



LANGUAGE AND STYLE MANUAL
OF THE EUROPEAN FREE
TRADE ASSOCIATION

2007





Foreword

The EFTA language and style manual is based on an observation of documents written by EFTA staff. It identifies problem areas, exposes them and puts forward ways of tackling them. The majority of the language and style difficulties or errors identified tend to recur. By supplying guidelines, the manual puts the responsibility on users to harmonise their work, weed out linguistic inaccuracies and above all, have more consideration for their reader.

The manual is a living document and welcomes suggestions from staff for future updates.

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1. The definite article (The)

- should always precede proper nouns, e.g.: the Commission, the Council, the Parliament, the State, the environment, the sea, etc. However, there are exceptions to this rule, e.g.: “Parliament was already in session when ...”;
- is used in definite description: e.g., Working Group on Free Movement but WG on **the** Free Movement **of Goods** or “The meeting discussed information and participation” but “the meeting discussed **the** information and participation **of workers**”;
- is dropped when a proper noun takes on an adjectival form, e.g., “Commission representatives are of the opinion that...” or “EFTA Environment Ministers agreed that ...”;
- is not compulsory in cases where proper nouns are presented in a one-word bullet point form.



2. Capital letters

Capital letters tend to interrupt the flow of reading. They can also give an impression of pompousness or ignorance, if used excessively. Therefore reserve them for their proper uses.

Capitals should only be used for proper nouns/specifics, for example: Estonia (proper noun) or the EFTA-Singapore **Free Trade Agreement** (specific) but a **free trade agreement** (general). Among other common specifics are: the EEA Agreement, the Internal Market Strategy, the EFTA Convention, etc.

In names of institutions, capitalise the first letter of the first word and subsequently the first letter of key words (primarily nouns). For instance, the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development** (UNCTAD) and the **European Free Trade Association** (EFTA). If you refer to the Association as an organisation, then do not capitalise the letter **o** as **organisation** is in this case a common noun, as opposed to **Association**, a specific. You can also capitalise the first letter of the first word and subsequently the first letter of keywords in titles, subtitles, names of chapters, etc, for example: **The Annual Report of the European Free Trade Association** (title of a document), **Are there Concrete Examples of Trade Creation Effects?** (subtitle in a document).

Other examples: **Euroland** maintains a capital E at all times because it can be considered as a “country” (proper noun). **Euro Indicators** is the name of a



publication and therefore maintains a capital **E** and a capital **I**. So do **Food Safety Statistics**, **Labour Force Statistics**, etc. But when referring to such statistics in general, then do not capitalise.

In the case of lengthy programme names, only capitalise the first letter, e.g., the “**S**ixth framework programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities, contributing to the creation of the European Research Area and to innovation (2002 to 2006)”.

The first letter of the days of the week and months of the year is a capital letter, but not that of the seasons.

Avoid using capital letters to highlight or give prominence to. (See Chapter 8 for EFTA exceptions to this rule.)

Finally, if in doubt, do not capitalise.



3. Shortcuts

A shortcut is a shorter route than the usual one and a means of saving time or effort.

However long, always give the full name of an official document the first time you cite it in a text and follow it with its shorter form in brackets, for instance: the **Council Directive 93/42/EEC of 14 June 1993 concerning medical devices** should be shortened to **Directive 93/42/EEC concerning medical devices** (no date). In the text thereafter, the **Medical Devices Directive** may be used. To use the abbreviation, it is necessary to add **(MDD)** after the first reference to the Directive. In this case, the term Directive starts with a capital **D**. However, when referring to directives in general, do not capitalise the **d**.

The official name of an institution should be given in full, e.g.: the (EFTA) **Group on the Lisbon Process and Other Horizontal Policy Issues**. Later in the text you may refer to it as the **Group**. The (EFTA) **Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade** may be referred to as the **Committee on TBT**, the **TBT Committee** or simply the **Committee**.

In the case of lengthy programme names, the same applies. Firstly, give the full name, e.g.: **the Sixth framework programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities, contributing to the creation of the European Research Area and to innovation (2002 to 2006)**. You may later in the text refer to the programme as the



Sixth Framework Programme for Research or the **FP6** (shortened names to be indicated in brackets after the full name has been given).

Shortcuts are, however, not always the shortest way home. Many messages are lost in this way. To effectively drive your message home, you often have to spell out all the words in your idea, for example:

Incorrect	Correct
EEA EFTA committee participation	EEA EFTA participation in EU committees
EFTA third countries activities	EFTA's activities with third countries
EFTA States governments	The governments of EFTA States
Delegations Heads	Heads of Delegation



4. Phrasal verbs and prepositions

A **phrasal verb** is a set multi-word verb (e.g., to look after, to provide with, to doze off, etc).

A **preposition** is a word used before a noun or pronoun to show the relation of one thing to another in the sentence (on, at, under, by, within, etc). The examples below demonstrate the importance of using phrasal verbs and prepositions appropriately.

The comments drafted by the EEA EFTA States and submitted to the European Union are **EEA EFTA Comments on** (a subject, regulation, proposal, directive, etc.) and not **EEA EFTA Comments to**. When they are addressed to and/or submitted to a particular official, meeting or department, then we can say **EEA EFTA Comments to** e.g.: the **EEA EFTA Comments to the Barcelona Council**.

By, before, until and **within** are commonly used in conjunction with deadlines. However, **until** and **within** are often erroneously used.



Incorrect	Correct
You must send the letter until 10 July	You have until 10 July to send the letter
You must send the letter within 10 July	You must send the letter by or before 10 July

Within is not easily usable in the context of a **deadline** (the point in time at which something must be done or completed) but is more appropriate in terms of **time frame**

(a time period within which something must be done or completed), e.g., “a new member must open its electricity market **within** the first 6 months of joining the organisation”.

Do not write **under sous réserve** as **sous** means **under**.

Approve of (consider fair, good or right or commend) and **approve** (authorise or sanction) are often confused, e.g. “the Working Group **approved of** the minutes of its previous meeting” instead of “the Working Group **approved** the minutes of its previous meeting”.

To **dispose of**, meaning to get rid of, should not be confused with the French **disposer de**, meaning to have (at one’s disposal).

With a view to must always be followed by the gerundive (-ing): The Chair raised his voice **with a view to attracting** the attention of his noisy audience. **With a view to** (with the aim of, in order to) should not to be confused with **in view of** (given that, since, considering, etc).

Other examples of incorrect use of phrasal verbs and prepositions:

Incorrect	Correct
to provide to	to provide with (give, supply/furnish with)
to include into	to include in, incorporate in or into
to implement into <i>(confusion with incorporate into)</i>	to implement
on short notice	at short notice
a representative from or for	a representative of

5. Direct / indirect object

Some verbs cannot be used in direct object phrase construction. For the phrase construction to work, you must name the indirect object:

Incorrect	Correct
The Chairman informed that ...	The Chairman informed <u>the Standing Committee</u> that ...
The Delegate expressed that ...	The Delegate expressed <u>the view</u> that ...
The EU Representative welcomed that ...	The EU Representative welcomed <u>the news</u> that ...



6. Misuse/overuse: alternatives

Like anything else, when overused or misused, words tend to depreciate. This is the case with those listed below.

As well as: **and** has largely taken over the role of this formula. Why use three words when you can use only one?

Currently is a term that is seriously suffering from exhaustion. Quite often it is redundant. If you remove it from the sentence: “Jane is currently working at the WTO”, you will lose no part of the message. If you must absolutely emphasise that Jane is working at the WTO at this very point in time, then **now** is the word.

Incumbent is generally used to refer to a person who holds an office, such as a clergyman/woman or a member of parliament. The definition implies that the person is already in office. Incumbent is therefore not applicable to a future employee. We can therefore replace incumbent with: **successful candidate/applicant**, the name of the advertised position, the future + name of advertised position, you (personal touch), etc.

Moreover and **furthermore**: these two prepositions whose role is to expand an idea that has already been introduced are often wrongly used as synonyms of **and**. They also tend to suffer from overuse, which can be overcome through the use of alternatives such as **in addition to**, **additionally** and **also**.

Rather than facilitate conveyance of a clear message **on the one hand ... on the other (hand)** tends to simply fill up a lot of space. Often, **and** can do the job. For instance: “the EU **on the one hand** aims to reach a bilateral agreement with Mexico and a multilateral agreement with Mercosur **on the other hand**” can just as well be “the EU aims to reach a bilateral agreement with Mexico **and** a multilateral agreement with Mercosur”.

Although commonly used, **organigram(me)** (diagram representing the management, responsibility and hierarchical structure of a company, organisation, etc.) is not listed in major dictionaries of the English language. It is therefore advisable to use **organisation(al) chart**.

Overview: this extremely popular word, meaning general summary of a subject, suffers from overuse. **Summary** and **outline** are good alternatives. It also tends to be misused, in particular when used to refer to detailed descriptions.

Recall: of the many meanings of this word, “to bring back to mind” is one of the most commonly used. However, one cannot bring back to another person’s mind but only to one’s own mind, e.g., “**I recall** vividly what the Swiss Delegate said at the opening session”. Hence, it is incorrect to say: “**May I recall you** that the meeting starts at 10.00 sharp”. The speaker means: “**May I remind** you that the meeting starts at 10.00 sharp”.

Relevant is in great need of alternatives, e.g.: **applicable, appropriate, crucial, in question, and pertinent**.



Responsible functions solely as an adjective (a word that qualifies a noun). So it is wrong to use it as a noun, e.g., “the **responsible** requested members to submit their contributions” or “the **responsible** will look into the matter”. The two examples should name the noun being qualified by the adjective **responsible**, i.e., “the **official responsible for** the programme requested ...” or “the **assistant responsible** will ...” respectively. You have to spell out the subject (the responsible person) before the sentence can make sense.

To **Revert to**: to return to a former state, condition, topic, owner, etc. For instance, “Reverting to your original statement, I think ...” Because it is now becoming rare to use **revert to** in this context, substitute it with more common phrasal verbs such as to **refer to**, to **return to** or simply **go back to**.

Spouse (a person’s partner in marriage) is an old fashioned term that does not reflect many of the modern types of relationships between people. You can also use other perfectly legal terms such as **partner** or **companion**.

7. Italics

Italics are chiefly used to indicate foreign or rare words, emphasis and quoted text.

Foreign language terms that have entered into the English language or recently coined words, such as **acquis**, **comitology**, **cumulation**, etc. may be written in italics or not. Apply the chosen form throughout the document. However, italicising expressions like **de facto**, **inter alia**, **mutatis mutandis**, etc., that have been in use in the English language for a long time might make the style appear cluttered or even affected.

Use bold or colour to emphasise text because the slanting nature of italic characters can prove difficult to read, especially if the text is long.

Use quotation marks and/or colour rather than italics to highlight quoted text.

Copied texts

It is not sufficient to transfer text from one place to another.

Texts copied from other sources need to be corrected if they contain: poor spacing and punctuation, inconsistencies (in the layout of figures, spelling of the same word differently in the same document, inappropriate use of capital letters, etc.), misspelling/typographical errors, some of which may have occurred during the ‘transit’.

8. Harmonisation

Below are examples of words with a double spelling and regularly used in official EFTA documents. **Highlighted in bold** is the most commonly used version of the word in question. Either version of the term may be used, provided that the chosen version is maintained throughout the document.

Version 1	Version 2
bi-lateral	bilateral
co-operate, co-operation	cooperate, cooperation
co-ordinate, co-ordination	coordinate, coordination
decision-making	decision making
decision-shaping	decision shaping
e-mail	email
eurozone/euro zone	Eurozone/Euro zone
eurocurrency	Eurocurrency
judgment	judgement
institution-building	institution building
money-laundering	money laundering
Romania	Rumania
workforce	work force
workplace	work place
world-wide	worldwide

9. EFTA parlance

Examples of language that is specific to EFTA

EFTA Version	General Use
Decision (e.g., decision by the EFTA Council, Standing Committee and Joint Committees)	decision
Declaration on Cooperation/ Declaration on Co-operation	declaration on cooperation/ declaration on co-operation
(EEA EFTA) Comments	comments
(EFTA) Delegate(s), Delegation(s)	delegate(s), delegation(s)
the EEA Enlargement Agreement	enlargement
(EFTA or EEA EFTA) Member State(s)	member state(s)
(EFTA) Heads of National Statistical Institutes	heads of national statistical institutes
(EFTA) Experts Group	experts group
Green/White Paper	green/white paper
(EFTA) Ministerial meeting	ministerial meeting
(EFTA) Working Group	working group



In general, the first letter of the title of a known office-bearer is capitalised, e.g., Director (Director-General or Secretary-General, if the title is a hyphenated compound name).

10. Hyphenation

You can use the hyphen to, among other things, make your work easier to read.

Hyphenate compound nouns:

- decision-making
- decision-shaping
- follow-up (noun) but no hyphen in “to follow up” and “following up”
- clear-up (noun) but no hyphen in “to clear up” and “clearing up”
- six-month period and not six months period

Hyphenate compound adjectives:

- Brussels-based
- country-specific
- cross-border
- EEA-relevant
- EFTA-EU
- EFTA-related
- market-oriented
- non-EFTA
- oil-producing



Avoid hyphenating the following:

Incorrect	Correct
forth-coming	forthcoming
in-coming	incoming
on-going	ongoing
out-going	outgoing
out-standing	outstanding
up-coming	upcoming
web-site	website
EEA-EFTA Member States	EEA EFTA Member States

As the rules on hyphenation are highly variable, a hyphen should always be used where it contributes to clarification. When overused, however, the effect of hyphenation can be perverse. So, when in any doubt, do not hyphenate.

11. British and American spelling styles

As the official working language of EFTA is English, the following words should be written in the British spelling style:

British	American
analyse	analyze
centre	center
catalogue	catalog
colour	color
labelling	labeling
favour	favor
fulfil, fulfilment (exceptions: <i>fulfilling</i> , <i>fulfilled</i> , etc.)	fulfill, fulfillment
labour	labor
metre (exceptions: <i>parameter</i> , <i>barometer</i> , etc.)	meter
practise (verb) practice (noun)	practice (verb and noun)
programme	program

Although the **z** spelt words listed below are not considered to be strictly based on the American style orthography, British style English tends to favour the **s** version, whereas American English considers **s** spelt words to be of British style.

British	American
authorise, authorisation	authorize, authorization
finalise, finalisation	finalize, finalization
harmonise, harmonisation	harmonize, harmonization
liberalise, liberalisation	liberalize, liberalization
organise, organisation	organize, organization
pressurise	pressurize
standardise	standardize
standardisation	standardization
summarise	summarize

In order to standardise the spelling of words belonging to the above category, EFTA official documents use the **s** spelling. When you quote a text containing **z** spelt words from another source or when you refer to **z** spelt names of organisations, designations of officials, etc., you will of course retain the **z**.

NB: Certain words, such as fertilizer, are only **z** spelt.

12. Abbreviations and acronyms

When used properly, many acronyms and abbreviations can certainly enhance communication. They act as ‘shorthand’ and therefore convey more meaning in less time and fewer words. They also add colour to writing. To efficiently use abbreviations/acronyms, it is worth bearing the points below in mind.

An abbreviation is the shortened or contracted form of a word, phrase or multi-word name, e.g.: the Statistical Office of the European Communities – Eurostat.

In general, only the first letter of the abbreviation of a multi-word name is capitalised.

Other examples: Mercosur and Euromed.

Acronym: a word formed from the initial letters of a multi-word name (de facto an abbreviation), e.g.: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – NATO.

An acronym is usually fully capitalised.

When you use an abbreviation/acronym to refer to an organisation in a text for the first time, remember to supply the full name of the organisation and other information whose purpose is to shed light on the organisation. The acronym/abbreviation and/or information should appear in brackets immediately after the full name of the organisation.

Alternate the full name and acronym in the text.



A high number of abbreviations/acronyms in a document tend to fill up the space and overwhelm the reader. You can therefore draw up a list of these and their names in full and place them at the beginning or end of the document.

The definite article **the** precedes an acronym that is unpronounceable as a word, e.g., **the EU**, **the UN**, **the EOTC**, etc., but is not required for those that are pronounceable, e.g., **EFTA**, **NATO**, **UNICEF**, etc.

Exceptions include: **the WHO**, **the ETUC**.

In titles, use either the full name or the acronym but not both.

Do not use abbreviations and numerals at the beginning of a sentence, for instance: “**E.g.**, the EFTA Secretariat decided to ...” should read: “**For example**, the EFTA Secretariat decided to ...” or “**2 years ago** ...” should read: “**Two years ago** ...” However, use numerals elsewhere in the sentence.

13. Punctuation

Punctuation marks carry a lot of information whose meaning can be lost or misunderstood if incorrectly used.

A language using the same type of punctuation marks as another does not necessarily use them in the same way.

Use one space after a comma or a full stop. Double spacing at the end of sentences distracts the reader. Most users do not use it consistently.

Use a full stop within brackets only at the end of a full sentence.

There should be no space between the percentage amount and the percentage symbol, e.g., **ten percent** should read: **10%** and not **10 %**.

A fraction of a percentage is punctuated by a full stop and not by a comma, e.g.: **seven and a half percent = 7.5%** and not **7,5 %**.

Use **space** instead of **commas** and **full stops** in figures of above one thousand.

In the case of bullet points or similar enumerations, end sentences with a comma, semi-colon, and the last point with a full stop. If the enumeration consists of single-word points then it is not necessary to punctuate it.



14. Titles and names of persons

It is important to spell people's and place names correctly and to put accents and symbols (where these exist) in the right place. EFTA uses the British style for titles:

British	American
Mr	Mr.
Mrs	Mrs.
Ms	Ms.

Use the title Ms before a woman's name. Use Mrs (meaning strictly "wife of") or Miss (could be considered pejorative) only when you are certain that this is the title the woman in question uses. On lists of participants in meetings, etc., the titles for both women and men could be dropped.

The person who presides over a meeting, etc. is the **Chair, Chairperson** or **Chair(wo)man**.

Chairmanship can be referred to simply as Chair.

A female spokesperson is a **spokeswoman** or **spokesperson**.

Unnamed individuals should be referred to as: **he/she** or **she/he** or **s/he**, and not simply as **he**.

Avoid using the personal pronouns **he** or **she** more than twice in a row as far as possible.

Avoid using the personal pronouns **he** or **she** the first time you refer to a person in a new paragraph. Identify them first.

15. Figures and currencies

We use numerals rather than words to more clearly express amounts and codes to express currencies. But that is not enough ...

To avoid confusion and for ease of reading, use spacing (rather than full stops and commas) for figures of one thousand and above, e.g., **6 000 000**, rather than **6,000,000** or **6.000.000**.

When expressing an amount in a given currency, the currency's code, if used, should precede the amount, e.g.: **Six million Swiss francs = CHF6m** or **six million euros = €6m/EUR6m**. When writing a figure above one million in the short form, use a full stop rather than a comma, e.g., **2.3** million.

Avoid abbreviations such as **mio** for **million**.

Similarly to other currencies, Europe's single currency is spelt **euro** and not **Euro**, unless it is the first word of a sentence or appears in a title or in a list.

EUR and **€** work well in contracts, lists, tables and other graphic illustrations, while **euro** works well in texts.



16. The reader

Think more about your reader by considering the following points.

Passive verbs make writing duller and more difficult to understand. Active verbs make writing livelier and more personal. Compare “The Icelandic Delegate mentioned that ...” and “It was mentioned by the Icelandic Delegate that ...” You can see that by making the sentence passive, we have had to introduce the words ‘was’ and ‘by’, which makes the sentence clumsier.

Prefer the active voice unless there is a good reason for using the passive voice, e.g. in the sentence “the Chair noticed that a mistake had been made in the minutes of the meeting”.

Like passive verbs, too many nominalisations* make writing very dull and heavy-going. By saying **to exchange views** rather than **to have an exchange of views** and **to discuss** rather than **to have a discussion**, for instance, you will have cut out many useless words.

* “To ‘nominalise’ is linguistic terminology for the condition when a verb gets turned into a noun, with the subsequent loss of information about what is really meant by the word. For instance, the verb ‘to educate’ is turned into ‘education’ at which point nobody has any idea about how you educate or who is being educated. Nominalisations hide the real meaning that somebody attaches to a word from other people, who might make a different meaning. ‘Stress,’ a nominalisation itself, has become an externalised and static noun, hiding the true expression of a process, and disqualifying any personal meaning.” - Dr Philip Hayes - Stress News 2002 Vol. 14 No.2 - The Psychobiology of Stress and Healing

Let your vocabulary be accessible. Overburden the text with too many technical terms and you will put your reader off. Sprinkle it with a few such terms, thus adding a bit of flavour, and you will capture your reader's interest. If the reader is a specialist in your field, they will enjoy reading stuff they know presented lightly. If they are not, they will be happy not to have to spend too much time deciphering or looking up new words, rather than actually reading your text for its overall message.

If your document contains 'insider' terminology, e.g., **comitology**, **cumulation**, **pipeline**, **pre-pipeline**, **acquis (communautaire)**, etc., take the trouble to briefly explain such terminology when you use it in the text for the first time.

Alternatively, draw up a glossary of the uncommon terms and place it at the back of your document.

Do not give your reader indigestion with overly long sentences containing too many ideas. For ease of reading (and perhaps enjoyment), keep your sentences to an average of 3 ideas and 15 words (30 maximum).

