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Introduction

The Editorial Team edits items to comply with the InfoPlus+ House Style. It helps us achieve a consistent style and preserves the integrity of your submission.

Writing style

Tone

We aim to achieve a newsy and conversational tone of voice, which is also credible, informative and easy-to-read.

Style

Write concisely and in plain English. Here are a few pointers:

- Use subject-verb-object construction by default:
  For example, instead of 'The new software program will be installed by the company' write 'The company will install the software program.'

- Avoid the use of jargon:
  Where it is necessary to use industry terms, include a short explanation of what the term means in the sentence or paragraph.

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- Use verbs instead of 'nounisms':
  For example, instead of 'The company will take responsibility for the installation and deployment of the solution', write 'The company will install and deploy the solution'

- Use active voice instead of passive:
  For example, instead of 'A 10% discount on courses is being offered to members by the ISTC', write 'The ISTC is offering members a 10% discount on courses'

- Avoid overly-long sentences:
  Break long sentences into several shorter sentences to make the text easy and enjoyable to read and understand.

Spelling

Use the following conventions:

- British English
- The -ise variant in words like civilisation
- Prevailing spellings in computer contexts, such as 'dialog' and 'disk'

Singular-plural agreement

Remember that words like 'team' are singular, even though they refer to more than one person. We use the same convention for organisations: 'the ISTC has' not 'the ISTC have'.

Note: Avoid '(s)'. Recast the sentence as a simple singular or plural where possible. If you need to emphasise that there may be one or more, repeat the noun in singular and plural forms. For example,

we avoid constructions such as "The program creates a file(s)." We might use: "The program creates one or more files." or "The program creates a file, or sometimes several files."

Gender-neutral writing

Do not use masculine pronouns to represent both genders. It is often possible for authors to avoid problems in this area if they consider their approach before starting to write. There are several alternatives:

- Use plurals (readers … they/their); this is often appropriate, as articles often describe multiple content creators producing material for multiple readers. Avoid using plural verbs with singular nouns (the reader … they/their) — this is acceptable to the editors of many publications now but ISTC members often dislike it and consider it to be grammatically incorrect.

- Use the second person: speak to the reader directly with 'you' and 'your' or possibly include yourself as a fellow technical communicator with 'we' and 'our'.

- Use 'he or she' and 'his or her'. This becomes clumsy if used more than once or twice. Avoid 'he/she', 'his/her', 's/he' and so on.

Abbreviations

Use the following conventions:

- Write terms in full on first use, followed by the abbreviation or acronym in parentheses. For example, virtual private network (VPN).

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- Where an abbreviation is better known than its expansion, put the expansion in parentheses on first use instead.
- In general, do not abbreviate terms that occur only once or twice and do not use informal abbreviations ('info' for information or 'MS' for Microsoft).
- Common acronyms do not need to be spelled out, such as: BBC, UN, UK and USA.
- Do not use full stops in acronyms (US, ATM) or names (M J Newell).

And or &

- Avoid ampersands (&) except where they occur in names (such as the names of organisations or publications).
- Occasionally, we may use ampersands where space is short, for example in tables.

Latin terms

Prefer English to Latin, particularly Latin abbreviations. Write 'for example' rather than 'e.g.' and 'that is' rather than 'i.e.'. Use other Latin abbreviations, such as 'etc', only when unavoidable. Do not use 'etc' with 'for example': the latter implies a list that is not exhaustive. Use Latin words where the meaning is well understood and an English equivalent is less concise, for example ad hoc and vice versa.

Numbers

In general, write numbers from one to ten in words, numbers above ten in numerals. Within a phrase, be consistent (from one to twelve). When using numbers in different roles within a sentence, exercise your discretion ('20 four-cylinder engines' or 'thirty 12-inch bolts').

Use numerals for percentages (45%), measurements (15m) and ages (12 years old). Never start a sentence with a numeral, even when the number is more than ten: 'Fifty-seven runners started the race' rather than '57 runners started the race'. Use words for approximations if preferred (about a hundred, over a thousand).

Members of our profession

Be sensitive to the fact that the ISTC represents specialists in various areas of scientific and technical communication: be as inclusive in your terminology as you can without impairing readability. In particular, the term 'technical communicator' includes illustrators while the term 'technical author' does not.

In a similar vein, when writing generally, use 'organisation' rather than 'company' or 'firm'. The former encompasses government departments and non-profit bodies as well as commercial operations.

Preferred words

Instead of	use
despite the fact that	although
amongst	among
and/or	choose one or the other
approximately	about or around
very	extremely, substantially, particularly
whilst	while
in order to	to
prior to	before
leading-edge, state-of-the-art, world-class	stick to a factual description without using clichés
very unique, the most unique	unique

Presentation

Punctuation

Use the following conventions:

- One space after a full stop
- A space before units (1.2 cm)
- No space or initial capital on 'website'

Full stops

- No full stops or colons at the end of headings
- Full stops to terminate points in lists of complete sentences
- No full stops to terminate points in lists of words or phrases but one on the last point in the lis*t*

Commas

No comma before words like 'and', 'or' and 'but' (except where items in a list are long or contain commas, in which case a comma or semicolon may be needed, or where adding a comma clarifies the meaning, such as 'the product is available in red and green, and blue and yellow').

Quotation marks

- Single quotation marks (and double quotation marks for quotes within quotes)

- Introduce quotes with a colon.

- Note: If you need to identify a colloquialism, use single quotation marks but use such terms sparingly. For example: London taxi drivers must prove they have 'the knowledge' before being given an operator's licence.

Other forms of punctuation

- Ellipsis character for ellipses, not three or more full stops (use sparingly)

- Few exclamation marks and never more than one at a time

- A greater-than symbol in file names and menu options (for example, Tool > Options > Edit).

Hyphens and dashes

The newsletter follows the following rules regarding hyphens:

- Hyphens in e-business, e-booking, e-commerce, e-procurement and similar words, but no hyphen in email

- No hyphens in multimedia, offline, online and similar words

- Hyphens to create compound adjectives using two adjectives (leather-bound book and up-to-date software or cost-effective product) but not using an adverb and an adjective (fully supported initiative)

- Hyphenate co-operate, co-ordinate and similar words

- Hyphenate mid-October and similar terms

The newsletter's style regarding en dashes and em dashes involves:

- En dash as a joining signal, with no spaces on either side, for example 23–54 or London–Paris

- Em dash as a separating signal, with a space before and after it — like this (the text will be set with thin spaces in place of the standard spaces)

- Avoid writing sentences with dashes (or semi colons) if a full stop would be more correct.

Apostrophes

Incorrect use of apostrophes is one of the most criticised aspects of writing so we must get them right:

- Possessives: the apostrophe comes after the owner (Bill's pen, the dog's ball). If there is more than one dog, the apostrophe moves after the 's' (the dogs' ball). For plural nouns, the apostrophe moves back before the 's' (the children's ball, the people's princess). Exception: the possessive 'its' is similar to 'his'and therefore does not have an apostrophe.

- Contractions: use an apostrophe to represent missing letters (do not = don't, I am = I'm) but avoid using too many contractions.

- Plurals: do not use apostrophes in plurals of numbers and acronyms (1990s, ATMs).

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Case

Use upper case sparingly:

- A single initial capital in headings
- No initial capitals for nouns apart from recognised terms, such as 'Dynamic Systems Development Method (DSDM)', 'Internet', 'Broadband' and 'World Wide Web' (but not on 'website' and other derived terms)
- Initial capitals for titles in newsletter article by-lines and for specific titles used in the body copy. For example, Steven Green, the Managing Director of Engineering Media.
- No capitals for generic titles. For example, 'Managing directors and technical authors attended the event.'

Capitals for all letters in acronyms, even for terms that can be read as words (such as 'NATO' and 'AWOL'). *Names and titles*

For the first mention of a person's name, use both first name and last. Thereafter, use the person's first name.

Accompany the first mention of the individual's name with the person's position and company. For example, David Travis, the Managing Director of Userfocus.

The newsletter does not use titles, such as Mr and Mrs, but does include titles, such as Dr or Prof.

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Text attributes

Use bold type for menu options and dialog names.

Use an attribute to ensure clarity when writing user instructions. For example, 'Select *File > Save.*'

Use italics for emphasis, foreign words that have not been fully assimilated into English and titles of freestanding publications such as books, periodicals and the title of InfoPlus+ when used in the body copy (use roman type with single quotes for titles of articles and chapters).

Bullets

Use bullets where bullets would make the content easier to read and scan. When writing bullets:

- Ensure that the number of items in a bulleted list does not exceed more than seven.
- Keep bullets short or under two lines of text
- Maintain consistency within bullets by respecting parallel grammatical constructions.
- Parallelism in lists

All items in a list should use the same grammatical form. For example, if you were listing appliances in a kitchen, all the points might simply be nouns:

- Cooker
- Refrigerator
- Washing machine.

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If you were explaining how to use a washing machine, you might use a series of complete sentences, each with the same grammatical form (here starting with verbs in the imperative mood):

- Put the items to be washed into the drum.
- Close the door.
- Turn the control knob to the required cycle.

Headings

All newsletter articles have a title. Article titles should be:

- Short
- Descriptive
- Attention-grabbing

Specific sections

Event and training listings

The event and training listings following the newsletter House Style but follow these rules to achieve consistency:

- Capitalise the first letter of the words in course titles and event names.
- Use complete sentences for course and event listings.
- Descriptions should be factual, summarising the key aspects of the event or training course.
- Event and training descriptions should be of a consistent length—around two sentences for each listing.

- Avoid using acronyms in the event title where possible, unless the acronym is part of the event name.
- If acronyms are used such as STC, write out the full meaning of the acronym in the description for clarity.

Please see the example events listing for further clarification:

13   STIC Annual Summer Conference
Held by the Dutch technical writing organisation, Studiekring voor Technische Informatie en Communicatie (STIC), this event will explore learning from others designing information for users. It will be held in Dutch. Utrecht, the Netherlands.
www.stic.nl

23–26 DocTrain Life Sciences 2008
This event explores solutions to content challenges facing pharmaceutical companies, medical device manufacturers, and health and hospital corporations around the globe.
Indianapolis, USA.
www.doctrain.com/life

The back page

All listings here should be amusing or light-hearted in some way.

Graphics are welcomed. When submitting graphics indicate the source, whether you hold the copyright to use the graphic or whether you have permission to do so.

Note: New Hart's Rules (ISBN 0198610416) is an excellent reference for presenting text. In most cases, *InfoPlus+* complies with its suggestions.