DG COMM 1 Style guide

- Council of the EU and European Council -

July 2020 - *update*

INTRODUCTION

This guide to writing, editing and English usage is intended for content contributors at www.consilium.europa.eu.

It is an evidence-based document that seeks to strike a balance between meeting user needs and achieving Council business goals. It sets out conventions for style, tone of voice and language. It also contains a list of commonly used words and terms.

The evidence underpinning this guide is collected and updated on a regular basis. This is done with the help of tests, audits, content analysis and other measurement techniques which reveal reading and behaviour patterns online.

The objectives of this document are to ensure that online content available on the Council's website is clear, consistent and easy to find, and that it reinforces the institution's brand identity. The principal goal of this guide is to help content creators write in a way that reaches target audiences effectively.

What the document does not aim to do, however, is to restrict content creators. It instead seeks to provide them with the structure and collective knowledge necessary in order to be efficient and effective in their work. In other words, it provides quick answers to questions that may arise when creating content.

This guide applies to all content published on consilium.europa.eu, including:
- audiovisual content from the TV Newsroom or the Council streaming service
- services linked to www.consilium.europa.eu, e.g. PRADO or CASE

It does not cover:
- speeches and remarks
- official documents (both PDF and html)

This is the third update of the unified DG COMM style guide, initially launched to coincide with the revamp of the Council website in 2015. The updates take into account new usability findings, web developments and trends, feedback received and issues spotted.

The document will continue to evolve. We invite you to help us by providing feedback so that we can keep it relevant and up to date.

1. WRITING

1.1. GOALS AND PRINCIPLES

WEB READING PATTERNS

The guidance on writing for the Council website is based on evidence on how people read and behave online. [Research](#) by user experience (UX) guru J. Nielsen shows that people read differently on the web than on paper: they don't read word by word but rather tend to scan the page, picking out individual words and sentences instead. On the average webpage, **users read between 20-28% of the words**.

Further [research](#) from the same source shows that people tend to read a webpage in **an F-shaped pattern**. First, they read the top part of the content, in a horizontal stripe; next, they go to the paragraph below in an horizontal movement that covers a smaller area than the first movement; then they continue scanning the left side of the page in a vertical movement (as shown in the 'F pattern' heat map below).

This specific feature of web reading should be our primary consideration when drafting for the Council website.

AUDIENCE

Our communication materials have two main **target audiences**:

- Primary: **media professionals (in print, audiovisual and digital), opinion formers (academia, think-thanks, influential bloggers, NGOs), government officials (delegates,**

diplomats, civil servants), officials of international organisations, as well as leaders, ministers and MEPs

- Secondary: **interested citizens** (general public), students in higher education, **lobbyists, legal experts**

TONE OF VOICE

Tone of voice refers to the way we write, what we write and how we write.

It is important to remember that the Council speaks with one voice on behalf of all the institutions and entities it represents. Therefore, **we should write about 'ministers' or 'the Council', rather than 'member states'**. For example, 'Ministers discussed the Commission's proposal'. Similarly, when referring to decisions adopted in the Council, **we should avoid mentioning the specific configuration**. For example, 'The Council adopted a proposal' rather than 'The Environment Council adopted a proposal'.

We should emphasise different elements of the tone of voice depending on what or whom the content refers to. But flexibility and customisation does not mean that we should not strive to uphold a consistent tone of voice in all communication.

To reach our target audiences, we should therefore make sure that our content is:

- **authoritative:** make the most of the depth and range of the Council's knowledge and expertise, be direct and assertive but not dogmatic
- **clear:** enable the reader to understand the main message at a glance by presenting content in a 'scannable' format and by ensuring they are not distracted by complicated phrases and overly complex content (for instance, by keeping content jargon-free)
- **accurate**: always keep in mind the need to double-check figures, statistics, statements and other precise information included in our texts
- **accessible:** ensure that our content is easy to digest by using short sentences (maximum 20-30 words) while trying to avoid oversimplification
- **transparent:** as we seek to be open about the purpose and actions of this institution, provide explanations as often as possible
- **concise:** always look for the most effective, concise and direct way to provide information and try to avoid elaborate constructions

- **serious:** write with responsibility and provide context
- **dispassionate:** be restrained and measured in our communication, in line with established web writing conventions

CLEAR LANGUAGE

Clear language is a key requirement to understanding content on screen. This does not mean that the content has to be oversimplified or that specialist terminology should be avoided. However, research shows that **shorter sentences in plain language** allow readers to assimilate information faster.

REMEMBER: many of the website's users are not native speakers

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Formal or long words should be avoided where easy or short ones can be used. For example, we should choose 'help' rather than 'assist', 'about' rather than 'approximately', 'said' rather than 'took the opportunity to express'.

Where possible, we should also:

- **avoid unwieldy grammar** - e.g. use 'they could' instead of 'they may be able to'
- **choose short rather than long sentences** with sub-clauses
- **omit useless words and phrases**, such as 'in order to' and use 'to' instead
- **avoid using 'etc.'** - instead, introduce an enumeration with a formula, e.g. 'such as' or 'like'
- **steer clear of time-tied words such as 'today'** - be specific, e.g. 'on xx date'

REMEMBER: words ending in '–ion' and '–ment' tend to make sentences longer and more complicated than necessary

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INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Inclusive, bias-free language avoids stereotypes and references to irrelevant details. Below we provide recommendations on how to refer to different groups in a non-discriminatory way.

Gender

We should avoid the use of generic masculine pronouns - 'he/his/him' - to refer to people of all genders. The preferred solution is to use 'their' or 'they'. If gender is unavoidable, we should choose 'he or she' and not 's/he', 'he/she' or '(s)he'.

AVOID GENERIC GENDER CONNOTATIONS whenever possible

- **Omit the pronoun:**

  An official's leave entitlement depends on ~~his~~ age.

- **Change the possessive pronoun 'his' to 'a' or 'the':**

  The candidate must submit **the** application (instead of the candidate must submit 'his' application).

- **Use gender-neutral nouns** that make no assumption about the gender of a job-holder

chairman	→	**chair**
spokesman	→	**spokesperson**

Persons with disabilities

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities calls for measures to combat stereotypes related to disability, so it is important that we are aware of and avoid negative stereotypes or stigmatising language.

Here are some simple pointers for when we write or speak about persons with disabilities:

- use person-first language - a **person with a disability**
- **emphasise each person's individuality and capabilities** rather than their condition
- **avoid** references such as **'suffers from'** and **'victim'**
- steer clear of terms that define the disability as a limitation
- **do not use collective, non-homogeneous nouns** such as 'the deaf'

INSTEAD OF	USE
the handicapped; the disabled	**persons with disabilities** or **disabled persons**
the blind	persons **who are** blind

afflicted by; suffer from; victim of	**to have** - e.g. a person who has epilepsy
NO an autist	**YES** an autistic person or a person with autism
NO a person suffering from a mental disorder	**YES** a person **with** a mental health condition
NO wheelchair-bound; confined to a wheelchair	**YES** **a wheelchair user**

For more information, see the communication on inclusive language:

https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35394/en_inclusive-comm-gsc.pdf

BUZZWORDS AND JARGON

Too many buzzwords and jargon are off-putting for readers.

Internal jargon should be avoided (e.g. 'conditionality') but, if we have to use it, then we must explain its meaning on first use in every new document and product.

Many buzzwords are too general and vague, and can lead to misinterpretation (e.g. 'synergy').

We should also **avoid metaphors** such as:

- drive (we can only drive vehicles, not schemes or people)
- drive out (unless we are writing about cattle)
- going forward (unless we are providing travel directions)
- ring-fencing

We can avoid these terms by clearly stating what is actually being done. **It is important to be specific.**

LIST OF JARGON TERMS

Avoid altogether	Alternative
To disincentivise/ incentivise	To discourage/encourage, remove/provide

	incentives for
To impact	To have an impact on
To progress **(transitive and intransitive)**	To make progress on/with
To debrief	To brief on, report on
To collaborate	To work with
To dialogue	To talk, hold discussions, speak with
To leverage (unless in the financial sense) ***but we can use as a noun - e.g. to have some leverage**	To influence, use as a bargaining tool

These words are overused or used in the wrong context	Alternatives
Agenda **(unless it is for a meeting)**	Aims, objectives, goals, to be planned or Scheduled
To advance **(transitively)**	To make progress on, get ahead on (depending on context)
To deploy **(unless it is military or software)**	To use
Overarching	Main, principal
To promote **(unless we are talking about an ad campaign)**	To encourage
Slimming down **(in terms of processes and not diet)**	This usually means removing x amount of paperwork
Key **(unless it unlocks something)**	Important **(a subject/thing isn't 'key', it's probably 'important')**
Liaise	Work together, cooperate
Land **(as a verb, only use if you are talking about aircraft)**	Achieve, deliver, agree (ministers didn't 'land' a deal, they probably 'agreed' or 'delivered' a deal)
Robust	Strong, resilient
To commit/pledge **(we represent a political institution that does in fact commit to action)**	To undertake to do, to set out to

To counter	To oppose, to disagree
To deliver **(okay for results and services but less so for** **improvements or priorities)**	To produce results
To empower **(perfectly acceptable in the right context but** **we need to use it responsibly)**	To enable to, to equip to
To initiate	To begin
To mainstream **(establish across the board, in all policies)**	To implement, to generalise
To streamline	To design, to bring up to date, to put in order
To tackle **(unless we refer to sports tackles)**	To reduce, to curb, to counter
To transform **(works if talking about radical change)**	To radically change or alter
To utilise	To use

Content is easier to understand if it is:

- specific
- informative
- clear
- short
- serious
- unemotive (not too laden with adjectives)

1.2. GRAMMAR AND CONVENTIONS

Upholding certain conventions and rules of grammar helps us keep our writing clear and consistent. This section will lay out the house style which applies to all of our content.

SPELLING

Use **British English spelling** and not US English spellings. For example, 'organise' rather than 'organize'. However, if an organisation uses the 'z' spelling in its name then we should follow that practice.

VERB TENSES

We should always try to write in **simple tenses**.

We **should avoid use of the passive voice** wherever possible.

YES: 'Council approved the regulation'
 NO: 'The regulation was approved by the Council'

Also, where possible, we should try to **avoid using the future tense** as this usually requires later updates.

PUNCTUATION

We do not use full stops or semicolons in **lists and bullet points** (also a feature throughout this document - below, for example).

QUOTATION

To introduce quotes, we should use a colon (**not** a comma):

Donald Tusk, President of the European Council:
"It is the right time to set out what we want the EU to focus on."
Single quotation marks should be used:
- in headlines
- in specific situations, for example to introduce an alternative name - the 'codecision' process/also known as 'codecision'

Double quotation marks should be reserved for direct quotations in the body of the text. An example:

"Our strategy is threefold: balancing our budgets, keeping up the necessary structural reforms and strengthening our financial sector," said Eurogroup President Dijsselbloem.

When preparing main results we advise drafters **not to start with a quotation** but to add an introductory text and then the quote.

HYPHENS

We should not use hyphens for 'email', 'cooperation' or 'codecision'. However, we should keep them for words such as 'no-one', 're-use', 're-examination'.

As a general rule, we should avoid using hyphens as they clutter up text. We should use them only to form short compound adjectives (three-year deal) and transform adverbs into adjectives (ill-mannered, hard-pressed).

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

To spell or not to spell?
Some abbreviated terms are sufficiently familiar to our readers and **do not need** to be spelled out at first mention: EU, UN, WTO, NATO, IMF, G8, G20, GDP, SMEs.

Other abbreviations and acronyms, however, **need to be spelled out**. Examples:

- **Council configurations**: General Affairs Council (GAC) or Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council
- **Less familiar terms**: e.g. HR, TACs and quotas, ERDF, IAEA, WHO, UNSCR, ICC, ICTY, AU, ASEAN, WMD, RTD, CEO, OECD
- Where a policy or name has an abbreviation, we should mention it in full at first use, with the abbreviation in brackets, then simply use the abbreviation for the rest of the text - e.g. "These kinds of incidents are often called network and information security (NIS) incidents"

N.B. We should rely on **common sense and previous usage** to determine whether a particular abbreviation or acronym can be considered familiar enough to readers of Council texts.

Upper/lower case?

The interinstitutional style guide suggests that:

- where an acronym or abbreviation of **six letters or more can be pronounced**, we should write in **lower case with only the first letter as a capital**, e.g. Ecofin and Coreper, unless the body itself follows a different practice
- we should reproduce an acronym or abbreviation of **up to five letters** in **capitals** even if it can be pronounced, e.g. EBA, AIDS
- we should write as we speak in the case of 'plural acronyms' such as SMEs (unless used as an adjective)

Acronyms and initialisms

Acronyms are formed from the first (or first few) letters of a series of words and are pronounced as words (e.g. NATO). Initialisms are formed from the initial letters of a series of words and each separate letter is pronounced (e.g. ECB).

We should:
- not use full stops between capitals in acronyms and intialisms
- use full stops in lower-case initialisms (i.e., e.g., etc.)
- not use definite articles before acronyms - e.g. "EFTA decided …" and not "the EFTA decided"
- use a **definite article** for initialisms - e.g. "New developments at the ECB" or "announced by the IMF" or "issued by the ESM"
- use the **'an' form of the indefinite article** where the pronunciation of the initialism so requires, e.g. 'a BBC film' or 'an MEP question' (with 'M' pronounced as 'EM') or 'an LTRO' ('L' is pronounced 'EL') or 'an ESM decision'

PROPER NOUNS AND NAMES: TERMINOLOGY AND CAPITALISATION

In the Annex you can find a list with the **most commonly used terms and titles** and the **appropriate capitalisation.**

Alternatively, you can consult our [policy pages](#) to check the use of well-known terms such as 'digital single market' or 'cybersecurity'.

For questions and suggestions, contact digital.editors@consilium.europa.eu.

EU, Union and Community

When writing about the EU, we should use 'European Union' or 'EU'. **We should not use 'Union'** as this is an ambiguous term. 'European Community' and 'Community' should also be avoided, unless used in an historical context (in the Council/European Council history timeline, for example).

European

The first time we mention an EU institution, we should use its full name - e.g. the "European Commission proposal on network security" or "the European Parliament debated the issue".

Once it is clear which European institution we are referring to, we should use the shorter version of the name: "The Commission will now revise its proposal and present a new draft."

Member states

We should not use capital letters to refer to the group of EU member states, e.g. 'member states' and **not** 'Member States'. The same applies to the group of EU leaders, e.g. 'heads of state or government' and **not** 'Heads of State or Government'.

Roles and titles

For instance, we must:

- only use capital letters for the **first letter** of a person's surname, not for their entire surname - e.g. 'President Donald Tusk' and **not** 'President DONALD TUSK'
- **use capitals** where a person is referred to by their **official title** - the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, or the Secretary-General of the Council
- **use capitals** where the title is not mentioned in full, but **in conjunction with the person's name -** e.g. President Herman Van Rompuy, High Representative Federica Mogherini or Prime Minister Theresa May

- **use lower case** in **all other circumstances** - e.g. the high representative or environment ministers or the Council presidency or heads of state or government or EU leaders or the president
- **not use the titles Mr, Mrs, Ms, Doctor, Professor, etc.** when mentioning someone by name; rather, use either the official name of the role or the person's first name - e.g. 'Antonio Tajani said' but **not** 'Mr Tajani said'

EU legislation

When referring to regulations, directives, declaration, decisions treaties etc., we should:

- **use lower case** to cite names of legislative acts (usually displayed in full capitalised format in official documents): for documents such as the 4th railway package or a Commission communication - i.e. 'Council decision 12/2000 on preparatory bodies' or 'The EU treaties lay down rules for…' or 'Council regulation…' or 'digital single market strategy'
- **use upper case** to cite the official names of treaties - i.e. 'the Lisbon Treaty' or 'the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)'

Bodies and institutions

We should:

- use **capitals** where the institution is referred to by its **official title** - e.g. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the National Assembly
- use **lower case** where the **official title is not mentioned in full** - e.g. the Polish foreign ministry or the French parliament
- use **lower case** where institutions and entities are referred to in **generic form** - e.g. central banks or national parliaments
- use **lower case** where specific bodies within institutions, agencies or companies are mentioned - e.g. the IAEA board of governors or the financial counsellors working group
- use upper case for the official names of treaties - e.g. the Lisbon Treaty
- use **capitals** for **Council configurations** - e.g. the Justice and Home Affairs Council
- use **capitals** for **Council working parties and preparatory bodies** - e.g. the Working Party on Special Plant Products or the Working Party on Integration, Migration and Expulsion (if unsure, check the name against the list of official bodies available on the website)
- use 'Coreper' **not** 'COREPER'

- use the translated name for foreign institutions and bodies, with exceptions such as Banque de France

International agreements, conferences and conventions

For the high-profile cases, we should use capitals - e.g. the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Geographical names

Some of the following rules may seem obvious but consulting them can prove helpful. As such, we should:

- use upper case for **official country names** - e.g. South Africa, Northern Ireland
- use lower case for **geographical points** - e.g. southern Europe, north-east Spain
- check previous usage for the correct spelling of countries, cities and geographical names

Note that when we refer to disputed territories, we should always use the name mentioned in official EU documents.

More details to be found in Annex 5 of this style guide.

NUMBER, DATES AND TIMES

For **figures higher than nine**, we should always use numerals and not words. Conversely, for figures one to nine, we should use words and not numbers.

Sentences can start with numbers but we should avoid having two sentences with 'neighbouring' numbers.

NO	YES
"The Council met in Luxembourg on 14 June 2014. 17 ministers attended the meeting."	"17 ministers attended the Council meeting in Luxembourg on 14 June 2014."

Fractions should be spelled out. For example, 'a two-thirds majority' or 'two thirds of members'.

Numbered positions (excluding dates, <u>see</u> below):

- from **1-9**: first, second, third…ninth
- from **10 onwards**: 10th, 11th, 13th

For **percentages**, we use a % sign without a space, i.e. 50%.

We use '500 to 900' and not '500–900' (except in tables).

Thousands and millions

We should spell out exact figures but we should use 'million', 'billion' or 'thousand' for **rounded figures**.

YES: "The EU has about 500 million citizens."
NO: "52 125 people visited the Council's website in May 2014."

For thousands, we use a space, as in '1 500 people'. We **should not use commas**.

To make sure that figures are not split over two lines, we should **enter a non-breakable space code - " "** (Ctrl + Shift + Space) - between the figures in html.

For **fractions of millions** and billions, we should indicate only one figure beyond the decimal point for the interval from ten onwards (e.g. 11.7 million or 279.6 million) and two figures beyond the decimal point for the interval from one to nine (e.g. 7.11 billion).

We also always use **million and billion** (singular), e.g. '€138 million'. 'Millions' are only used in phrases like 'millions of cows'.

Decimals

We should mark decimals with a full stop, not with a comma.

Money

- **euro**: we should use the **€ sign** (before the figure, without a space), for example "Cyprus will receive a transfer of €1.5 billion from the European Stability Mechanism."

- we apply the same format for currencies with a recognisable sign, such as $ or £ more
- we use the full name for other currencies that do not have a widely recognisable sign; for instance we write 'Swedish crown' and **not** 'SEK' or 'kr'.

The plural of 'euro' and 'cent' are to be written without 's'.

Date and time
We should avoid vague indicators of date, such as 'today'. It is important to use a precise date.

We should use the **24-hour system for time**, with a full stop between the hour and the minutes. For example: '17.30' and **not** '5.30pm'.

- when writing dates in full, we should use the following format: '16 June 2014'
- when covering a particular period, we use 'and' (14 and 15 June) or a dash (14-16 June)
- when writing dates in short form, we stick to the DD/MM/YYYY format - e.g. 16/06/2014 or 14-16/06/2014

Decades
We should write 'the 1980s' and **not** 'the 1980's', 'the 80's' or 'the 80s'.

Centuries
We should write 'the 21st century' and **not** 'the 21st Century'.

ADDRESSES AND PHONE NUMBERS

Email addresses
When we have to include an email address, we should give it **in full, in lower case and preferably as an active link**. To avoid spam, the address should be hidden in a clear link, using the **mailto: function**.

Addresses
When writing a postal address for the Council or European Council in Brussels, we use the **bilingual FR/NL format**. For example:

General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union

Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 175

1048 Bruxelles/Brussel

Belgique/België

In all other cases, we refer to the [Interinstitutional style guide](#).

Phone numbers

We should write telephone numbers in the **international format**, including the relevant international dialling code. There should be a '+' before the international dialling code, then a space before the rest of the phone number. For example: +32 22819728

1.3 DOs and DON'Ts

We should get **straight to the point**: when you beat around the bush, the text sounds hesitant and unsure. Every paragraph should feature a clearly defined and structured topic.

NO	YES
Concerning the Task Force Mediterranean, the Council invited all relevant parties to continue with their active involvement in the implementation of operational actions. One of the priorities will be to engage with non-EU partners in order to avoid that migrants embark on hazardous journeys towards the EU. Information campaigns, an effective return policy and resettlement for persons in need of protection are also considered important elements of this approach.	**Task Force Mediterranean** The Council invited all parties involved to continue working on actions to stop shipwrecks in the Mediterranean. Priorities include: • working with non-EU partners to stop migrants embarking on hazardous journeys to the EU • information campaigns • an effective return and resettlement policy for people in need of protection

We should avoid overly complicated explanations and unnecessary information. Do this by using **clear language** that explains the benefit to the user.

NO	YES
The use of the interinstitutional code number facilitates the compilation of complete dossiers on the progress of	

each procedure, from its inception until it is adopted by the Council or by the Parliament and the Council. Using the interinstitutional file number as a search criterion may thus facilitate the search of documents issued in the framework of Council deliberations concerning draft legislative files.	Interinstitutional codes are used to track the progress of legislation within the institutions. Use the code in your search to find all the documents covering Council deliberations on a particular piece of legislation.

We should **avoid jokes and puns**: they undermine the **serious nature of our work** (and can be difficult to translate). We should not make light of serious issues but make them understandable.

NO	YES
Europe's youth are down but not out Youth unemployment rates in the EU have reached unprecedented levels due to the economic crisis. Consequently, the EU and its member states have agreed a comprehensive approach to combat youth unemployment.	**EU action on youth unemployment** Youth unemployment rates in the EU have reached unprecedented levels due to the economic crisis. Consequently, the EU and its member states have agreed a comprehensive approach to combat youth unemployment.

We should **nuance our tone** and **focus on facts**, action and legislation rather than emotions.

NO	YES
The extent and intensity of the financial crisis, as well as the level of recession and unemployment that have ensued, have shaken the confidence of an important segment of European citizens in EU institutions.	In view of the recent financial crisis, the Ecofin work programme prioritises: • completion of the banking union • strengthening the regulation of financial markets • advancing legislative work in the area of taxation

We should not use **quotations that** do not help explain the text.

NO	YES
"We need to carry on with resolve," he said, referring to the on-going reform effort, the completion of the banking union and the objective of improved fiscal policy coordination.	"Our strategy is threefold: balancing our budgets, keeping up the necessary structural reforms and strengthening our financial sector."

And, just as a reminder: we should speak with a **single voice**: we should talk about 'ministers' or 'the Council', rather than 'member states' or specific Council configurations.

NO	YES
Member states discussed the draft regulation.	Ministers discussed the draft regulation.
NO	YES
The Environment Council adopted a proposal.	The Council adopted a proposal.

2. READABILITY

While our pages are meant for human users (see the Audience section), we also aim to make our content easy to find on search engines.

OPTIMISATION

Around half of total visits to the Council website come via search engines like Google (organic traffic). This is why it is extremely important that we use **keywords and search terms** to help visitors navigate easily towards the desired content.

Content producers should therefore always check:

- search logs and site analytics - to see what terms and words our users use ('eurozone' and not 'euro area') - if in doubt, get in touch with the digital communication unit
- Google Trends and AT internet (web analytics provider) - for further insight into preferred formats

Should you wish to access in-depth site analytics, please contact the digital communication unit.

In the case of certain policies, press materials or webpages there may be a variety of options for spelling a particular term. For example, deciding whether to use 'cybersecurity', 'cyber security' or 'cyber-security'. The 'Commonly used terms' section in the Annex is useful in this respect.

SOCIAL MEDIA

When adapting policy- and diplomacy-related content for use on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn, we should follow a number of simple but effective rules:

- keep it short - this means that we apply the maximum 280-character Twitter requirement for the other platforms too (on Twitter, we actually try to keep it shorter than 280 characters)
- go for engaging content - which can also mean starting with a question and using 'we' or 'you'
- try to be descriptive but also to simplify - if you have to use technical terms or vague buzzwords, explain them
- choose one main point of focus - provide a link to the rest of the content
- combine posts with visuals - we sometimes attach vignettes (visuals with practical information such as the date and time of a debate) which help shorten and complement posts

A few examples:

Facebook:
How can we fight 🤜 disinformation and fake news ahead of the European elections in May 2019? EU foreign ministers discussed this crucial issue at today's Foreign Affairs Council. Watch to find more ↩
📌 Full details: https://europa.eu/!Hn47fG

Twitter:
EU foreign ministers met today with their counterparts from @_AfricanUnion.
☞ They focused on #peace #security #trade and #multilateralism.
📰 Read the main results: https://bit.ly/2W8VZvw
#EUAU #AUEU

MULTIMEDIA

While guidelines on producing text for multimedia pieces such as infographics and videos evolve in line with digital trends, which means they evolve constantly, there are certain rules on content production which endure. We try to follow them:

- using short sentences - maximum 15 words
- using visuals and colours to replace words as much as possible - for example, arrows to indicate either increase/decrease or location
- keeping text to a minimum - which means only writing down what visuals cannot convey
- highlighting key figures and messages
- including keywords in the title - and keeping in mind other search engine optimisation (SEO) requirements, such as title length, subheadings and captioning

For examples of good infographics, visit the related web section: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/.

TEXT LENGTH

Text length guidelines help us ensure that:

- text is consistent and can easily be shared across different areas of the website
- search engine optimisation (SEO) conventions are followed (display of search results)

Based on analytics and user-related evidence, we should aim, if the content allows, to structure our text into **short paragraphs**.

Comprehensive pages work and are even recommended. The latest search engine optimisation (SEO) trends - which we try to follow in order to improve indexing of web content on Google - recommend a length of between 500 and 2 000 words for a web page. Where we need to include consistent background and additional explanations, we should break the related pages into **sections of shorter text** or individual subsections.

As mentioned earlier, reading online is different from reading on paper. When not just scanning pages for keywords, readers tend to spend more time on longer pages. This, however, does not mean they read more. As this **study** shows, users are inclined to read only half the information on

relatively short pages of about 110 words. Beyond the first paragraphs, the amount of information read decreases rapidly to about 20% of the text.

Suggested length of texts (all character figures include spaces)	
Picture caption	**± 120ch** (±15 words in English)
\<Title\> tag	**± 70ch** (8-10 words in English)
Heading	**± 70ch** (8-10 words in English)
Lead-in / introductory sentence (Press)	**max. 200ch** (25 words in English)
Sentence (Web)	**120-160ch** (15-20 words in English)
Sentence (Press)	**max. 200ch** (25 words in English)
Paragraph	**320-560ch** (40-70 words in English)
Link labels	**± 70ch** (8-10 words in English)
Meta description	**± 150ch** (± 15-16 words in English)

HEADLINES

They should be clear and concise. In order to ensure that, we should try to include at least one keyword related to the topic. A few best practices:

- in the interest of brevity and inclusion of keywords, refer to 'topics/processes/descriptions' - e.g. 'Digital single market: building Europe's data economy' (description) or 'Copyright: Council signs off on new rules' (process)
- for reasons of readability, impact and indexation, avoid starting the title with a gerund - e.g. write 'Air competition: strengthening the rights of EU passengers' and **not** 'Improving air competition'
- as far as possible, try to match the page URL with the title, or title keyword, to make it easier for both external and internal users to find - e.g. 'Energy Union for Europe' will have the URL www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/*energy-union*

- try to steer clear of abbreviations unless they are widely known - e.g. we use 'EU' extensively but should avoid using 'EaP' for 'Eastern Partnership' or 'CAP' for 'EU agricultural policy'

HEADINGS

Using headings to separate different parts of a text presents many advantages in terms of readability. This is because headings:

- give **visual cues to users** which attract their attention
- help to **structure a text**, and **enhance reading and navigation**
- provide a useful tool for **improving SEO** and the search engine results page (SERP)

Headings contribute to the page ranking and should therefore contain the right **keywords** (see Optimisation on how to check the right words). They are also crucial for **accessibility** (see Accessibility) on devices such as screen readers, which help people with visual impairments navigate the website and make sense of the information it contains.

NB: We use **heading tags** (h2, h3, etc.) only where it makes sense. Too many such tags on a page can make it hard for users to scan the content and determine the sequence of topics.

We also need to use heading tags in their correct order and not jump from a h1 to h3 without having a h2 title in between.

BULLET POINTS

Bullets make texts easier to read. We should apply the following guidelines:

- use an **introductory sentence**, for instance 'Points covered in the meeting included:'
- use **lower case** at the start of the bullet
- **do not use full stops** within bullet points; it is better to start another bullet point or use commas, dashes or semicolons to expand on an item
- **do not put 'or' or 'and' at the end** of bullet points
- **do not use full stops** or other punctuation (commas, semicolons) at the end of a bullet point, even after the last bullet point
- do not use bullets for long sentences

- do not use bullets within bullets
- do not use more than six bullets in a single block of text (as we have done in this enumeration)

If a text cannot be broken down into a maximum of six bullets, then it should be divided in a different way, for example, by using an explanatory sentence to group a set of bullets on a specific theme.

ITALICS AND BOLD

We **should not use** text in **italics** as it is hard to read on screen.

We may use **bold,** but only sparingly, when we wish to highlight certain phrases, words or sentences, particularly in longer articles.

NB: Bold should not replace the correct use of headings.

ALPHABETISED LISTS

We should list member states alphabetically instead of in protocol order. The same applies to Council configurations and other lists where the protocol order is non-alphabetical.

In translations, and as agreed with the language units, we adapt alphabetised lists to ensure that they are in the correct order for the target language.

FOOTNOTES

Footnotes are **only allowed in the case of official documents (see image below)**. In all other cases, we should either place information from footnotes in a textbox or incorporate it in the text itself.

NB: **Footnotes distract the reader** from the key information contained in the text.

EU's single market. The SAA will establish an area that allows for free trade and the application of European standards in other areas such as competition, state aid and intellectual property. It will also help the implementation of reforms designed to achieve the adoption of European standards by Kosovo. Other provisions cover political dialogue, cooperation in a wide variety of sectors ranging from education and employment to energy, the environment and justice and home affairs.

The European Union will continue to support Kosovo's progress on its European path through the stabilisation and association process, the policy designed by the EU to foster cooperation with the Western Balkan countries as well as regional cooperation. Stabilisation and Association Agreements are a core component of this process. In order to support the necessary reforms, the EU makes available Pre-accession Assistance to the Western Balkans and Turkey amounting to some €11.7 billion over the period 2014-2020, of which €645.5 million is allocated to Kosovo.

Kosovo*

References to Kosovo are without prejudice to positions on status. They are in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/99 and the opinion by the International Court of Justice on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

> Video of the EU-Kosovo Stabilisation and Association Agreement signing ceremony ↗
> Stabilisation and association agreement between the EU and Kosovo ↗

CAPTIONS

We should use them to **add extra information** and provide commentary or context but **not** to describe an image (we do this through the alt-text - see more in the Accessibility section). However, in certain cases, such as when captioning meeting highlights after a Council configuration, we can describe the footage uploaded with wording such as 'press conference following the meeting X'.

NB: Captions **should not end with a full stop** (see a correct use of captions below).

20 June

Digital single gateway: ambassadors give endorsement

EU ambassadors today endorsed an agreement to set up a **single digital gateway** which will provide access to online information on the EU internal market. The Bulgarian presidency of the Council and the European Parliament had previously reached this deal.

The single digital gateway will act as a user-friendly entry point which will assist citizens and companies in finding information on topics such as **work, retirement, study or business activities in another EU country.**

> Digital single gateway: easier access to online information and procedures (press release, 20/06/2018)

The single digital gateway will be a 'one stop shop' for EU citizens and companies

TABLES

Tables should **always have titles and be accessible** (in terms of headings alignment and page architecture). We should use tables only to present data and not to make changes to layout.

NB: Before deciding to use tables, it is advisable to **look for alternatives** (bullets, for instance).

WRONG: does not present data, cannot be read left to right

Monday 14 December 2015	Tuesday 15 December 2015
+/- 08.45 (tbc) Doorstep - Luxembourg minister of agriculture **+/- 10.00** **Beginning of the Council meeting** +/- 10.15 Adoption of legislative A items (in public session) +/- 10.25 Adoption of non-legislative A items +/- 10.30 **Fisheries:** - Fishing opportunities 2016 (EU and non EU stocks) - Fishing opportunities 2016 (Black Sea) +/- 12.30 **AOBs(agriculture)** - School schemes (Milk, fruit and vegetables) (in public session) **+/- 13.15** **Press conference** (agriculture) +/- 15.00 **Agriculture:** - Sustainable agriculture and bio-economy AOBs (agriculture) - Difficulties in the pig meat sector (IT) - Young farmers (Presidency)	**+/- 10.00** **Beginning of the Council meeting** - Fishing opportunities 2016 (EU and non EU stocks) +/- 11.30 **Agriculture:** - Medicated feed and veterinary medicines (in public session) AOBs (agriculture): - Codex alimentarius (Presidency) - Imports of honey in the EU (HU) ttbc **Fisheries:** - Fishing opportunities 2016 (EU and non EU stocks) ttbc **Press conference** (fisheries)

CORRECT: contains specific data, a precise list and is readable left to right and top to bottom

EU budget for 2015 (in million euro)		
Headings	**Commitments**	**Payments**
1. Smart and inclusive growth	66 782	66 923
- 1a. Competitiveness for growth and jobs	17 552	15 798
- 1b. Economic, social and territorial cohesion	49 230	51 125
2. Sustainable growth	58 809	55 999
3. Security and citizenship	2 147	1 860
4. Global Europe	8 408	7 422
5. Administration	8 660	8 659
Special instruments	515	352
Total	**145 322**	**141 214**

CREDITING QUOTES

Regarding quotes, we should apply the following usage rules and recommendations:

- use quotes in a **quote box** to highlight specific content and **draw attention** to the text
- give the official, full title of the person quoted, including (if relevant) a reference to their role in connection with the Council presidency

NO
Fernand Etgen, Luxembourg's Minister for Agriculture, Viticulture and Consumer Protection
YES
Pierre Gramegna, Minister for Finances of Luxembourg and the President of the Council

META DESCRIPTION

The meta description always appears together with the title of the page. It is crucial that we **use it to expand on the title without repeating it**. A few other rules:

- since the meta description appears on search engine result pages (SERPs) as a snippet just below the title, it should contain the keywords or search terms in order to boost the click-through rate
- it should not include the date
- it should be written in full sentences
- it should contain fewer than 150 characters
- as far as possible, we should find a way to explain or summarise what the text is about without reproducing the introductory part of the text in the meta description

The Council of the European Union - Consilium
www.**consilium**.europa.eu/en/council-eu/ ▾
The Council is an essential EU decision maker and is also responsible for coordinating policy, developing the EU's common foreign and security policy, ...

Documents and publications - Consilium
www.**consilium**.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/ ▾
You can get access to Council documents, archives and the library or find a publication you need.

Timeline: reform of EU asylum rules - Consilium
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/ceas-reform/ceas-reform-timeline/ ▾
The common **European asylum** system (CEAS) sets common minimum **standards** for the treatment of all **asylum** seekers and applications.

We should also use the meta description for our **emailing system**. In this particular case, it appears as the main text in the body of an email received by the subscribers.

Council of the European Union

18/1/2016 | MEETING

Foreign Affairs Council, 18/01/2016 - Main results

Ministers discussed Syria, including recent developments in the region, Iraq and Ukraine. They adopted conclusions on Libya and the Middle East peace process.

Shown above, as displayed in an email to our subscribers, the meta description created for the 'Main results' of a Council meeting.

Press releases also have this feature, with the meta description showing in daily and weekly digests received by subscribers.

LINKS

When writing the text used for a link, we should provide at least a basic idea of what the linked page is about. We should therefore always choose a **descriptive text for links**. It is usually a few words or a short phrase. We should **avoid generic anchor text** such as 'page', 'article', 'click here' or 'read more'.

We recommend replicating the **h1 title (page title)** to which we provide a link. We should do this also in the interest of Accessibility.

NO [Click here for more information](#)

YES [European energy security strategy](#)

The page URL - for example: 'http//:www.europarl.europa.eu' - should **not** be used for the link description. A few other principles to apply when it comes to linking:

- if possible, links should be placed either at the end of the paragraph or section, or within the dedicated 'see also' (external links) and 'related documents' (internal links) boxes
- to avoid a cluttered effect we should not create too many links in the body of the text
- for **short pages**, we should place links within the 'See also' section or directly below the relevant paragraph
- for **long pages**, we should include the links between sections or paragraphs
- **we should not use calls to action**, such as 'read more about xxx' or 'download the speech on xxx' in standard links or in the 'see also' or 'related documents' boxes
- instead, we should **use calls to action only** to draw a user's attention to a single specific link, such as when links are placed in the side panel

External links

We should add external links (to pages outside the consilium.europa.eu domain) only to **help meet a clear user need**. There are essentially **three types of external links** on the Council's website:

- links to content on other EU institutional websites (also agencies and the presidency)
- links to other international organisations (UN, NATO, etc.)
- links to national government websites (also permanent representations)

External links **should never point towards commercial services** or websites, such as news websites (BBC.com, lesoir.be, etc.) or websites whose ownership is unclear.

The external websites we link to should be **free to access** and have **clear privacy and cookie policies**. They should also **work on mobile devices** and, very importantly, meet our own **accessibility standards**.

Moreover, for reasons of predictability we should always **visually align** external links with the related symbols. For instance, we should help users understand immediately when:

- they will be **leaving the Council's website**
- they will be accessing PDF documents

If it helps to clarify the destination of the link, we can **add the name of the destination** website, in brackets, at the end of the link (without using the word 'website').

NO: Agriculture and fisheries information on the European Commission website

YES: Agriculture and fisheries (European Commission)

Where the link points towards a statement, speech, or other document where the date is relevant, **we can add the date** as part of the link description. For instance:

NO: 8 September - Statement by HvR on Ukraine

YES: Statement by Herman Van Rompuy on Ukraine, 8 September 2014

In general, we should apply the rules on writing dates.

Internal links

In order to differentiate between the different types of links to internal pages, we should follow linking conventions such as:
- mentioning the **specific format**, in brackets, at the end
  e.g. '…(press release, 13/12/2018)'
- in the same manner, emphasising that users can find more **relevant information** by accessing certain links
  e.g. '…(background information)'

Mentioning 'background information' is very important as it is a way of promoting the policy pages we create.

WEB PAGE URLs

We should use the following guidelines when creating new URLs or sub-folders for web content:

- the **URL should reflect the page name**
- use of verbs, especially in their gerund form, should be avoided
- use of **'the', 'and', '&' and 'or'** is **not recommended**
- accents and punctuation such as **commas or apostrophes should not be used**
- always **use a dash** to separate the words
- folders for sub-pages should be given the same name as the page to which they belong, so that the URL is consistent for users

  e.g. a page on 'tackling climate change' should be given the URL 'climate-change'; URL for sub-pages would be '/climate-change/page-name-goes-here'

ACCESSIBILITY

We aim to make our content accessible to anyone using a screen reader, keyboard navigation, or Braille interface, and to users of all cognitive capabilities.

Directional language

We avoid directional instructions and any language that requires the reader to be able to see the layout or design of the page. This is helpful for many reasons, including layout changes on mobile.

> **NO:** Select from the options in the right sidebar
> **YES:** Select from these options

Headings

They should always be nested (programming-wise, this means arranged in a logical sequence) and consecutive. We should never skip a heading level for style reasons.

To help group sections, we must make sure that **the page title is H1, top-level sections are H2, and subsequent ones are H3 and so on**. We should avoid excessive nesting.

Hierarchy

We should clearly separate different topics with headings. Starting with a simple outline that includes key messages can help create a hierarchy and organise ideas. This improves 'scannability' and facilitates better understanding.

Labels

We should label using clear names and appropriate tags. We must carefully consider what fields are necessary and required. The labelling itself should be clear and brief.

Alt text

This is the most basic, yet helpful, form of image description. We should apply it on all images. The content should be concise and content-sensitive. It should also take the nature of the pictures into account:

- for creative content and stories, **describe** the image in detail
- for specific meetings or topics, describe what the image shows
- for charts or graphs, populate the alt text with the data contained so that users receive all the important information (for instance, in the WAI description field of infographic pages)

Examples of good alt texts:

> "Group of people on a train station."
> "Happy baby playing in a sand box."
> "Five people in line at a supermarket."

We **should also end with a full stop** as it makes the screen reader pause a moment after the last word, allowing the user some 'breathing time' before the ensuing text.

We **should not** include the name of the photographer or keywords, or start the text by mentioning that it is an image.

Examples of bad alt texts:

This is an image of people waiting on a platform in the train station (© J. Smith/ AFP)
Tackling cyber threats is one of the priorities of the European Union

N.B.: Users who cannot see the images should come away with the same information as those who have seen them.

Captioning

We should ensure that captioning is available for all videos.

Reminder: the caption should be different from the first sentence of the adjoining text and also different from the alt text. It **should give additional information or explain the gist** of the topic in just a few words (see good example below).

The single digital gateway will be a 'one stop shop' for EU citizens and companies

For more information on how and why we implement the accessibility requirements, read [Improving the Council's website accessibility](#) on DOMUS.

ANNEX

CAPITALS AND LOWER CASE: THE MOST COMMON TERMS

The following is a summary of usage of capitals and lower case for terms and titles most commonly used in DG COMM 1 communication materials:

A
action plan
administration head of mission
the African Union (AU)
the African Union mission in Sudan (AMIS)
the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
agenda, annotated draft agenda
agreement, interim agreement
ambassadors
annex
annual report
article (with exception of copy on topics such as 'Art 7')
Association Council, Cooperation Council

B
the Banque de France

C
central and eastern Europe, southern Lebanon
central banks, central bank governors
chapter
Commissioner Viviane Reding
code of conduct
the Committee of the Regions
the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
the conference of the parties
conclusions, Council conclusions
the Commission
the Council
the Court of Auditors
the Court of Justice
Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)
communication, Commission communication
criminal law

D
declaration
decision
delegations
Democratic Republic of the Congo
directive
diplomacy
the director-general for enlargement

E
Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)
the Economic and Social Committee
the EFSA management board
the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights
the EU commissioner for enlargement
the EU Special Representative for Sudan
the EU sustainable development strategy
the EU troika, troika meeting with Bosnia and Herzegovina
emergency and crisis response
the Europe 2020 strategy on jobs and growth
the Europe 2020 strategy, the Thessaloniki agenda
the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
European Border and Coast Guard Agency
the European Central Bank

European Commissioner
the European Council
European defence equipment market
the European Economic Area (EEA)
the European External Action Service
the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)
the European Investment Bank
the European Parliament, the Parliament
the European Police College
the European Union
the EU-Turkey Association Council
the excessive deficit procedure

F
the financial counsellors working group
financial instrument
fisheries
former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: we should now always refer to it by its full name 'North Macedonia' or 'Republic of North Macedonia' (and not 'Northern Macedonia')
the French delegation
the French minister

G
the General Agreement on Tariffs And Trade
the General Court
governments
guidelines
the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

H
heads of state or government
High Representative Federica Mogherini
the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
the House of Commons

I
the IAEA board of governors
the institutions, the EU institutions
intellectual property rights (IPRs)
the International Accounting Standards Board
the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)
the International Court of Justice
the International Monetary Fund (IMF)
international financial reporting standards

J
joint action
joint assessment mission
the joint transfer pricing forum
the Justice and Home Affairs Council
justice and home affairs

K
Kosovo: references to Kosovo should be accompanied by a box at the bottom of the page with the following indication "Kosovo* References to Kosovo are without prejudice to positions on status. They are in line with

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United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/99 and the opinion by the International Court of Justice on the Kosovo declaration of independence. "

the Kyoto protocol

L
the legal service

M
meeting
the member states
Member of Parliament
Member of the European Parliament
memorandum of understanding
the Middle East peace process
migration and refugee crisis - the Cabinet is consistent in using this term to describe the current situation

the Minister for Social Affairs
ministers
ministerial meeting
the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

N
the National Assembly
national ministries
national parliaments
non-agricultural market access
the Northern Dimension
the Northern Dimension environmental partnership

P
the Palestinian national dialogue
paragraph
peace agreement, Darfur peace agreement
political agreement
the Permanent Representatives Committee
political dialogue
position, common position
the presidency, the Cypriot presidency
the President of France
the President of the Commission
the President of the Council
the President, the Prime Minister
President Jose Manuel Barroso
the press office
programme
protocol

Q
the Quartet

R
regulation, recommendation
report, progress report, opinion
the Republic of Montenegro
resolution
review
rule of law mission

S
the secretariat
secretaries of state
session
single undertaking
the Stability and Growth Pact
statement
strategy

structural funds
summit, spring summit, spring European Council

T
trade ministers
trade-related questions
the temporary international mechanism
the Treaty Establishing the European Stability Mechanism
the Treaty of Lisbon, the Lisbon Treaty
the Treaty on European Union
the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
the treaty, the EU treaty, the treaties

U
UN Conference on Environment and Development
the UN Economic and Social Committee
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UN Security Council resolution
the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)
the UN General Assembly
the UN Charter
the UN Secretary-General
the UN special envoy, the UN special representative
the United Nations, the UN Security Council

W
the Western Balkans
the World Health Organization (WHO)
the World Trade Organization (WTO)
the WTO's Doha Development Agenda (DDA)

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