

Mary Immaculate College

WRITING STYLE GUIDELINES



AUGUST 2022

WRITING STYLE

Every brand has a personality based on the established values of the organisation. Voice is how that personality is conveyed. The tone of voice (not as in what you say but rather how you say it) will both embody and expresses the MIC brand's personality and set of values.

A distinctive tone of voice creates consistency in how the MIC brand and our values are communicated, and should inform all of our written copy. This includes promotional material, website, social media messages, emails etc. Obviously MIC's tone will differ according to the various audiences e.g. the tone used for Annual Reports will be more formal and authoritative than that used on social media communications.

We have compiled the following Writing Style Guidelines in order to ensure consistency across all of MIC's publications.

MIC STYLE GUIDE

ACCENTS

Use on Irish, French, German and Spanish words, but not on anglicised words such as café.

ABBREVIATIONS

Dr Fr Ms - note the absence of a full stop.

Prof. - note full stop.

*For written material we refer to the President of MIC as **Professor Michael A Hayes**, in the first instance. Thereafter, **Prof. Hayes** may be used.*

e.g. means 'for example' - note full stops.

In lists beginning with e.g., don't end with *etc.* as *etc.* is not giving an example.

Examples:

Mary Immaculate College regularly hosts events of public interest e.g. conferences, workshops and seminars. ✓

Mary Immaculate College regularly hosts events of public interest e.g. conferences, workshops and seminars etc. ✗

Etc. means etcetera - note full stop.

i.e. means 'that is' - note full stops.

ACROYNMS

Spell out everything in the first instance followed by the acronym in brackets.

Mary Immaculate College (MIC) ✓

Coláiste Mhuire gan Smál (CMgS) ✓

Department of Education and Skills (DES) ✓

Acronyms may be used thereafter.

Use acronyms in the first instance when they are better known than the actual words, such as VAT, PRSI, PAYE, GATT, VHI, RTÉ, ESB.

Don't use full stops between letters and don't add an apostrophe in plurals.

AGE

Age ranges are used with no apostrophes:

In your 20s and 30s, you ... ✓

Often the word age can be omitted: instead of *when you reach the age of 65*, *when you reach 65*.

MIC STYLE GUIDE CONT'D

AMERICANISE V AMERICANIZE

We prefer to use the *-ise* endings as in analyse, centralise, organise, realise.

We use *-re* endings as opposed to *-er* as in centre, theatre, fibre.

We use *-our* as opposed to *-or* as in colour, humour, labour.

BRACKETS

If a sentence is complete without the information contained within the parentheses (round brackets), put the punctuation outside the brackets.

(A complete sentence within parentheses should begin with a capital letter and end with a stop.) ✓

A taught course involves seminars and lectures and normally lasts one or two years (full-time or part-time). ✓

BULLET LISTS

Bullets point lists are a simple way of avoiding lengthy sentences. They're particularly useful if you need to ask readers to carry out more than one action. They allow readers to scan key points quickly and easily.

Do not insert a comma, semicolon or final full stop after each point – unless each point is a full sentence, in which case start each point with a capital letter and end with a full stop.

Example:

Facilities at Mary Immaculate College include:

- state-of-the-art sports centre
- accommodation for 200 students
- music studios
- art studios
- radio station

If each bullet point is a complete sentence, use sentence case:

Example:

- MIC promotes excellence in teaching, learning and research.
- The College seeks to foster in its students a spirit of justice and compassion.
- We, the College community, respect cultural diversity.

CAPITAL LETTERS

Generally speaking capital letters should be used at the start of a sentence. However, there are some exceptions:

- Use capital letters for titles of people e.g. Professor / Dr / Mr / Ms.
- Use capital letters for titles of places e.g. South Circular Road, Higher Education Authority, Mary Immaculate College.
- When referring specifically to MIC as opposed to any college then use a capital 'C'.

Example:

The College was awarded €54 million. ✓

I attended college in the 80s. ✓

- Capitalise events when referring to a specific event, as in Open Day, Gala Dinner, Alumni Reunion, but not when speaking generally, as in: We are planning a gala dinner at the end of the year.
- When using title case, lowercase the minor words:

Example:

Certificate in Education and Wellbeing of the Older Person ✓

Certificate In Education And Wellbeing Of The Older Person ✗

- Use capitals for acronyms e.g. MIC, MIDAS, GAA.
- Use capital letters for nationalities and languages e.g. Irish, French, German.
- Use capital letters for days of the week and months of the year e.g. Monday, July but not seasons e.g. spring, winter.
- Use a capital letter for the first letter of a quote that is a full sentence. However, if the quote is a fragment then do not use a capital letter.

Example:

“We are delighted to be honoured in this way.”

Professor Joe Bloggs said that they were “delighted”.

If a direct quotation is interrupted mid-sentence, do not capitalise the second part of the quotation.

Example:

“We are delighted to be honoured in this way,” Prof. Bloggs said, “as it shows our commitment to the project”.

MIC STYLE GUIDE CONT'D

CAPTIONS

When writing captions to pictures showing several people, write as in the following example:

Pictured L-R: Mr Richard Walsh, CEO, HEA; Professor John Smith, President, MIC; and Minister for Skills, Research and Innovation, Damien English, TD.

If two people only are shown, write as follows:

Professor John Smith, President of MIC, Limerick, left, pictured with Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, Professor Emeritus in History at NUI Galway.

COLONS

Use before a list, as in:

The main difficulties in this economic climate are: lack of resources, lack of skilled workforce and lack of adequate pay. ✓

or before a full-sentence quotation:

Speaking at the launch he said: "Mary Immaculate College is delighted to be involved in this worthy initiative." ✓

or to introduce a bulleted list (see section on Bullets previously).

SEMICOLONS

A semicolon is used to connect two related sentences, giving equal prominence to both parts.

Aisling is studying philosophy at MIC; philosophy having always been her favourite subject. ✓

Semicolons may also be used to separate items in a series when the items use internal commas.

Example:

Pictured at the event were L-R: Professor Ruth Walsh, Stanford University; Dr Maria Trent, University of Limerick; Dr Colm Sullivan, event organiser and lecturer, MIC; and Professor John Smith, President, MIC. ✓

COMMAS

Commas should be used as follows:

After items in a list as follows:

The following subjects are required: English, Irish, French Studies and German Studies. ✓

MIC STYLE GUIDE CONT'D

Before and after a clause that provides extra information. However, the sentence should still make sense if the clause is removed.

The LINC programme, operated by a consortium led by MIC, is the first of its kind in the country. ✓

If they are necessary for clarity, especially in a long sentence with a number of details.

Following a competitive process, the three Limerick-based higher education institutions secured the largest share of the funding available in the 2016 call under the EU's Erasmus+ Programme. ✓

After introductory phrases or words:

Over the last 10 years, the student populations had increased by 100%. ✓

CONTACT DETAILS (ADDRESS, PHONE NUMBER, WEB ADDRESS)

Written Addresses

These should have as little punctuation as possible with no abbreviations.

Use the following style:

Mary Immaculate College
South Circular Road
Limerick
Ireland
V94 VN26

However, if address is to appear on one line then it should read as follows:

Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick, Ireland,
V94 VN26

Phone Numbers

Use the style:

T: +353 61 204000

Note: This will enable people who are browsing the material on smartphones to tap the screen in order to call the number.

Web Addresses

Use the style:

W: www.mic.ie

Note: don't forget to add a hyperlink, so that people can simply click it to access the website.

MIC STYLE GUIDE CONT'D

DATES

Dates are written as in 15 August 2022, without any commas. Do not use superscript 'th', 'st', 'nd' or 'rd' after the numerals.

Include the day of the week where useful to the reader (e.g. if the date concerns an event in the near future or a deadline): Monday 15 August.

For decades, write like this, without an apostrophe: the 1990s.

When writing about periods of time, use either the words *from* and *to* or a dash – not both.

Examples:

from 19 July to 25 July 2022 ✓

from 19th -25th July 2022 ✗

from July 2016 to August 2022 ✓

from July 2016 – to August 2022 ✗

Similarly, do not combine *between* and the dash:

between 1 June and 15 July ✓

between 1st June-15th July ✗

EXCLAMATION MARK

Avoid using exclamation points (!) unless stylistically appropriate, e.g. in a quote.

FULL STOP

Add a full stop the end of a sentence.

Do not use a full stop for the following:

- at the end of a heading
- at the end of short items in a bulletpoint list
- after titles such as Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr
- after initials in names (Ms S Kiely)
- in acronyms (UCC, Vhi, ESB, VAT, BBC)
- for am and pm in times (7am, 10.30pm)
- in measurements (km, cm, lb)

FRACTIONS

These should be written out as words: half, two-thirds, five-eighths, two and a half. Or replace with a percentage: 50%, 75%.

MIC STYLE GUIDE CONT'D

GENDER

Use gender-neutral titles where possible: chair or chairperson, not chairman/chairwoman, actor not actress.

Try to avoid using 'he' or 'she' (or 's/he' or 'he/she') when referring to people in general.

Examples:

The typical student is nervous before his first day at college. ❌

Most students are nervous before their first day of college. ✓

HYPHENS

Hyphens are useful, but try to make one word wherever possible. Use them, however, to avoid confusion.

Examples:

- *12-week semester* ✓
- *First-year students* ✓
- *Part-time courses* ✓
- *Third-level institution* ✓

Adjectives take a hyphen when they go before the noun (object) they are describing.

Example:

We have developed well-thought-out and user-friendly guidelines to help students understand the risk of plagiarism. ✓

Also use a hyphen in prefixes.

Examples:

- *Non-negotiable* ✓
- *Re-entry* ✓
- *Ex-directory* ✓
- *Mid-1990s* ✓

Note: There is no space around a hyphen. If the adjectives come after the noun, then they don't need a hyphen e.g. the apartment was off campus, the relationship was long term.

MIC STYLE GUIDE CONT'D

IS v ARE

This is a case of singular and plural.

Example:

The staff is but the staff members are ... ✓

MIC is but MIC students are ✓

ITALICS

Italics apply to the following:

The titles of large whole texts such as books, films, TV series', plays etc.

Example:

First-year students are required to read either Hamlet or The Sea. ✓

When a quote, piece of text or title is in Irish or another language.

Example:

Níl aon tinteán mar do thinteáin féin is one of our favourite expressions. ✓

MONEY

Write as follows with no spacing: €655.50.

Use the symbol € for euros as in €13.5 million.

For US dollars and sterling use the symbols: US\$2,000 and £3,000 respectively.

Write out million and billion in full, as in €15.2 million.

NUMBERS

Numbers from zero to nine should be written out in full i.e. one, two, three and so on.

Numbers from 10 onwards should be written as digits i.e. 10, 11, 12, 100, 1,000 and so on.

From 10 upwards, if you cannot be precise, write in words.

Examples:

Fewer than twenty students attended the event. ✓

Fewer than 20 students attended the event. ✗

Use commas in numbers greater than 999

Examples:

2,139 ✓

2139 ✗

MIC STYLE GUIDE CONT'D

Where one number in a series is greater than 10, use figures for all the numbers.

Example:

2, 9, 34, 78 and 150 ✓

When giving a range of figures, use the dash.

Examples:

45-65 ✓

45 to 65 ✗

Write the number in words at the start of a sentence.

Examples:

Two thousand students attended the career fair. ✓

2,000 students attended the career fair. ✗

Use the symbol % for per cent.

Examples:

MIC has a 94% retention rate. ✓

MIC has a 94 per cent retention rate. ✗

Write out first, second, third etc. up to ninth, then 10th, 11th, 51st, millionth, billionth.

Examples:

This was the first time that MIC won the Fitzgibbon Cup. ✓

This was the 1st time that MIC won the Fitzgibbon Cup. ✗

MIC won the Fitzgibbon Cup for the 10th year in a row. ✓

MIC won the Fitzgibbon Cup for the tenth year in a row. ✗

QUOTATION MARKS

Use double quotation marks when you are quoting someone, and single quotes for quoted words within the quotation.

In the case of a complete quoted sentence, place full stops and commas inside the quotes:

The student said, "The course is difficult but very rewarding."

In the case of a partial phrase, place full stop and commas outside the quotation:

The student said the course was "difficult but very rewarding".

MIC STYLE GUIDE CONT'D

Use single quotation marks for the titles of articles, reports, poems, news headlines and for quotes within quotes.

In headlines and captions, use single quote marks.

QUOTES

If quotes are preceded by a comma or a colon, the full stop goes inside the quote marks.

Example:

Speaking at the launch Professor Smith said: "This was a remarkable achievement." ✓

If the quote is in the run of a sentence, the full stop goes outside the quote marks.

Speaking at the launch Professor Smith said that this was "a remarkable achievement". ✓

Commas should be used when separating a quote.

Example:

This is a remarkable achievement" stated Professor Smith, "one that we should be very proud of." ✓

QUALIFICATIONS

For abbreviations referring to qualifications, do not punctuate and make sure to use the correct combination of upper and lower-case letters:

Examples:

BA	✓
B.A.	✗
B Ed	✓
B.Ed	✗
H Dip	✓
H. Dip.	✗
PhD	✓
P.Hd	✗

If referring to a specific qualification in full, use the following format:

BA (Hons) Arts ✓

For the type of degree in general, use lower-case as follows:

A master's degree ✓

When referring to honours in general, use lower-case as follows:

A degree with honours ✓

MIC STYLE GUIDE CONT'D

If writing the formal title of a qualification, write 'Hons' and put in brackets as follows:

BA (Hons) Early Childhood Care and Education ✓

Degree classifications should be written as follows:

First, 2.1, 2.2, Third, Pass ✓

Hyphenate as follows:

She gained a first-class BA (Hons) which she undertook on a part-time basis as she could not commit to a full-time programme. ✓

TIMES

Use the 12 hour clock as opposed to the 24 hour clock

Do not insert full stops in am or pm

Examples:

Lectures commenced at 11am and concluded at 2pm ✓

Lectures commenced at 11a.m. and concluded at 1400 hrs. ✗

For periods of time, use a hyphen, with spaces either side as follows:

The office is open 8.30am - 5pm. ✓

TITLES

Buildings

Capitalise the names of buildings as follows:

Foundation Building

TARA Building

Programmes

Capitalise official programme and module titles, but use lower-case for general research and subject areas.

Examples:

You can study history at Mary Immaculate College. ✓

Mary Immaculate College offers an MA in History. ✓

In the interest of consistency, please use 'programme' as opposed to 'course' when referring to MIC's academic programmes.

MIC STYLE GUIDE CONT'D

Years and Semesters

Capitalise official years and semesters.

Examples:

Full Academic Year	✓
Autumn Semester	✓
Spring Semester	✓
Christmas Holidays	✓

When referring to individual years or semesters within a course, use the following style:

year 1, year 2, years 2 and 3	✓
semester 1, semester 2	✓

Job Titles

Use capitals for job titles, but not for jobs.

Examples:

<i>Professor Smith received a round of applause.</i>	✓
<i>She asked for a meeting with the Professor.</i>	✗

Above all the key to any style guidelines is consistency, consistency, consistency.

If you require additional guidelines in this area you might like to check out Oxford Dictionaries Online – a free site offering a comprehensive current English dictionary, grammar guidance etc. <http://oxforddictionaries.com>

Checklist

- Choose words that are simple clear and direct, with no jargon. Be mindful of your audience.
- Move beyond the facts where possible. Use facts to back up your message not *be* the message.
- Use exclamation marks (!!!!) sparingly.
- Avoid the passive verb where the active verb can be used i.e. 'the food was prepared by the cook' Vs 'the cook prepared the food'.
- Do not use ampersands (&) as a replacement for the word 'and' except in selected cases i.e. B&B.
- Use images to visually convey your tone.
- Finally, ensure the tone of what you are writing adequately captures the spirit of MIC.

FURTHER INFORMATION

These Writing-Style Guidelines have been produced by the Strategic Communications & Marketing Office and should be read in tandem with the MIC House-Style Guidelines.

We wish to achieve a high level of consistency across the MIC brand and hope that these guidelines will provide the necessary tools to assist us in our efforts.

If you require any additional information or assistance, please contact:

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