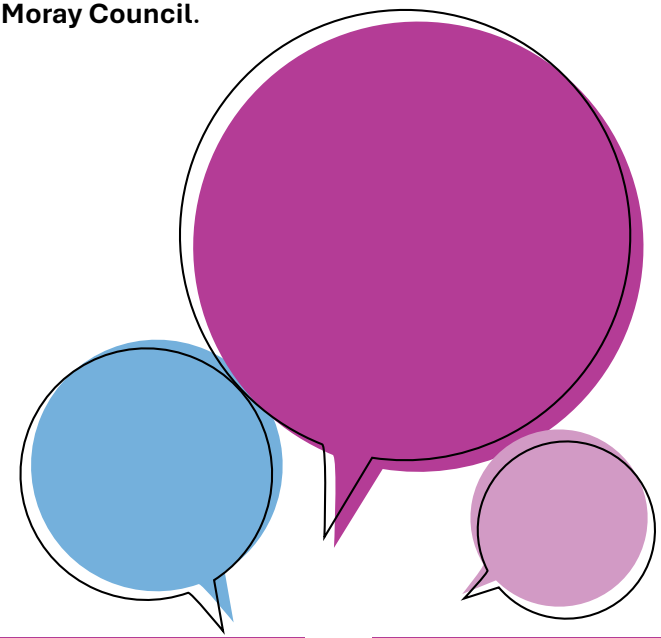
On Message

A guide to producing inclusive corporate documents and content for **Moray Council**.



Contents

On Message	1
Summary of guidance	2
Introduction	4
Inclusive communications	5
How do we make information inclusive?	8
Accessibility: more than just structure	9
Video content for social media	10
Our brand	11
Our logo	12
Our brand typefaces	13
Using our logo	14
Our logotype	15
Use our brand as designed	17
Our colours	17
Service Identities	18
Partnership branding	19
Comms campaigns	20
Our imagery	21
Writing to style	22
Starting with the basics	23
Design guide and checklist	35

Summary of guidance

Understand the brand and house style

- **Brand Colours and Fonts:** Use the official colours and fonts specified in the Moray Council brand guidelines.
- **Logo Usage:** Ensure the logo is used correctly, maintaining its proportions and placement as per the guidelines.
- **Tone of Voice:** Adopt a friendly, professional, and clear tone. Avoid jargon and overly complex language.

Inclusive Language

- **Gender-Neutral Terms:** Use gender-neutral language (e.g. “they” instead of “he/she”).
- **Avoid Stereotypes:** Ensure language does not perpetuate stereotypes or biases.
- **Respectful Language:** Use respectful and considerate language, especially when referring to different groups of people.

Consistency in formatting

- **Headings and Subheadings:** Use consistent styles for headings and subheadings. Follow the hierarchy (e.g. H1 for main headings, H2 for subheadings).
- **Bullet Points and Numbering:** Use bullet points for lists and numbering for steps to enhance readability.
- **Paragraphs:** Keep paragraphs short and focused on one idea.

Accessibility

- **Font Size and Type:** Use a readable font size and type. Avoid overly decorative fonts.
- **Contrast:** Ensure high contrast between text and background for readability.
- **Alt Text for images:** Provide descriptive alt text for images to assist visually impaired users.
- **Plain Language:** Write in Plain English, avoiding complex sentences and technical jargon.

Proofreading and Review

- **Spell Check:** Always run a spell check before finalising documents.
- **Peer Review:** Have another staff member review the document for clarity, consistency, and adherence to guidelines.
- **Feedback:** Encourage feedback from colleagues to continuously improve the quality and inclusivity of documents.

Training and Resources

- **Training Sessions:** Attend regular training sessions offered on brand guidelines and inclusive writing.
- **Reference Materials:** Keep a copy of the brand guidelines and accessibility standards handy for reference.

By following these steps, **Moray Council** staff can ensure that all documents and content are on brand, in the house style, and inclusive and accessible to everyone. The corporate communications team is always happy to help create inclusive communications – ask for assistance via pr@moray.gov.uk or for design support design@moray.gov.uk.

More comms information, templates, guides and the design guide checklist can be found on the comms hub on Interchange.

Introduction

Like many large organisations, we regularly review the way we provide services to meet the ever-changing needs of our customers. Realigning and changing the way we do business allows us to be more effective and efficient as well as unifying how we deliver services to our customers. In-line with the wider period of transformation and culture change in the council we're refreshing our branding and design guidance.

Moray Council produces a significant amount of material on many platforms, and in a variety of formats. Much of this is produced for the public and the style and standards should be consistent in all external content as an integral part of our identity.

Preparing and writing documents for our audiences is a critical skill, as the end product needs to meet the needs of the user and affects our reputation as a trusted source of information.

This document includes full guidance on our brand, our style and accessibility requirements.

Inclusive communications highlights the council's legal obligation to provide online content and digital documents that can be accessed by anyone, regardless of accessibility needs. For example, a hearing or visual impairment, or even a temporary disability like a broken arm, which could affect how someone uses a computer. For some, particularly those with visual impairments, they will rely on a screen reader; some will magnify text or rely on high-contrast fonts or backgrounds to make text more readable. All of these considerations impact the decisions we make in preparing content and documents.

Accessibility is now the foundation on which everything else is based. As an inclusive organisation, we must provide information in a format that can be easily accessed by all.

Our brand provides guidance on the overall appearance of a document, making it obvious that it is produced by us, furthering trust and accountability. This includes the corporate colour palette and correct use of the council logo.

Our style offers guidance on how we should word and structure our communications. The way in which we address people, and the phrases we use show that we are an inclusive, friendly and approachable organisation.

Inclusive communications

By using inclusive communication, we ensure people who use our services get access to them, use them and participate in improving them.

Inclusive communication:

- helps people in communities to lead independent lives
- helps public authorities avoid discrimination

Inclusive communication provides benefits in terms of both cost and user satisfaction. If services are designed around the needs of the people who use them, they will be more cost effective, user friendly and fit for purpose.

If the Council is getting it right the first time, the people who use our services will understand and communicate their needs straight away.

Six Principles of Inclusive Communication

Following these six principles will help you deliver services more effectively and support people with communication support needs. You may already consider some of these things, but using the principles together will help you think about all aspects of inclusive communication.

1. **Communication accessibility and physical accessibility are equally important**

   All people who use public services have the right to access them on an equal basis.

   To make your services fully accessible means considering communication accessibility as well as physical accessibility in the traditional sense.

2. **Every community or group will include people with different communication support needs**

   You should presume that every group you are working with, or expect to work with, includes people with communication support needs. This includes members of the public and your colleagues.

   Inclusive communication should be considered at all times, whether providing information or planning an event, meeting or activity. Good communication practice will help you reach your target audience more effectively and allow people to access services on an equal basis.

3. **Communication is a two-way process of understanding others and expressing yourself**

   Quality service delivery is when the service provider and person who uses the service understand each other, and the person who is using the service is able to express their needs and choices effectively.

   Everyone communicates differently. When somebody has communication support needs, it may take more effort and time to ensure that service provider and person who is using the service understand each other.

   You need to:

   - Match your communication to the needs of the people who use services
   - Recognise and respond to the variety of ways that individuals may express themselves

4. **Be flexible in the way your service is provided**

   In order to match the way you communicate to the needs of all the people who use services do not take a 'one size fits all' approach.

   It's important to consider how changes to the way services are delivered will affect the people who use them. A 'one size fits all' approach will not work, as one system will not meet the needs of all the people who use services.

5. **Effective user involvement will include the participation of people with different communication support needs**

   To help you identify the full implications of service changes for all members of the community, involve people who use these services, including people with communication support needs, from the beginning of the change process.

   Services delivered around the needs of the people who use them will be more cost-effective, user friendly and fit for purpose.

   It's important that people with communication support needs have the opportunity to participate in the change process in the same way that others can.

6. **Keep trying**

   Small, simple changes to the way you communicate will make a big difference to your service delivery. Some changes may take longer, but will deliver positive outcomes, resulting in cost efficiencies and an increase in user satisfaction.

Legislative duty:

By law (The Public Sector Bodies (Website and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018) our websites and digital documents must be accessible.

Reputation and trust:

If our users cannot access the trusted information they need, in a format accessible to them, our reputation is at risk as trust in the organisation will decline.

Access to information:

While we are a digital first organisation for corporate documents, we must also account for the fact that not everyone has internet access. Our online and offline documents should be consistent in their style, branding and accessibility features.

How do we make information inclusive?

What information you're sharing, how many words it is and the objective of the piece of communication will determine the best way to present the information. The corporate comms team can assist with identifying the best channel and option for you. This could be a webpage, an infographic, social media content or a designed digital-first document.

All information should meet particular standards. These can be found on full online here: WCAG 2.2.

What to consider

A screen reader is a piece of software that is frequently used by people with a visual impairment or a learning disability on their devices. It can also be helpful for others, including some elderly people or those with English as an additional language.

A screen reader will start at the top of a document and read out all the text. This means websites and digital documents need to be structured in such a way that screen reader software can interpret and follow.

Some types of content, for example graphics and images, cannot be read by a screen reader. We use alternative text (alt text) descriptions embedded within an image or infographic to describe what the image looks like to the user. This is the same reason and format we use on all our corporate social media imagery as well.

Different screen readers interpret copy slightly differently, and quite often mathematical or typographical symbols are not understood by the software, so can present issues. While we can't design for every type of screen reader, we can try to minimise these issues.

Accessibility: more than just structure

A lot of what we've set out so far relates to structure. But there are other things to consider relating to conditions like colour blindness or dyslexia to help make content more accessible.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia can take different forms; while some can confuse or misread certain letters, for others whole pages of text can swim and move.

We tend to produce documents with high contrast, black text on white paper. While this makes reading easier for people with poor eyesight, it can make it more difficult for those with dyslexia.

We print many of our documents on recycled paper, which has a pale grey rather than pure white appearance. This has the benefits of a slight reduction in contrast, reducing glare, and can be helpful for people with dyslexia, while not significantly impacting other readers.

For digital documents, this can be controlled by the user as they can set their own contrast settings on their screen, and all of our websites offer high contrast settings.

Many of the accessibility tips for people with dyslexia are relevant to make documents easier for everyone to read:

- write in short sentences / paragraphs
- using frequent headers to break up large 'text walls'
- use left alignment on body text – never justify whole blocks of text
- Use the 'Aptos' typeface for body text

For more information on dyslexia visit this website: https://www.dyslexic.com/blog/quick-guide-making-content-accessible/

Video content for social media

The corporate comms team are all fully trained in video production and can assist with video creation for social media. Some tips for creating content yourself can be found in the comms hub on Interchange.

Most people will not click on a video in social media, instead they will glance at it in the feed. This means they will not hear the sound embedded in the video file (85% of social media users watch video without sound!) and don't forget those with a hearing impairment will rely on the content and captions to understand your message.

If you're making or requesting a video from corporate comms consider:

- Keeping it short and to the point, less than 30 seconds.
- Communicating your message visually in the opening five seconds.
- Use open caption subtitling [sometimes called burned in or embedded captions] so that those watching without sound can understand your message.

A few more considerations around video work:

- Do I have the subject's permission? Get it in writing! [Corporate comms consent form is available].
- Have I used music? Do we have the rights to use / broadcast this music?

If the answer to either of the above is 'No' or 'I don't know', then don't do it!

Lastly, social media posts require an alt-text description just the same as images included in digital documents. All platforms all allow you to add alt-text to images, take a bit of time to write these clearly and meaningfully.

Our brand

Our brand reflects our core values and gives us a common base for clear, consistent communication.

Without a strong and consistent brand, we risk giving out conflicting and confusing messages to both our staff and the public.

Creating new logos for individual projects does not help raise public awareness of the role the council plays in delivering services. To improve customer satisfaction it is vital that we are accountable and our people know who is delivering their services to them.

A consistent and unified brand improves awareness and understanding of our vision, enhances our reputation and raises awareness of our responsibilities and successes.

Only one brand should be used to promote all Council activities with no deviation from the core brand permitted.

Our logo

The **Moray Council** brand identity is founded upon two parts. The thistlehead corporate mark, and the ‘Moray’ logotype, the combination of which form our corporate logo.

corporate logo

thistlehead corporate mark

Moray logotype

Our brand typefaces

The council identity incorporates two typefaces. Helvetica Neue and Neue Hammer Unzaile. In addiiton we also use the Aptos typeface for our regular document body text.

Helvetica Neue

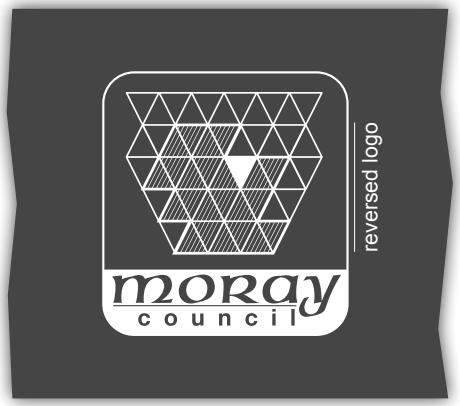
The Helvetica Neue typeface is composed of a number of different weights. These styles may be used as best suits the needs of document headers and sub-headers.

Neue Hammer Unziale

The Neue Hammer Unziale font has several available font weights, but the only acceptable style is ‘style 1’. When used as part of our brand identity it is applied only to the word ‘moray’ brand and is used only in the lower case form.

Using our logo

Our logo comes in three forms; colour, mono, and reversed.



The colour version is the preferred form for all high level communications.

The mono version is used on many public documents and for forms that may be photocopy. It is also the base design for alternative production methods e.g. foil blocking or thermo printing.

The reversed version is useful as a watermark, or for standing proud against a dark background.

Our logotype

As with our logos, the logotype comes in three variations:

colour logotype

mono logotype

reversed logotype

The reversed variant is the preferred option but there will be occasions when other versions are stylistically more appropriate.

The logotype should be separated from complex background imagery by using a standard purple design element with the reversed logotype. The logotype can be used on any materials in place of the standard logo, or when a logo cannot be effectively utilised in a design.

Clear space:

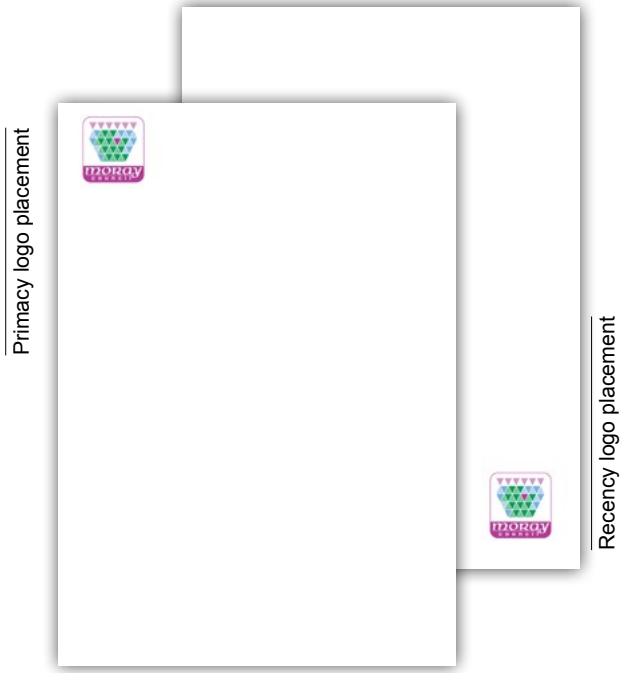
Our logo and logotypes require a minimum clear space around it equal to the width of the letter ‘m’ in Moray.

Placement

Our logo is usually placed preferably towards the right hand side of the page in either the upper or lower corner.

The logo may however be placed anywhere on the page depending upon the requirements of the design and respect for clear space.

When used along side a partner logo, such as NHS Grampian or Police Scotland, our logo should have primacy (the partner logo must be no bigger than our logo and inset from it).



Use our brand as designed

Our logos and logotypes must be used as designed. Our corporate identity is agreed at the highest levels of our organisation.

Please don't:

- re-size the logo
- distort the logo
- re-colour the logo
- overlay text or graphics

Make sure to:

- use the pre-sized logo for the paper size
- use only once, on the document cover

All that having been said, Design has discretion to provide specialist versions of our logo and logotype for specific purposes, novel media, or campaigns.

Our colours

Our branding incorporates three colours. Primary purple, and secondary blue and green. In addition to black and white.

Within these colours are a range of tones that can be used to give further nuance.

MC Purple

Pantone	7442
CMYK	30 / 91 / 0 / 0
RGB	179 / 23 / 255
HEX	AE3E95

MC Blue

Pantone	2925
CMYK	100 / 30 / 0 / 6
RGB	0 / 168 / 240
HEX	007FC1

MC Green

Pantone	355
CMYK	100 / 0 / 91 / 6
RGB	0 / 240 / 22
HEX	009B58

Service Identities

Moray Council is a large organisation with many services. Some Council services have their own identity that sits alongside our universal **Moray Council** brand.

A typical example would be the schools run by the council.

Each school has its own ‘badge’ and colour scheme which inform the colour choices of its web pages and publications. These are always secondary to the council branding.

Example: Elgin Academy School Badge

Partnership branding

When we work in partnership with other organisations we may have to produce materials that include multiple brands.

This can get complicated. But, as a rule of thumb, our branding should take priority if we are the lead partner in the project.

However, there are times when the **Moray Council** branding should not be used. Instead the various partner brands are replaced by a specific Partnership identity.

Examples of this include:

- **Health and Social Care Moray:** a partnership of the Moray Council and NHS Grampian

- **Moray Community Planning Partnership:** a collaboration of many agencies including Moray Council, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue, and many others

Please consult with the comms team via pr@moray.gov.uk.

Comms campaigns

A campaign is created by the comms team to achieve a specific comms and engagement goal. Anything from increasing the number of foster carers to changing attitudes to recycling in our area. A campaign will have many platforms for communication – web, leaflets, social media, advertising etc. The campaign identity ties these aspects together and ensures a strong and consistent message appropriate to the audience and required goal.

It may not always be clear if a campaign is needed, so in the first instance you should speak to the comms team via pr@moray.gov.uk, who will be able to advise and support you.

Our brand within campaigns

If it's necessary to create a campaign identity, often when working in partnership with other stakeholders, you should discuss this with the comms team to advise on the most appropriate approach. They'll work through a comms plan with you and provide design guidance too.

When creating a campaign identity it's still important that the public is aware of who is behind the campaign. If the campaign includes partners, their logos must be present and consistently used. Guidelines should be drawn up for each campaign identity which details how to use partner logos. The campaign brand should still draw from and include the council identity.

When developing a visual identity for a campaign advice should be taken from the Graphic Designer via design@moray.gov.uk.

Our imagery

We are people focused. Therefore our imagery should reflect this celebration of people, both our customers and our staff.

Images should be clear and strong, representing:

- our people
- our ideals and aspirations
- our shared culture and natural heritage

A single strong image is always the preferred option for document covers. Multiple images can cause confusion and lead to the perception of a fractured organisation moving in different directions. A single image shows a unity of purpose.

Should you need new photography commissioned, or want to use existing imagery from our stock library, please contact the comms team via pr@moray.gov.uk.

Writing to style

Moray Council produces a huge amount of material on many platforms and in a variety of formats. Much of this material is produced for public consumption, but the styles and standards of this material can vary hugely.

This is **Moray Council**'s style guide for producing written content for the website, documents or publications and social media posts for the public. It doesn't cover technical reports but is generally applicable to Committee reports.

This guide is designed to help you but remember it's a guide, not a diktat. It's a framework within which you can feel confident to write in your own style.

You're asked to follow this guidance to help create a consistent style and standard across the council. One of the main difficulties in implementing a writing style guide, particularly when many people are originating content, is that people's age and experiences in education affect how they organise their writing. For example, use of capital letters, abbreviations, formatting, numbers and so on. While variation in language use is common, most people think that their way of doing things is the right one. For this reason, a style guide:

- **makes better use of writers' and editors' time:** a style guide provides quick answers to format, style and accuracy questions.
- **helps readers by being consistent:** readers are not jarred by the varying, personal stylistic choices of different writers. Clear, pithy writing shows respect for your reader.
- **conveys the right 'look and feel':** a style guide can help organisations enhance their external image by articulating a style that reflects its values.
- **saves money:** a style guide reduces time spent writing, reviewing and correcting documents.

Starting with the basics

To keep content understandable, concise and relevant, it should be:

- specific
- informative
- clear and concise
- brisk but not terse
- serious but not pompous
- incisive (over-friendliness can lead to a lack of precision and unnecessary words) – but remain human (not a faceless machine)
- emotionless – adjectives can be subjective and make the text sound more emotive, like spin

There are some fundamental principles of good written communication:

- **use plain English:** avoid long or complicated words when short or easy ones are available. Use 'buy' instead of 'purchase', 'help' instead of 'assist', 'about' instead of 'approximately' and 'like' instead of 'such as', 'start' instead of 'commence'.

- **use short sentences:** usually no longer than 25 words, without multiple sub-clauses. Remember, the average reading age in Scotland is 9–10 – aim for that level.

- **use active language, not passive:** it is usually clearer, more direct, more concise and doesn't disguise who is doing what. For example, 'We will make a decision on your application once we have received your letter', not 'Once we have received your letter, a decision will be made on your application'; and 'We recommend that you…', not 'it is recommended that…'

- **avoid technical language and jargon:** unless you are addressing a specialist audience – even then, use it with care. We lose trust from people if we write council buzzwords and jargon. Often these words are too general and vague and can lead to misinterpretation or empty, meaningless text. We can do without these words.

You can usually remove a third to a half of what you write in a first draft.

- **Write conversationally:** picture your audience and write as if you were talking to them one-to-one but with the authority of someone who can actively help.

If possible, get someone to check what you've written, particularly if it will be read outside government. Always read back what you write. If it 'sounds' wrong, or comes awkwardly off the tongue, then the meaning is probably obscure and you are not communicating effectively. Broadly speaking, it's best to write as you would speak.

Addressing the reader

Address the reader as 'you' where possible. This is particularly so for creating content on our website when we often make direct appeals to residents and businesses to get involved or take action, e.g. 'You can contact the Council by phone and email' or 'Please pay your Council Tax'.

Gender-neutral text

Make sure text is gender neutral wherever possible. Use 'them', 'their', 'they' etc.

Contractions

Use contractions, e.g. can't, you'll. Some organisations are reluctant to use them but when testing with users we've never encountered a problem with understanding.

Sometimes, lots of 'cannot', 'should not' etc can seem archaic and formal. That's a tone we can move away from without jeopardising the overall tone of information coming from local government.

Links

In online writing, describe what a weblink is with the relevant terms and make them active and specific. For example, 'To book a room click here:' Always link to online services first. Offer offline alternatives afterwards (where possible).

Capitalisation

One of the gradual changes in the 'look and feel' of documents, both on paper and online, has been reduction in the use of capital letters. This gives pages an uncluttered feel, as well as supporting informality.

Capitals should be used with discretion. There is a tendency to capitalise nouns in government communications – often, it seems, to arbitrarily confer importance or status. Try to avoid this.

Use lower case as much as possible. Company names may feature unusual capitalisation (or lack of capitalisation, such as sportscotland, iPhone); try to follow the company's convention, even if it looks ridiculous.

Sentence case is used in press release headlines but capitals can be used in document headings. For example, a section of a document could be titled: 'How To Use Capital Letters in Headings'.

In text use a capital first letter if the noun is specific: 'the Cambridge Faculty of Education', but use lower case letters in general use, e.g. 'Cambridge has a number of education faculties'.

Capital letters are used for titles such as Moray Community Planning Board or **Moray Council**, with any subsequent shortened reference to an organisation or body being capitalised, 'the Council will work on this'. This is not necessary when referring to a generalisation in the body of the text, 'this action forms part of council business.'

Most importantly, DON'T USE BLOCK CAPITALS FOR LARGE AMOUNTS OF TEXT. IT'S HARD TO READ, AND I FEEL YOU'RE SHOUTING AT ME.

Numbers

Always explain what your date range represents, e.g. ‘tax year 2013 to 2014’ or ‘September 2013 to July 2014’. Date ranges can be the academic year, calendar year or tax year. This is why date ranges must be very, very clear.

The correct rule for sequences of numbers is either to use ‘from… to…’, or to use dashes ‘26–8’. The use of ‘from…to…’ is clearer:

- from 10 November to 21 December
- from 10.00am to 11.00am

For simple dates our style is:

- Date: 13 February 2013
- Time: 4.30
- 24-hour clock: use a colon 14:30

Numbers from one to nine within text should be written in full (one, two, etc). Numbers 10 upwards should be numerals (11,12,13). If used as part of a sequence (26-8) numerals are best. Sentences should not start with a number, but if unavoidable this should written in full, e.g. ‘Twelve hundred competitors…’ Above ten, use figures, unless it produces an unbalanced result, mixing figures and words, such as ‘The projects take between eight and 11 years to complete’. In this example, it would be better to say, ‘between 8 and 11 years…”

Commas

Commas tend to be used excessively. They should only be used to clarify and avoid ambiguity. Their use between adjectives depends on whether they aid understanding or create unnecessary pauses. E.g. ‘successful well-established mutual’ is a clear unambiguous phrase that does not need commas, but ‘The departmental colours include red, blue, mid-blue, blue and turquoise, and green…’ would be thoroughly confusing without commas.

It’s useful to read the sentence aloud and hear where the natural pauses fall (if you need to take more than one breath, the sentence is too long!)

Dashes & En Rules

Dashes ‘–’ can be overused, and are often a sign of sloppy writing. If you use them for emphasis or parenthesis, use the ‘en’ dash. En dashes ‘–’ are longer than a hyphen and can be a substitute for versus, range, or a pairing where both parts are equal. For example: the Obama–McCain debate, 40–50 people, the Smith–Jones paper.

Hyphens

Hyphens should be used between an adjective or participle and noun when both are used as an adjective, for example ‘fast-stream civil servant’, ‘user-focused services’, ‘high-achieving press officer’, ‘top-quality writing’.

They are not necessary between an adverb and an adjective or verb qualifying a noun, e.g. totally enclosed system, specially designed program, rigorously enforced spending controls.

Avoid dashes or hyphens in a direct quote: if there needs to be a break as the sentence is too long, use a full stop. And start another sentence. (Yes, you CAN start a sentence with ‘and’!)

Acronyms – or not

People use the term ‘acronym’ to describe anything made up of initial letters, but it’s not so. NATO is an acronym (because it’s pronounced as a word) but IRA is an initialism. CLT is an initialism, COSLA an acronym.

Acronyms should be used sparingly and always with consideration to the reader’s understanding of them.

There’s no need for full stops between letters of acronyms like H.M.R.C. If the short version’s more familiar than the full one, like BBC, FBI or FAQs, you don’t need to write it out. If it’s not, or if you aren’t sure how well known it is, put it in full the first time you use it, then use just the short version from then on, e.g., International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). But avoid using it at all if you can – so you’d call the IAEA the agency.

When to use ‘we’

In any introduction to the council, try to lead with ‘we’ – it will be very obvious who the ‘we’ is in the context of a council publication or letter.

In policy documents ‘we’ is also used. For example: ‘We announced our intention to do x as part of the partnership agreement.’

However, it’s not obvious who ‘we’ is in all contexts. For example, in a publication or detailed guide on the web, users might start reading the content in the middle of a page. They could arrive at a heading from the navigation bar on the side, or skim read from the top until they find the section they want.

Using ‘we’ within council documents creates an idea of collective responsibility and promotes a togetherness across services, don’t be afraid to ‘we’.

Writing about disability

Not everyone will agree on everything but there is general agreement on some basic guidelines.

The word ‘disabled’ is a description not a group of people. Use ‘disabled people’ not ‘the disabled’ as the collective term.

However, many deaf people whose first language is British Sign Language (BSL) consider themselves part of ‘the deaf community’. They may describe themselves as ‘Deaf’ with a capital ‘D’ to emphasise their deaf identity.

Avoid medical labels. They say little about people as individuals and tend to reinforce stereotypes of disabled people as ‘patients’ or ‘unwell’.

Don’t automatically refer to ‘disabled people’ in all communications: many people who need disability benefits and services don’t identify with this term. Consider using ‘people with health conditions or impairments’ if it seems more appropriate. Full guidance on this area of communication and style is available from the Council’s Equalities Officer.

Differentiating text: *italics*, **bold** & “quotation marks”

In printed documents italic is used for *book*, *film* and *play titles*, and for *stressed* or *foreign words*. Following this convention doesn’t disrupt people’s reading.

Section sub-heads work well in **bold** because the type contrasts with that used for the body type.

The UK convention is for single quotation marks for ‘quoted material’ with double quotation marks for a direct “quote.”

One space after a full stop is enough. Two spaces dates back to the time of typewriters and word processors where the typeface needed the space. We no longer need two spaces after a full stop in modern digital or print. Adding two spaces also causes issues if someone else needs to edit your document or turn it into a designed version as the additional spaces all need to be removed manually. Think: one stop space!

The dreaded apostrophe

The one area of punctuation that's most likely to confuse is the use of the apostrophe. This needn't be the case as there's just one basic rule to follow: use the apostrophe when letters are missing. Here are some examples:

In full	Letters missing	Shortened form
do not	o	don't
can not	no	can't
could not	o	couldn't
let us	u	let's
that is	i	that's
would not	o	wouldn't
they are	a	they're
they had	ha	they'd
you would	woul	you'd
we had	ha	we'd
you are	a	you're
I am	a	I'm
was not	o	wasn't
it is	i	it's
it has	ha	it's
what is	i	what's
my car is there	i	my car's there
the coat is on the peg	i	the coat's on the peg
Tom is going out.	i	Tom's going out.

It's is short for it is or it has. Its means 'belonging to it'. For example: 'The planet has probably spun off its axis by now'.

If you are uncertain which to use, say it in full: 'The planet has probably spun off it is axis by now.'

This is plainly silly, so it's its rather than it's.

Possessives

For proper nouns ending in s, add ’s, e.g. St James’s Park. Do not confuse with plurals, especially when referring to ages or decades:

- under-16s (plural)
- under-16’s (possessive)

Take care with plural nouns: use women’s not womens’; children’s not childrens’; people’s not peoples’. Avoid the common error of adding an apostrophe when making a word or abbreviation plural, as this makes it possessive:

- DVDs not DVD’s
- 1990s not 1990’s

A-Z of common queries, your quick check list

Query	Quick Check
About	should be used only with numbers rounded-off to tens or hundreds. Do not say ‘about 132’.
Affect / effect	Generally, ‘affect’ is a verb and ‘effect’ a noun. When you affect something, you produce an effect on it. However, you can effect (i.e. bring abut) a change.
Allow / enable	Enable means to make able, not to make possible. So, the software enables the user to monitor use of the service; but the software allows use of the service to be monitored.
Ampersand (&)	to be used only as part of a formal title – Department for Work & Pensions, Health & Safety Executive, Tyne & Wear – and not instead of ‘and’.
Amongst	sounds archaic. Use ‘among’.
Billion	in the UK, means ‘thousand million’. Spell it out.
Bullet points	always use a lead-in sentence before bullet points, which should make sense running on from that sentence, preceded by a colon. Use lower case at the start of a bullet. Don’t use or or and at the end of bullets. Don’t put a full stop at the end of the last bullet in the series.
But	You can start a sentence with ‘but’, and with ‘and’. They give pace and pulse to your writing. But don’t do it too often.
Colons	Used to provide a pause before introducing related information, while the semicolon is just a break in a sentence that is stronger than a comma but not as final as a full stop. when used to refer the reader to following text it should not be followed by a hyphen or dash, ‘:-’.
Co-operate and co-ordinate	take hyphens, but email, infrared, printout, readout, reopen, reuse and worldwide do not.
Department	normally takes a lower case ‘d’ unless a specific department is being given its official title, e.g. ‘the Department for Transport’, but ‘the policy of the department is…’.
Due to	is an expression to be employed with care. ‘Because’ is often better.

Query	Quick Check
Fewer / fewer than	Use ‘fewer’ for numbers, but ‘less’ for quantity, e.g. fewer than 50 special advisers, fewer government websites than in 2012; but less than 75%, less than 50 tonnes.
Government	normally takes a lower case ‘g’ unless a specific government is being referred to, e.g. ‘the Scottish Government’, but ‘successive governments’, ‘government data’, ‘the workings of government’.
Headlines	use sentence case in bold type.
However	it is fine to start a sentence with ‘however’. However, if used as a connector, providing a link with the previous sentence, it should be followed by a comma. If used to modify a clause, no comma is necessary. However much you argue, there will always be those who disagree.
Initials	when those of a person, are followed by full stops, and with a space before the surname. Don’t use stops when initials are part of an acronym: PCSU, GDS or MCO.
Less / less than	is for amounts/quantity/units of measurement (‘less investment’, ‘less than 75%’; ‘less than 40 miles away’).
Long / short term	are hyphenated if used as an adjective. For example, ‘short-term benefit’. Long Term Economic Plan is an exception.
Midlands	and other regions take lower case, e.g. midlands, south west, north east.
Minister	use upper case for a full title, e.g. Minister for Environment, or when used with a name, such as Cabinet Secretary Joanna Bloggs. When referring non-specifically to “a minister’ or ‘ministers’, use all lower case.
Multi	as in ‘multidisciplinary’ or ‘multinational’, doesn’t need to be followed by a hyphen.
Onto	is one word, except when it means ‘onwards and towards’, e.g. ‘let’s move on to the next point’, or ‘apprentices can go on to full-time employment’.
Parliament	takes a capital ‘P’, but ‘parliamentary’ is all lower case.
Per cent	use ‘per cent’ not ‘percent’. Use the symbol ‘%’ with a number.

Query	Quick Check
Program	this spelling is only correct when used in connection with computing – ‘computer program’, ‘software program’.
Punctuation for quotes	use double quotation marks for “direct quotations”. Use single quotation marks within ‘quotes’, and for ‘unusual terms’ and words used in an ‘unusual way’: “The framework allows organisations to ‘purchase’ a digital delivery team”. In quotes running to two or more paragraphs, open quotes for each new paragraph, but close quotes only at the end of the quote. The comma or full stop always comes **after** the unquote, except where a full sentence is being quoted. So: He described the policy as ‘truly radical’; but: “The policy,” he said, “is truly radical.”
Seasons	spring, summer, autumn, winter (no initial capital letter).
Semicolons	used to break up a list of categories. For example: postgraduate studies; nursing; midwifery and auxiliary medical studies; health-management studies – or to connect two sentences.
Spaces	insert a single space after a full stop, not two or more.
Spelling	avoid American spelling (verbs ending in ‘ise’ or ‘yse’, like ‘revise’ and ‘analyse’, should not be spelt ‘ize’ or ‘yze’).
That / which	As a general rule, ‘that’ is used to introduce a clause that gives information essential to the meaning of sentence; ‘which’ is used to introduce a clause not essential in identifying the thing being discussed. Changing that to which or vice versa can completely change the meaning of a sentence. For example: • the service that is digital is quick and easy to use • the service, which is digital, is quick and easy to use The first sentence, using that, suggests a comparison with non-digital services. The second, using which, simply informs you that the service is digital and easy to use, not that it is this that makes the service better. We can remove the clause without losing any essential information: ‘the service is very fast and easy to use’.

Query	Quick Check
Time	generally, use ‘am’ and ‘pm’ and not the 24-hour format. So, 6.30am (not 0630) and 6.30pm (not 1830 or 1830hrs). Use am / pm, without stops. The 24-hour format may be clearer when writing an operational plan, for example.
Under way	is two words, e.g. ‘the project is under way’.
Verbs	sentences usually, but not always, need verbs.
While	should be used to indicate that something is happening at the same time as something else, not as an alternative to ‘and’.
Whilst	sounds archaic. You would never say it in normal conversation, so don’t use it in writing. Use ‘while’.

There’s lots more spelling and grammar help online, just search for it or ask the comms team via pr@moray.gov.uk.

Design guide and checklist

We have an in-house Graphic Designer who can prepare accessible digital documents, create content and advise on style.

Design can also produce print-ready files for our in-house print room, or to be sent to specialist printers.

You can send files to design@moray.gov.uk to be checked and an accessible document produced for you or to request a design job.

You can help by following some simple steps before sending your document to design:

- ☐ Ensure the document text is final. We can deal with correcting the occasional spelling mistake, but we want to avoid having to restructure whole pages
- ☐ Proofread it or get someone else to proofread it. And do it again, for good luck!
- ☐ Language used should reflect our style
- ☐ Avoid placing images into the document text (send specific images to be used as high res files)
- ☐ Floating text boxes shouldn't be used
- ☐ No ALL CAPITAL HEADINGS. I FEEL LIKE YOU'RE SHOUTING AT ME, AND IT'S REALLY HARD TO READ. Just use upper and lower case, like you would in a sentence
- ☐ Remove footnotes
- ☐ Avoid the use of tables. If you must use a table, be sure it is in simple form for accessibility
- ☐ If you've used track changes, accept all edits and turn track changes off

Please provide a design brief and any examples of other work you like along with your deadline for the job to be completed when submitting your request.

Tables

We can use tables to present data but they must be 'simple' tables.

A simple table means:

- Having a labelled header row
- No split or merged cells (these can confuse screen readers)
- Avoiding symbols or colours to explain meaning, for example a screen reader has no idea that a green arrow means 'improvement from last year'; at best it will say 'green arrow', which means nothing to the user
- Tables should be used for laying out comparative numerical values, not for laying out large bodies of text

Images

If you've specific images you need included, attach them to your email as a high res JPG or PNG image file, avoid saving them into the word file.

In the body of the text document include a '<mark up instruction>'. This is just a text note inside a pair of greater than/less than signs.

Example:
<add image IMG_686823 here>

Our graphic designer can advise on the appropriateness and quality of the image and can help source different images if necessary.

You should include an 'alt text' description of your image in the mark up; this explains to those using a screen reader what is contained in an image. If you don't include this, the graphic designer will suggest one for you. Alt text should provide the context of the picture as well as describe its contents.

Example:
<add image IMG_686823 here; alt 'A smiling woman with grey hair, and wearing a blue dress is standing on a sandy beach watching the sunset.'>

Alt text must be added to all images you're using on your service's social media channels. If you need guidance on how to do this, contact: pr@moray.gov.uk.

Charts and graphs

Charts and graphs are a specific category of image and must conform to the rules of images above.

It's difficult to produce meaningful charts and graphs for people who rely on screen readers. We strongly recommended that if a chart or graph must be used, it is simplified as much as possible.

Ask yourself, what am I trying to tell my audience? If you want to display a lot of numerical data over time, then a simple table is a more effective way of doing this.

- Can the data be reduced to a few key points?
- Do we need multiple comparator trend lines or just an average?
- Can we describe the trend in a short paragraph?

Our graphic designer needs the raw data for the graph, so that it can be accurately redrawn. Please include all the necessary data including title, axis labels and scaling.

Just as with a regular image the alt text for a graphic is important and must include all the pertinent data that is being presented visually.

Flow charts

Flow charts are used to visually describe complex relationships or branching decision making. This 'non-linear' presentation doesn't translate well into plain text. This is a near impossible problem for partial or non-sighted individuals as screen readers cannot understand or interpret the diagram in any useful way.

Avoid the use of flow charts, unless there is absolutely no other way to present this information.

If a flow chart must be used, consider reducing the chart to direct reporting / management relationships and remove all unnecessary information.

Our graphic designer can provide advice and alternative options, contact: design@moray.gov.uk.