

**The Chinese University of Hong Kong**  
**Information Services Office**  
**Institutional Style Guide (English)**

(1.9.2020)

About this Guide

1. In preparing and editing English language materials for the University publications, the Information Services Office has adopted this Guide. Colleagues from other units of the University are welcome to refer to this Guide and, where practicable, follow the conventions given herein so as to achieve a stylistic consistency across the University.
2. While great care has been taken to consult various sources and authorities in the preparation of this Guide, the recommendations herein are not meant to be prescriptive. When a particular usage is recommended, it must be understood that other usages are not necessarily wrong, incorrect or inappropriate. Should another usage be preferred, it is highly advisable that it be used throughout the same text or piece of composition.
3. With the accumulation of our experience and particularly with feedback from other users, this Guide will continue to develop, update itself and include more entries. Comments or suggestions should be sent to [iso@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:iso@cuhk.edu.hk).

# A

## a, an

Note the following

- an hour
- an honour
- an SCTL working group was formed ...
- a history class
- a unique experience
- a university

## abbreviations

Full-stops in

- Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr., Prof.

‘Prof.’ should only be used when the full name follows, as in

- Prof. James Watson
- Avoid Prof. Watson
- Professor Watson

No full stops and spaces in

- US, UK, HKU, EU, UN

It is not necessary to spell out well-known abbreviations or acronyms

- CUHK, US, UK, EU, Caltech, MIT, UN, FBI, CD

Otherwise, spell out on first mention and put the abbreviation in parentheses

- Society of Chinese Biochemists (SCB)

When the short-form of ‘for example’ or ‘that is’ is used, use full-stops followed by a comma

- e.g.,
- i.e.,

## **advice**

As a noun, ‘advice’, even in the plural sense, should not take an –s ending. Examples of presenting the plural sense of ‘advice’ include:

- His mentor gave him a lot of good advice on his career path.
- This useful little book contains pieces of advice from the veterans of the trade.

## **adviser, advisor**

Both are in current use, though ‘adviser’ is the more dominant spelling (ranging from 6 to 20 times more frequent than the use of ‘advisor’). The difference does not lie in one being British and the other American.

## **alumni**

Plural. Singular ‘alumnus’ (male) or ‘alumna’ (female)

## **analyse (v.)**

Not analyze

## **and**

Use ‘and’ (not ‘&’) in the main body of a text, except in proper names and titles.

## **anniversary**

The date on which an event occurred on the same date in an earlier year or the commemoration of such an event on that date in following years.

If an event first occurred in October 2004, it would be celebrating its first anniversary in October 2005, and its fourth anniversary in October 2008.

The Chinese equivalent ‘周年’ follows a similar usage.

## **apostrophe**

To indicate possession

- The possessive of most singular nouns (including proper nouns) is formed by adding an apostrophe and an s: Tom’s cat; the President-elect’s wife; John’s and Teddy’s bags; Johns Hopkins’s campus; Mr. Williams’s new house
- The possessive of plural nouns (including proper nouns) is formed by adding an apostrophe only: hawkers’ paradise; the Chans’ car; the Williamses’ new house
- Use ‘Social Welfare Department (SWD)’s...’; not ‘Social Welfare Department’s (SWD)...’

To indicate omission in words and numbers

- The Class of ’95 held a reunion last month.
- I haven’t been to the new library yet.

To pluralize numbers (except decades) and letters

- My jogging partner is a woman in her 40’s.
- How many A’s did you get for your HKCEE?
- The policeman checked our ID’s and birth certificates.
- Our student body is made up of 10,000 Ug’s and over 5,000 Pg’s.
- She was born in the ’40s. (NB: no apostrophe after ‘40’)
- This chair was made in the 1900s.

Academic degrees always take an apostrophe s

- Philip has a bachelor's degree in astrophysics.
- With a Master's in German, she is able to read Rilke in the original.

## **art and artwork**

The dimensions of a work of art should be listed in order of height, width, and (if applicable) depth, following the medium.

- Ink and colour on paper, 45 x 35 cm
- Ceramic, 9 x 10 x 21 cm

*Artwork* should always be one word (not art work) and singular. In plural, either '...works of art' or '...pieces of art'.

## **B**

### **bullet points**

- A bulleted list should not have fewer than three items
- Do not use upper case initial letters and ending punctuation for single words or short phrases in a list
- If the listed items comprise long clauses, long phrases or sentences written on separate lines, use upper case initial letters and a full stop after each bulleted item.

## **C**

### **capitalization (upper vs lower cases)**

*Upper cases*

Upper cases for names and academic titles

- Prof. Chan Tai-man

- Samuel W. Morris University Professor
- Fellow, Croucher Foundation
- Academician, Chinese Academy of Sciences
- Pro-Vice-Chancellor (of CUHK)
- Vice-Chancellor (of CUHK)

Use 'Faculty' to refer to an academic unit (e.g., the Faculty of Arts) and to distinguish it from 'faculty' or 'faculty members', the teaching staff of CUHK

Upper cases for the most senior jobs

- Chief Executive of the HKSAR
- Senior civil servants such as Secretary for Food and Health; Minister of Health
- Diplomatic and political leaders such as Consul-General of Canada
- Director-General of the BBC

Upper cases for academic departments, Schools, Faculties and Colleges

- Department of Fine Arts
- Faculty of Arts
- School of Journalism and Communication
- Chung Chi College
- the constituent Colleges
- one of the new Colleges
- but lower case in 'CUHK's unique college system', 'students enjoy their college life'

*Lower cases*

Lower cases for the following academic titles

- dean of the Faculty of Arts
- head of Chung Chi College

- chairman of the Department of English
- director of the Institute of East Asian Studies
- member of the Econometric Society

Lower cases for academic subject titles and when referring to a general subject area

- John is studying for a physics degree / degree in physics.
- As part of a science degree you study the scientific theories of Western Europe.

Lower cases for generic degree, diploma and certificate unless when using the full title

- I know very few who have both a master's degree in computer science and a diploma in musical performance.
- He is enrolled in a programme leading to the Diploma in Chinese Studio Art.

Lower cases for chairman, director, managing director (of a company), and presidents and chairmen of societies and institutions

- chairman of Shun Hing Foundation
- president of the Law Society

## **car park**

Not carpark

## **century**

Express centuries in numerals and lower case, except for compound adjectives and adverbs.

- writers in 19th century France
- eighteenth-century art

## **Chinese University of Hong Kong, The**

When referring to The Chinese University of Hong Kong, use

- The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- The Chinese University ... (at the beginning of a sentence)
- ... the Chinese University ... (in the middle of a sentence)
- The University ... (at the beginning of a sentence)
- ... the University ... (in the middle of a sentence)
- CUHK
- Avoid using 'CU'

When referring to one or more members of CUHK, avoid using 'CUHKer' or 'CUHKers'.

## Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, The

Use the shortform CUHK (SZ)

### comma

It is more common to leave the last comma out so that when listing a string of more than two items one should always write 'a, b and c' instead of 'a, b, and c'. However, a last comma in some situations would help dispel ambiguity.

- Dr. Lynch is appointed jointly by the departments of Theology, Philosophy, and Classics. (three departments)

A comma is used to introduce a direct speech or where the speaker is identified.

- The doctor said, 'The chance of contracting tuberculosis is, in developed countries, very slim.'
- Judge Reynolds summed up the decision of the appellate court, 'After listening to the arguments on both sides and carefully weighing the evidence before us, we've come to the following verdict...'

A colon may be used instead of a comma to introduce a quotation and often appears after expressions such as *thus* and *as follows*.

- Richard Dawkins once described the distinguished mathematical physicist Freeman Dyson: 'one of the most adventurous thinkers in all of science, not



afraid to throw his mind far into the distant future, somewhat in the manner of science fiction but exceptionally well-informed science fiction.’

- President Obama thus begins his 2009 inaugural speech to the nation: ‘I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors.’
- In one of his weekly *Time* essays, Joel Stein writes: ‘Expressing socially acceptable views is becoming more socially acceptable.’

### **consist, compose, comprise**

In the sense of ‘contain’ or ‘made up of’, these words should be carefully distinguished in their usage:

- A molecule of water consists of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom.
- A molecule of water is composed of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom.
- A molecule of water comprises two hydrogen atoms and oxygen atoms.

### **COVID-19**

- Use ‘COVID-19’ when referring to the disease
- Use ‘SARS-CoV-2’ when referring to the virus

### **currency**

A dollar value referred to in the text is assumed to be in Hong Kong Dollars unless otherwise stated.

- \$10,000 (=HK\$10,000)

When expressing in million or billion

- \$10 million (not \$10m; not \$10 millions)

## D

### dates

Day/Month/Year (No punctuation and abbreviation)

- 12 February 2008
- Monday, 12 February 2008
- Not '12 February 2008 (Monday)'

### decade

A decade is a period of 10 years. It starts in the first year of the period and so, strictly speaking, the first decade of the twenty-first century is 2001—2010, the second decade is 2011—2020, and so on.

### degrees

No full stops and spaces

- BA, MA, PhD, Hon DSocSc
- MB ChB (space in between)

### dialogue, duologue

The word *duologue* is less common than *dialogue* and refers to a conversation or dramatic exchange between two persons only, whereas *dialogue* is sometimes used for conversations which have more than two speaking parts.

## E

### e-

'e-' indicates electronic forms of communication or activities

- e-mail
- e-newsletter
- e-learning
- e-commerce

Avoid beginning a sentence with the above words

## **ellipsis**

... (three dots, not two, with a space before and after)

- The tribunal heard three more witnesses ... and deferred its decision to the next day.

## **enquiry, inquiry**

Enquiry: asking questions and seeking information

Inquiry: investigation

## **F**

### **facilitate (v.)**

The object of this transitive verb should always be a noun or noun phrase. For example,

A gently sloping pathway facilitates ingress and egress of the handicapped.

It is commonly believed that warm milk would facilitate one's falling asleep.

Avoid, for example,

The stewards were hired to facilitate the audience to find their seats.

### **following**

Avoid 'the followings'.

## **G**

### **graduands, graduates**

A graduand is someone who is to be awarded a degree. A graduate is someone who has been awarded and holds a degree.

# H

**health care (n.)**

**healthcare (adj.)**

## **Hongkonger, Hongkongers**

The above are the preferred forms even though ‘Hong Kongers’ and ‘Hong-Kongers’ are sometimes seen in international publications.

Avoid ‘Hongkongese’.

## **hyphen**

Do not use hyphens after adverbs ending in -ly

- a poorly performed act
- a scientifically proven theory

Use hyphens for short and common adverbs

- a well-taken point
- a much-admired speech

Note the following distinctions between hyphens, en-dashes and em-dashes

- Use a hyphen as in ‘a high-level committee’, ‘his father-in-law’
- Use an en-dash as in ‘... accounts for 20–25% ...’, ‘the school year 2007–08’, ‘the 2005–08 triennium’
- Use an em-dash as in ‘The triennium—which means a period of three years—is almost over.’
- Use a hyphen to join the two parts of a double-barreled name: Lloyd-Jones (an individual with a double-barreled surname)
- Use an en-dash to join the two names of a partnership: Lloyd–Jones (a partnership between Lloyd and Jones); or between names of joint authors/creators/performers: Lennon–McCartney compositions, Superman–Batman crossover comics
- Use an en-dash in: the Yang–Mill theory, the Calabi–Yau manifold (NB: some American books use the hyphen in such cases)

- Use an en-dash to join coordinate and contrasting pairs: the Brussels–Paris route, a current–voltage graph, the height–depth ratio

‘Vice-Chancellor’ and ‘Pro-Vice-Chancellor’ (of CUHK) should be hyphenated

Use hyphen in words such as

- hands-on (not hands on)
- in-house (not in house)
- state-of-the-art (not state of the art)
- two-thirds (not two thirds)

No hyphen in words such as

- cooperate (not co-operate)
- coordinate (not co-ordinate)
- manmade (not man-made)
- multidisciplinary (not multi-disciplinary)
- multimedia (not multi-media)
- prerequisite (not pre-requisite)
- online (not on-line)
- reuse (not re-use)
- startup (not start-up)
- worldwide (not world-wide)

## I

### **italic**

Italicize the titles of

- books, plays, films, works of art, pieces of music, TV and radio programmes, magazines, newspapers, and periodicals

Italicize foreign words and phrases not normally in use

- *Cha chaan tangs* are cheap local eats serving fast food.
- She ordered a *nasi ayam* at the Indonesian restaurant.
- This film director is known for his creative *mise-en-scène*.
- Italicize *honoris causa*
- Do not italicize: vice versa, ad hoc, in situ, feng shui, tai chi

Do not italicize foreign proper nouns and common parlance

- He dislikes that café for its bourgeois décor.
- They are learning French at the Alliance Française.
- There was a coup d'état in this town five years ago.

Do not italicize lecture and conference titles.

Italicize and parenthesize scientific names. Upper case for the first name (the genus) and lower case for the second (the species)

- flame tree (*Delonix regia*)
- jacaranda (*Jacaranda acutifolia*)

## L

### **lunch, luncheon**

- lunch is a meal served in the middle of the day
- luncheon is a *formal* meal served in the middle of the day

## M

### mainland

‘mainland China’ (not ‘Mainland China’ except at the beginning of a sentence)

‘on the mainland’ (not ‘in the mainland’)

### mimic

- to mimic
- he mimics...
- he is mimicking...
- he is mimicked by...

### minuscule

It means small or in lower case.

‘miniscule’ is a misspelling.

### Ms, Miss

‘Ms’ for married women who do not use their husband’s name

‘Miss’ for unmarried women

## N

### names

*English and romanized Cantonese names*

- Dr. Peter T.M. Chan

- Prof. Chan Tai-man
- Dr. T.M. Chan
- Prof. Peter Chan
- Mr. Chan Tai-man Peter

Depending on context, one may consider all caps for Chinese family names to avoid confusion to western eyes

- Mr. LEE Woo Sing

*Romanized Putonghua names* (do not hyphenate)

- Prof. Chen Hong
- President Chen Hongyu

*Japanese names*

Use the Western order of given name + family name for the Western alphabets, and the Japanese order family name+ given name for Japanese characters

- Junichiro Koizumi (小泉 純一郎)
- Akira Kurosawa (黒澤明)

## **numbers**

Use words for one to nine, numerals for 10 upwards, percentages and money

- In class, the 24 students were divided into four groups.

Exceptions:

- Numerals for numbers appearing in a table
- Numerals for numbers listed for statistical comparisons, e.g., ‘CUHK faculty members include 2 Nobel laureates, 1 Fields Medalist, 11 Awardees of the Croucher Foundation Senior Research Fellowship, ...’



Spell out if at the beginning of a sentence

- Twenty years ago, they met in school.

Spell out very large numbers so they are more easily recognizable

- One million (not 1,000,000)
- 1.5 million (not 1,500,000)

Numbers indicating sequence follow the guideline for other numbers

- First, fourth, eighth, ninth
- 10<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 53<sup>rd</sup>, 100<sup>th</sup>

*dozen, hundred, thousand, million, billion, etc.*, are singular:

- two dozen scholarships are offered
- three hundred mainland students
- Five million dollars were raised at the concert.

unless they refer to indefinite quantities:

- Hundreds were injured in the blast.
- The nearest star is millions of light-years away.

## **P**

### **percentage**

Use ‘%’, except when the number is written out in full

- 50% (not fifty %)
- one per cent (not percent)
- a percentage of our earnings

## photo captions

- may be a word or more, a complete or incomplete sentence, or several sentences
- no period required for the complete or incomplete sentence, or the last sentence in a caption
- the sentence in a caption should always be in the present tense
- locators (*above, below, top, bottom, left, right, clockwise*) in italic

## plurals

Note the following plural forms

- curriculum – curricula
- focus – foci (not focuses)
- forum – forums (not fora)
- formula – formulas (not formulae)
- gymnasium – gymnasia
- radius – radii
- stratum – strata
- syllabus – syllabuses (not syllabi)
- symposium – symposia

Note that a singular subject does not become plural even if other nouns are connected to it by ‘with’, ‘as well as’, ‘in addition to’, etc.

- What he said as well as how he said it was detestable.

## *detail*

No ‘s’ in ‘in detail’ or ‘go into detail’

### *talent*

It takes an 's' if it refers to a person's special skill or natural gift. It does not if it refers to people with such skill or gift.

- The competition has attracted talent from all over the world.
- The finalists flaunted their talents in a show televised to the nation.

### *offspring*

It is already a plural noun and does not take an 's'.

### *software*

Software is an uncountable noun and does not take an 's'.

### *grounds, commons, bounds*

When referring to a place or territory, these words must end in 's'.

### *compound nouns*

The plural inflection does not necessarily occur in the last word of a compound noun.

### sons-in-law

- ladies-in-waiting
- masters of ceremony
- deans of students

### **postgraduate**

- to qualify degree or programme of studies leading to a master's degree or above
- not 'graduate'
- short-form 'Pg'

## programme

Not program (except ‘computer program’)

## pronouns (gender-neutral)

A gender-neutral pronoun is one that refers to an antecedent the gender of which is not specified.

- *It* is the pronoun for *baby* and *child* as long as the gender of the young one concerned cannot be determined.
- *One* is also a gender-neutral pronoun. Its genitive form is *one’s* and its reflexive is *oneself*.
- Gender neutrality is also achieved by using *he or she* as in: The ideal candidate is a fresh graduate. *He or she* must demonstrate a willingness to learn.

Other acceptable variants are *him or her*, *his or her* and *himself or herself*. These must, however, be used sparingly.

- Some writers use a pronoun in the third person plural (*they*, *them*, and then the highly irregular *themselves*). Such usage is time-honoured and appears in the Shakespeare canon, but it nevertheless creates an agreement problem with the verb to follow and causes confusion, and therefore should be avoided.
- Some writers prefer to use *he* and *she* alternately when the antecedent is generic and of unspecified gender. This creates confusion as the reader may be misled to think that more than one individual is being involved.
- The forms *s/he*, *he/she*, *his/her* and *him/herself* are artificial and should be avoided.

## Q

### quotation marks

Always use single quotation marks ( ‘ ... ’ ) for a quote or a quoted speech, except for a quote within a quote (in which case, use the double quotations marks).

- For centuries, the ancient Greek aphorism ‘know thyself’ has been a motto for many philosophers.
- The professor said, ‘The study of philosophy is a quest for understanding of both ourselves and the world around us.’
- The professor said, ‘The study of philosophy is a quest for understanding of both ourselves, encapsulated in the ancient Greek aphorism “know thyself”, and the world around us.’

The general rule is that periods and commas should be placed inside the closing quotation mark, regardless of whether they are part of the quote or not.

- The principal was heard to have said, ‘The board has approved the extra funding in the next school year.’
- When John F. Kennedy said, ‘Ask what you can do for your country,’ he’s appealing for greater civic participation of the American people.

If the quote is a term, a short phrase or saying with no introductory punctuation, the period or comma should be placed outside the closing quotation mark.

- Civilians killed in the cross-fires between warring factions are considered ‘collateral damage’.
- With the saying ‘If there is a will there is a way’, the guest of honour began his keynote speech to the congregation.’

## R

### respective

The nouns following and qualified by *respective* take plural forms.

- All Department Chairmen / School Directors / Unit Heads should ensure that effective safety measures have been taken within their respective Departments / Schools / Units.

## **respectively**

A comma is recommended before *respectively*.

- New Asia College, Chung Chi College and United College were founded in 1949, 1951 and 1956, respectively.

## **S**

### **sic**

Always in italics and between parentheses, *sic* is used to confirm the accuracy of a quote, denote a factual mistake, or to call attention to the unconventional use of a word or phrase.

- The mayor was heard to have said, ‘Italian immigrants have done an artful (*sic*) lot for this city.’
- The Norman Conquest took place in 1072 (*sic*).
- The master’s cruelty is very palatable (*sic*) to the servants.

Obvious typographical errors and mis-spelled words may be corrected silently without using *sic*.

### **sometimes, sometime, some time**

- sometimes – occasionally
- sometime – at some unspecified or unknown time
- some time – a certain amount of time

### **spacing**

Leave double spaces after a sentence before starting another.

## spelling

Use British spelling

- colour, honour, behaviour (not color, honor, behavior)
- licence, defence, offence (not license, defense, offense) [as nouns]

Note that the –ize form, though widely used in the US, is NOT an Americanism

Beware of some interchangeabilities and UK/US differences

- benefiting, benefitting (either)
- labelling (UK); labeling (US)
- enrol (UK); enroll (US)
- enrolment (UK); enrollment (US)
- focusing, focussing (either)

Always consult a dictionary. Give preference to single t, l, s if either is fine, be consistent throughout the same piece or publication

Avoid endings such as

- amidst (use ‘amid’)
- amongst (use ‘among’)
- whilst (use ‘while’)

## T

### time of day

Use ‘a.m.’ and ‘p.m.’ for *ante meridiem* and *post meridiem*, respectively

- 9:30 a.m.  
4:15 p.m.
- Avoid 9:30 AM and 4:15 PM
- Avoid 9:30am and 4:15pm

## titles

Book, journal and album titles should be italicized

- *One Hundred Years of Solitude* made Gabriel Garcia Marquez world famous.
- His articles often appear in *Nature* and *Scientific American*.
- *All Aboard!* is the last album released by John Denver shortly before his untimely death in 1997.

Article titles should be between single inverted commas; use caps where appropriate.

- Laura Mulvey's article, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', is probably the most cited article in film criticism. [Note the position of the second comma in the sentence]

Conference, exhibition and song titles should be between single inverted commas; use caps where appropriate

- CUHK organized an international conference on 'Chinese Societies in the 21st Century'.
- 'Modern European Painters' is being staged at the Museum of Art.
- 'London Bridge Is Falling Down' defines childhood for millions across the globe.

## ton, tonne

- the British use primarily *tonne* as a unit of measurement of weight (equal to 1,000 kilogrammes)
- the Americans use *ton* which is slightly different from the British *tonne* (equal to 907 kilograms)
- the British sometimes call the American ton the *short ton*
- *ton* should be used in common expressions referring to large number or volume instead of a unit of measurement, e.g., 'tons of work', 'tons of complaints'
- generally, *ton* should be rendered 吨 whereas *tonne* should be rendered 公吨 in Chinese



## **toward, towards**

- ‘toward’ is used more frequently in American English
- ‘towards’ is used more frequently in British English

## **U**

### **Undergraduate**

Short-form ‘Ug’

## **W**

### **website**

If a web address begins with ‘http://www. ...’, simply begin with ‘www. ...’

If others, state full link

No full-stop or slash at the end of a web address

website, webpage (one word, no capitalization)

### **work**

When we are describing the collective output of a writer, painter or composer, we use the word *work* in the plural.

- the complete *works* of J S Bach

When we refer to an individual item selected from among someone’s works, we use *work* in the singular.

- *She Stoops to Conquer* is Goldsmith’s best known work

Sometimes the *works* of an artist are referred to by the French equivalent of the word, i.e., *oeuvres*. On some other occasions the Latin words *opus* and *opera* are used, the former being the singular and the latter the plural.

## Y

### year

Use an en-dash to link up two years to indicate duration

- 1992–2006

For academic years and special use, the latter year should be in two digits only

- 1999–00; 2006–07
- the triennium 2005–08