Creating content for Camden.gov.uk

This document details how we structure and write our content – including the style guide. The aim is to be clear and consistent across the website.

If our content is presented using a clear single voice, even if it has been written by a range of different authors, it will encourage a high level of trust from our users.

When deciding **what** to publish, please consult the main Content Strategy document.

Types of content

Website content should be structured in one of two ways:

1. Task focused content

- an action-based page title (e.g. Report an abandoned vehicle; Challenge a PCN)
- clear information outlining what information the user needs to complete the task at the top of the page
- a clear call to action
- don't include any information not directly relevant to completing the task

2. Information based content

- the first paragraph of content should be a brief overview of the content - this tells the user if the page has what they're looking for
- break detailed information into clear sections using sub-headings

Don't use FAQs

Well-structured, purposeful content provides a better experience than FAQs. Research shows users find FAQs frustrating, disorganised and difficult to scan.

The Government Digital Service has a useful summary: FAQs: why we don't have them

Attaching files

Wherever possible, publish content directly on the page.

On-page (html) content is easy to search for, responsive to different devices and browsers, and is structured for users of assistive technology. It's also easy to access, update and check for errors.

Only use attachments for content that can't be presented in this way (e.g. complex strategy documents), and apply the following:

- use PDF only, not Word documents - unless there is a statutory requirement to the contrary
- don't duplicate information available elsewhere
- files must be structured in web-friendly format in a sensible order

Any files uploaded must meet accessibility standards by law – if the file is old, it's likely you will need to review it for accessibility before publishing.

GOV.UK provide guidelines on [how to make PDFs accessible](#).

Reviewing content

Web authors should review their pages and attached files regularly to check:

- facts are still correct
- links are not broken or pointing to the wrong place
- online forms work as they should

Siteimprove analytics provides traffic and behaviour data to see how your content is performing. Contact the web team if you don't have a Siteimprove account.

If content gets very low traffic or engagement, question whether it needs to be on the site at all.

Language and structure

Write in plain English. This will make your content easy and quick to read. It also makes it accessible to people of different reading abilities.

The average reading age in the UK is 9 years old.

Plain English means:

- short sentences

- one idea per sentence or paragraph
- write in everyday language, not council jargon
- active verbs – "You can apply online" rather than "applications can be made online"
- use 'you' and 'we'
- use direct instructions

Structuring your text for the web: these features help users find what they need quickly:

- write a descriptive, meaningful page title and headings
- use headings to space out content
- use bullet point lists
- include a call to action button where appropriate
- remove unnecessary information
- use descriptive text for links – "read our content strategy" rather than "click here"
- put links at the end of a paragraph, rather than mid-text

For more information on plain English, visit www.plainenglish.co.uk

Our style guide

General writing style

- British English standard spelling: *-ise not -ize, programme not program* (unless referring to a computer program)
- website, email, internet, intranet: one-word, lower case
- use double quotes for reported speech and when referring to an excerpt from a quote
- headings: lower case, concise and descriptive. Use the 'styles' option in the editor and select heading level 3 or 4.
- no exclamation marks (!)
- no caps for emphasis; only use bold if absolutely necessary

Addresses

- write street numbers, names and postcodes
- always write out Street (not St), Road (not Rd) etc
- when letters are included, always lower case: *221b Baker Street*

Numbers

- use 'one' unless you're talking about a step, a point in a list or another situation where using the numeral makes more sense: *'in point 1 of the design instructions'*

- write all other numbers in numerals (including 2 to 9) except where it's part of a common expression like 'one or two of them' where numerals would look strange
- if a number starts a sentence, write it out in full (eg. thirty-four) except where it starts a title or subheading
- for numerals over 999, insert a comma for clarity: *9,000*
- spell out common fractions like one-half
- use a % sign for percentages: *50%*
- use a 0 where there's no digit before the decimal point
- use '500 to 900' and not '500-900' (except in tables)
- use MB for anything over 1MB: *4MB not 4096KB*
- use KB for anything under 1MB: *569KB not 0.55MB*
- keep it as accurate as possible and up to 2 decimal places: *4.03MB*
- addresses: use 'to' in address ranges: *49 to 53 Cherry Street*

Ordinal numbers

- spell out first to ninth. After that use 10th, 11th and so on
- in tables, use numerals throughout

Currency

- prices should be written with currency first then number: *£9.99, £10,000*
- don't include decimal point if it's a whole number: *£5*
- millions should be written: *£1 million, £1.5 million*

Dates

- follow the format: day, date, month, year
- *Monday 7 September 2000*
- only use the year if the event is not in the current year
- don't use date suffixes such as 1st, 2nd

Times

- use am or pm, no space: *9am, 4.30pm, 7pm*
- use a full stop to separate hours and minutes: *5.30pm*

Distances and measurements

- conversions (in brackets) to imperial units should be provided wherever this seems useful.
- metric followed by imperial in brackets:*16km (10 miles)*
- write out kilometres, metres etc when writing out the number (one to nine): *eight kilometres (five miles)*; otherwise numerals and abbreviation (mm, cm, m, km, ft)
- always write out miles, inches, hectares and acres
- when area, use *sq. ft, sq. metres, sq. miles, sq. kilometres*

Abbreviations

- don't abbreviate days, months etc
- don't use full stops in abbreviations, or spaces between initials: *BBC, US, mph, No 10, PJ O'Rourke, WH Smith*
- spell out less well-known abbreviations on first reference with abbreviation following in brackets. It is not necessary to spell out well known ones, such as EU, UN, US, BBC, CD
- acronyms take initial cap: *Aids, Isa, Mori, Unison*
- use all caps only if the abbreviation is pronounced as the individual letters

And or &

- only use the ampersand where it is part of an official title or name: *Marks & Spencer, P&O*
- don't use the ampersand for internal departments: *housing and social services*, not housing & social services

Bullet points

- useful for breaking up chunks of text and clarifying it. They serve the same purpose as a semi-colon or comma in continuous text.
- bullet points should start with initial lower-case, no full-stop (including for final point) and be single line spaced
- put the most important point first
- where possible, keep to one line in length

Underlining

- do not underline text – this could be confused with a hyperlink

Common mistakes

- council is singular, e.g. *the council is* ... not the council are
- never abbreviate to Cllr. It should be *Councillor Jane Smith*, then *Councillor Smith*