining clauses. However, ‘which’ can be used in a defining clause if this is clearer. Defining clauses have no punctuation, while non-defining clauses must be between commas. Don’t lose sleep over this one!
- Some examples follow.
- **He stopped the second car that was driven by a professor** (the clause defines the type of car that he stopped).
- **He stopped the second car, which was driven by a professor** (the clause does not define the type of car he had to stop but notes that the car in question was driven by a professor).

Time

- As a general rule use: **5.00 am** (not **5am** or **5.00am**). For **midday** and **midnight**, use **12 noon** and **12 midnight**.
- Keep an eye out for incorrect **am** and **pm**. These can have disastrous consequences.
- Use hyphens and apostrophes for clarity (eg **I gave him a five-minute start** or **He had five minutes’ start**).
- In preferred or more appropriate for the audience, use the 24-hour clock, with a colon, eg **10:00** or **17:00**.
- Never use the French format **5h30**. This just isn't English.

Titles

- Keep them short and explanatory, rather than clever

- Capitalise first letter, lower case for the rest, unless they're words that would be capitalised in a normal sentence. For example, **MBA programme**, but **Executive Education programmes**
- No full point at the end, unless there's a strong reason

Web addresses

- Leave out **http://** printed web addresses, start from **www** (but not if it's a website that's deliberately branded without it (eg **Amazon.com**). Don't include the slash at the end: if an address comes at the end of a sentence it's OK to use a full point.
- You can put websites in bold for clarity and/or emphasis, but remember to be consistent.
- If the length of a URL is likely to exceed column width, advise designers where to split.

Who/whom

- Who is a subject. Whom is an object.
- These days **To whom did you give it?** sounds overly formal. **Who did you give it to?** is much better in most contexts.

Word breaks

Computers usually make sensible word breaks, but adjust where necessary, especially in narrow columns. You can check any individual odd-looking word breaks in reference books such as the *Collins Gem Dictionary of Spelling and Word Division*, but don't waste time on it. Unlike other languages, there are few hard and fast rules in English.

List of commonly used or problematic words

(for commonly confused words see Butcher pages 159–162)

Some words and phrases to avoid:

- Adverbs that work in speech but not in writing (eg **actually, really, just** and **simply**) -removal of these is a matter of judgement but usually they can come out and tighten the copy at the same time.
- **Hopefully** – strictly speaking should never be used to mean 'it is to be hoped'. It really means 'in a hopeful way'.
- **In order to; 'on a regular basis'; 'of the opinion that'**. All cases of several words used when one or two more direct ones ('to'; 'regularly'; 'I think') would do the job better.
- **So** as in 'so then I decided to change job' and 'so you want to be a consultant'.
- **Time frame, touch base, at the end of the day, thought leadership, leverage, piece** (to mean 'thing', 'stuff', 'issue', 'area') and other jargon... unless you're playing buzzword bingo.
- **Techie/s, bean counters, mad scientists, boffins** – and other words that stigmatise particular professions.

A–Z

3i

3i Venturelab

ABN Amro

accounting & control (the area of study)

Accounting & Control (the faculty area)

Akzo Nobel

Alliance Center for Global Research and Development

alumna (feminine singular)

alumnae (feminine plural)

alumni (masculine or mixed plural)

alumnus (masculine singular)

amphi (the room – understood in the English-speaking world, but many anglophones would use lecture theatre or similar instead)

Amphi (the platform)

Amphi (the newsletter)

AON

Asia Campus (not Singapore Campus), but you can refer more informally to the Singapore campus (with a small C)

Asia Pacific Institute of Finance (APIF)

A.T. Kearney

AVIRA (the Executive Education programme)

Aviva (the company)

AXA

Bain & Company

bandwidth
Big 4
bilingual
blue-chip
Boeing
bookmark
The Boston Consulting Group (capital T, but alphabeticise under B)
Booz Allen Hamilton
Buona Vista (area of Singapore)
The Business School for the World (all in capitals)
byte (in computing)

Capgemini
case study (only use case, when it's obvious from the context what this means)
cash flow
CD-ROM
CEDEP (never spell out)
Centre for Advanced Learning Technologies (CALT)
Centre for Decision Making and Risk Analysis (CDMRA)
Centres of Excellence (not Research Centres)
class (not promotion)
Coca Cola (the company, lower case for the drink)
cocktail party (or drinks, or cocktails, not cocktail, which is a type of mixed drink)
company-specific programmes
cooperation
coordinate
communicator
computer-aided design (CAD)
computer-aided manufacturing (CAM)
continuing professional development (CPD)
Corporate Affiliation Programme (CAP)
course (can be part of a programme, but never a full programme)
coursework
cyberspace

database
decision sciences (the area of study)
Decision Sciences (the faculty area)
development (but say fundrasining, if that's what you mean, wherever possible)
dotcom company/dotcoms
download
downside

Economics & Political Science (the faculty area)
eLab@INSEAD
electives (but depending on the context, you may need to explain)
e-mail, e-commerce, etc
Entrepreneurship & Family Enterprise (the faculty area)

E.ON
Ericsson
Euro-Asia and Comparative Research Centre
Europe Campus (not Fontainebleau Campus), but you can refer more informally to the Fontainebleau campus (small c)
Executive Education (not EDP)
Executive MBA (not EMBA)
Exxonmobil
e-zine

faculty (collective noun), a faculty member (if singular)
FAQ (frequently asked questions)
Financial Times (FT)
finance (the subject in general)
Finance (the faculty area)
focused (not focussed)
France Télécom
FTP (file transfer protocol)

GIF graphics interchange format
Gigabyte
GlaxoSmithKline
golden hello
gopher

handwritten
hard disk
hard drive
Harvard Business Review (HBR)
Harvard Business School (HBS)
Healthcare Management Initiative (HMI)
Hewlett-Packard
high-flier
high-tech
Hindi (the language)
Hindu (the religion)
homepage
hotlink (but now dated – use 'link')
HTML (hypertext mark-up language)
HTTP (hypertext transfer protocol)
hydroelectric
hyperlink
hypertext

IESE (don't spell out)

IMD (don't spell out)
impact (a noun but rarely a verb, except in dentistry: use 'effect' or 'have an impact on'
instead)
incubator funds
INSEAD–ABN AMRO Managin for Value Research Initiative
INSEAD Alumni Association (IAA) (not International Alumni Association)
INSEAD Alumni Fund (IAF)
INSEAD Business in Society (IBiS)
The INSEAD Campaign (the current one, no longer called 'A Business School for the
World')
INSEAD Global Leadership Centre (IGLC)
INSEAD PricewaterhouseCoopers Research Initiative on High Performance
Organisations
INSEAD Social Science Research Centre (ISSRC)
INSEAD–Wharton Alliance (en-dash)
International Centre for Learning Innovation (ICLI)
internet
intranet

Java
JavaScript
Job-hunter/job-hunting
job search not jobsearch
JPEG (joint photographic experts group)

Keyword

lifelong
Linux
log off/log on
login name
London Business School (LBS)
LVMH

McDonald's (but alphabeticise as if Mac...)
Macintosh
mailbox
McKinsey & Company
marketing (the general subject)
Marketing (the faculty area)
marketplace (but market is often better)
MBA
MBA'93J, MBA'89D or MBA'63 (for earlier classes)
MBA Career Services (not CMS or Career Management Services)
Member States (when a member of the EU)
milestone

millennium
multidiscipline, multimillion, multimedia, multinational, etc

nerve-racking (not nerve-wracking)
network
no one (two words, no hyphen)
notice board
noughties (to describe the current decade)

offline
OK
online
on-screen
one-third
open-enrolment programmes
L'Oréal (capital L and O, alphabeticise under O)
organisation (s not z)
organisational behaviour (the subject of study)
Organisational Behaviour (the faculty area)

paperwork
participant (never student, but permitted when talking about MBA participants)
password
PC (type of computer, if you mean politically correct, spell it out)
PDF (portable document format)
PhD
Philips
Philip Morris
Plessis Mornay Learning Space
postcontract
postgraduate
postwar
prepaid
prerequisite
PricewaterhouseCoopers
prime minister
programme, unless you're talking about a computer, in which case, program
protocol

reinsure
rejoin
rigour
The Rudolf and Valeria Maag International Centre for Entrepreneurship (ICE)
run-off (noun)

SAB Miller
self-confident, self-employed, etc
shareware
start-ups
strategy (the subject in general)
Strategy (the faculty area)
subagent
subcontractor

takeover (one word) as a verb and take over (two) when a noun
Taxe d'Apprentissage (but you'll probably need to explain what this is in most contexts)
teamwork
Technology & Operations Management (TOM) (the faculty area)
Telefónica
text file
Tiananmen
time frame (horrible expression, plenty of alternatives, avoid if possible)
timescale (avoid if possible)
transnational
truly

under way (always two words)
Unix
URL (universal resource locator)
upload
username

Vodafone

Wal-Mart
website
well-being
Wendel International Centre for Family Enterprise
the Wharton School
word process
work/life balance
workload
workplace
workstation
World Trade Center (not Centre)
worldwide
world wide web (WWW)

Section 3

Editorial processes

Your web pages or brochures stand a better chance of being clear, concise, consistent and correct if you follow rigorous processes. You may need to adapt the suggested ten-step process below, but please try to follow its spirit and its principles. It already diverges from professional standards to match the realities and idiosyncracies of INSEAD!

1. Plan thoroughly

- Always start with a strong idea of the purpose of the document and its audience.
- Then create a detailed page-by-page plan – or a flowchart for a website.
- Get your plan approved by those who will need to approve the final document.
- If possible, work on the format and design concepts/templates with a designer at the planning stage. Also consider production issues, for example, the fact that brochures usually come in multiples of four pages.

2. Commission

- If the budget permits, use a professional copy writer.
- Whoever is writing, make sure you give them a clear brief complete with word counts - and a copy of these style guidelines.

3. Write

- Of course, follow the writing guidelines that you're currently reading, as well as the brief itself.

4. Edit

- Again, use these guidelines!
- Use the spellcheck but don't rely on it.
- Systematically eliminate all double spaces after full stops at this stage (a typing tradition that many writers find difficult to shake off)
- It's very important that someone other than the writer rereads the text with a critical eye at this stage. However, if someone with editing expertise is involved in the approval process (see below), you might be able to skip this stage.

5. Seek approval and amend

- If approval and/or buy-in is required from other people at INSEAD, it's absolutely essential that you seek their input at this stage. If you wait until after the text has been laid up, it may be difficult, time-consuming and costly to change.
- Treat all suggestions with respect, but use your editorial judgement too. Don't hesitate to amend insertions to fit the style of the overall document. And talk to people if you don't understand their handwritten comments.
- Beware of introducing inconsistencies at this stage!

6. Design and lay out

- Again, wherever budgets permit, use a professional designer with a successful record of working for INSEAD. Ideally they should be able to understand the text they are laying out.
- Don't submit a document with fancy lay-out to designers, as it will only hinder them. Do, however, find some clear way of indicating titles, headings, captions, tables and diagrams. Single or double pointy brackets (<,>, <<,>>) are commonly used by editors to give instructions like this. Make sure that 'track changes' is turned off.
- It's particularly tempting to adopt a 'do-it-yourself' approach when it comes to web design. Please resist.
- If you absolutely must design something yourself or are using a comparatively inexperienced designer, please use existing templates and keep it simple!
- You pay a designer to design and lay out, not to edit, hence the next very important stage. Do not allow the designer to shorten or rewrite any of your text. Instead, request that he or she tell you exactly how many lines or words you need to cut and where in order for the text to fit on the page.

7. Check and cut to fit

- Above all check that all the text is there, that no chunks of it have been repeated and that no dummy text remains from the design concept stage or a previous template.
- Most designers work on Macs, while most of us work on PCs. Formatting, accents, dashes, ellipses, special symbols may all get lost during the transfer, so pay particular attention to these.
- Check particularly for the hierarchy of headings and subheadings – and also line and paragraph breaks.
- Where text runs over, count the number of lines you need to cut and do so carefully. Consider combining short paragraphs or cutting paragraphs that run over only by a word or two.
- Check against the INSEAD visual identity guidelines at this stage too!
- Finally, figure out an efficient way of communicating all this to the designer (a meeting, a phone conversation, faxing a marked-up copy or emailing a list of changes can all work in different circumstances).

8. Check again

- Even if there were very few changes in the previous stage, the chances are that the designer will have missed or misunderstood some of your requests, so check it again – and repeat until you've checked everything off your list.

9. Seek final approval, amend and check (again)

- Now is the time to make sure your colleagues whose approval you sought previously are also happy with the design.
- Ask them not to make text changes unless absolutely necessary – they've already had that opportunity. On the other hand, this is the last chance if you or they do spot anything that absolutely must change!
- Go through the amending and checking process with the designer again.

10. Proofread

- Always use a professional proofreader, if possible, just before printing or putting your pages live. If this is not possible, get a colleague whose proofreading you trust to make final corrections. However, this colleague should ideally be seeing the text for the very first time!
- On the other hand, you should aim to make your text error-free and consistent well before it reaches the proofreading stage. The more errors there are for the proofreader to spot, the more will filter through into the final document.
- A good proofreader will simply correct errors and inconsistencies. They should not edit the text for style, but you can ask them to spot any glaring
- Finally, never ask a native English speaker to 'reread' if you want them to proofread! In English 'reread' simply means 'read again'.

Section 4

Further reading

The following are available to consult in the Communications Department – or will be shortly.

Spelling – *Oxford* dictionaries, published by Oxford University Press (OUP) are recommended. We realise that everyone has their preferences for dictionaries, however.

Everything you need to know about editing – *Copy-editing*, Judith Butcher, third edition, CUP.

Guidance on hyphenations, italics, capitalisation – *Hart's Rules for Compositors and Readers* thirty-ninth edition, OUP

Odd words, foreign words, place and names of famous people – *The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors*, OUP.

<to be expanded considerably>