



STYLE GUIDE

for written content

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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This document is a guide to producing written content for Heritage Doncaster. It ensures that we communicate with our audiences in a consistent and accessible way.

While we encourage everyone to be creative and flexible in their contributions, there are a few things to remember when writing for the service.

This document covers tone of voice, grammar and punctuation, common terms, and tips for success. It can be used as a reference for all content written for Heritage Doncaster, including exhibitions, outreach, and online.

WHY IS STYLE IMPORTANT?

We live in a world of distractions. Whether your text is displayed in gallery, at a community event, or online, it is competing for your audience's attention.

Your reader will likely be skim-reading your text while chatting to a friend, carrying a child, checking their emails, or wondering what they'll have for dinner that night.

The Heritage Doncaster style uses plain English to help people connect with us more easily. We can adapt our writing to suit a specific audience or occasion, but our basic principles should remain the same.

OUR AUDIENCES

Heritage Doncaster's mission is to use our diverse heritage to improve the lives of people living in the borough of Doncaster.

The borough is large and diverse. As a National Portfolio Organisation, funded by Arts Council England, we champion the Creative Case for Diversity. This means we believe in equality, and it is our responsibility to communicate with each and every person in a way they understand.

Communication helps tackle isolation. Even complex ideas can be communicated in ways that are engaging and accessible—for every reader.

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR WRITTEN CONTENT

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Who are you writing for? Imagine your reader as a real person. What are their interests? Where do they live? Where do they work? How do they speak? What about their family?

Realistically, our audience will always be diverse. It is our duty to make our work accessible and relatable to all. Readers connect to people and places, so take a person-centred approach to your writing.

Who is the main character in the story you're trying to tell? Bring them to life so your reader can relate to them. Alternatively, root your story in a sense of place and transport your reader there.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

Your reader may not understand certain terms and phrases, even if they are very familiar to you. If in doubt, briefly explain with some background information.

Writing in plain English does not mean dumbing down your ideas. It just helps your reader to understand what you are trying to say.

Try to stick to one idea per paragraph. For longer pieces, use subheadings to break up the text and draw attention to new topics.

Consider using bullet points or a numbered list to make facts more engaging. Or what about an infographic?

LAYERED INTERPRETATION

Don't be afraid to get straight to the point. Readers will scan text to find what interests them, so put your important points at the start to grab their attention. Your reader should be able to understand what you're trying to say, even if they only read your first sentence.

Include basic ideas in an introductory paragraph, and gradually introduce more complex ideas throughout the body of your text. This is known as layered interpretation. It gives you a chance to capture your reader's interest before guiding them through the details.

TONE OF VOICE

A consistent tone of voice helps us to communicate what Heritage Doncaster is all about. It reflects our values and gives our writing a sense of purpose.

The Heritage Doncaster tone of voice can be summed up as follows...

FRIENDLY AND ACCESSIBLE

Use a warm and friendly tone. Keep your sentences short, and don't make your writing more complicated or formal than necessary. It might help to imagine that you're writing to a friend.

Avoid jargon and don't use long words or phrases when shorter ones would do just as well. Don't forget to provide background information if necessary.

CONFIDENT AND UNBIASED

Write in active, straightforward sentences — we have an inspiring story to tell.

It is our job to create engaging content that it is easy to understand, without taking sides or sharing personal opinions. If we don't know all the facts, it's fine to say so. Different perspectives can be shared through community-curated content and quotes.

ENQUIRING AND INSPIRING

Engage the visitor's curiosity. Use layered interpretation to help them explore the story at their own pace. Leave room for them to reflect on what you've said, and make up their own mind.

Use words to engage, guide, and surprise the reader. Leave your audience with a sense of wonder.

GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION

SUBJECT	GUIDANCE	EXAMPLES
<p>ABBREVIATIONS AND APOSTROPHES</p>	<p>When using abbreviations, write out the text in full with the abbreviation in brackets, then use the abbreviation for the rest of the document</p> <p>Do not use full stops to separate letters in initialisms, acronyms, or contractions</p> <p>Use apostrophes in the standard ways—to show possession or letters missed out</p> <p>Do not use apostrophes for dates</p> <p>Add 's for possessives that end in the letter 's'—not just the apostrophe. The exception to this is for words where you don't pronounce the second 's'.</p>	<p>The Royal Air Force (RAF) Doncaster Royal Infirmary (DRI)</p> <p>DRI was featured on the BBC News</p> <p>Laura's coat; The boys' faces; Women's clothing; It's freezing; Past its best</p> <p>1960s not 1960's</p> <p>James's wife was called Anne Flying Childers' racing record was very impressive</p>
<p>CAPITAL LETTERS</p>	<p>Capitalise proper nouns and names</p> <p>Do not capitalise words that refer to our sites or projects unless the actual name is used</p>	<p>Doncaster Museum and Art Gallery</p> <p>Thanks for visiting the museum today The project is funded by NLHF</p>

SUBJECT	GUIDANCE	EXAMPLES
<p>DATES</p>	<p>Write dates as DD Month YYYY</p> <p>Don't include 'th', 'rd' or 'st'</p> <p>Don't include 'of'</p> <p>Use numbers for centuries where possible</p> <p>If the date is confusing, consider using a time period or era to clarify</p>	<p>21 January 1847</p> <p>Not 21st of January 1847</p> <p>Use 1800s not 19th Century</p> <p>The Victorian era</p>
<p>ITALICS</p>	<p>Use italics for:</p> <p>Foreign words that aren't used in English</p> <p>Titles of books, works of art, films, etc.</p>	<p><i>Equus quagga quagga</i></p> <p><i>Wuthering Heights</i></p> <p><i>Giants Refreshed</i></p>
<p>NUMBERS</p>	<p>Write out numbers up to ten, and use numerals for anything higher</p> <p>Always use numerals for ages</p> <p>If a sentence begins with a number, write it in words</p> <p>Use commas to separate numbers by the thousand—it makes them easier to read</p> <p>Use the 12-hour clock with a full stop between the hours and minutes</p>	<p>The horse ate two carrots today</p> <p>The horse ate 14 carrots this week</p> <p>Louise was 7 years old</p> <p>Fifty-six soldiers died in the battle</p> <p>1,735</p> <p>250,000</p> <p>7.30pm</p>

SUBJECT	GUIDANCE	EXAMPLES
<p>PUNCTUATION</p>	<p>Use one space after a full stop</p> <p>There are three types of dashes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hyphens (-) are used to make compound words • En dashes (–) are used to separate a range of numbers • Em dashes are longer (—), and are used instead of commas for emphasis <p>Do not use spaces before or after dashes and hyphens</p> <p>Use single quotation marks as standard</p> <p>Use double quotation marks when quoting something inside single quotation marks</p> <p>Avoid full stops after list items or credits</p> <p>Avoid exclamation marks where possible—use language for emphasis</p>	<p>Andrew nodded. His hat fell off.</p> <p>The cup was highly sought-after</p> <p>The war spanned 1939–1945</p> <p>The miners—who faced 20,000 job losses—went on strike</p> <p>The journal said there was ‘no shelter’</p> <p>Mo asked: ‘Do you know what “Kitchener’s Army” is?’</p>

SUBJECT	GUIDANCE	EXAMPLES
<p>COMMON TERMS</p>	<p>Some terms and placenames are commonly confused. See the examples to clarify the correct spelling and format.</p>	<p>Place names</p> <p>Use ‘the borough of Doncaster’ instead of just ‘Doncaster’ where possible</p> <p>Sprotbrough Conisbrough Mexborough</p> <p>If in doubt, Google it!</p> <p>Military</p> <p>First World War Second World War 1st Battalion KOYLI wartime (one word, no capitals)</p>
<p>CREDITS</p>	<p>All images and quotes should be credited according to the owner’s wishes. External organisations will have their own guidelines to follow. For community and in-house credits, see examples.</p>	<p>Community Submissions</p> <p>By kind permission of</p> <p>In-house</p> <p>Heritage Doncaster, or the specific site if applicable (e.g. Doncaster Archives)</p>

TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR WRITING

FORMATTING

Write in sentence case, using capital letters at the start of sentences and for names. Keep text aligned to the left to maximise readability.

Don't underline text when writing for the web, as this usually indicates a link.

Quotations can be an effective way of adding emphasis to your writing. Work a short quotation into the body of your text, or break up a paragraph with a longer quote set apart from the rest.

BREAKING THE RULES

Although it's not advised to start a sentence with 'but' or 'and', doing so can add emphasis to a closing statement. But use this sparingly.

A comma placed before the final item in a list (before the word 'and') is known as an Oxford comma. Feel free to use an Oxford comma if it improves clarity or readability.

Yes, you can use emojis on social media, where appropriate.

If in doubt, read your text out loud. Or even better, get someone else to read it to you.

GEORGE ORWELL'S RULES FOR WRITING

Avoid common clichés, metaphors and figures of speech

Never use a long word where a short one will do

If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out

Never use the passive where you can use the active

Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent



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