

Wakefield District's website for and about voluntary and community groups
Editorial guidelines for partners and staff

Editorial guidelines

“The most valuable of talents is that of never using two words when one will do.” *Samuel Jefferson*

Style and tone

You should write your copy in a simple, friendly, helpful and informative style, as though you are speaking directly to your audience. Sentences should be short, with a simple use of vocabulary and all jargon should be avoided. All copy should be jargon free and accessible to the general public, with acronyms spelt out in full the first time they appear on a page. This includes the voluntary and community sector (VCS).

Encourage involvement in the website and your own work. Suggest that people submit content or comments, and tell them how. Demonstrate how they can discuss issues or raise their concerns.

Copy needs to be concise and enable readers to pick out individual words and sentences easily. People rarely read web content word by word and scan content instead, spending less than five seconds on each 100 words. They want to find what they want quickly and easily. Web users also rarely scroll down a page. Therefore, copy should include:

- meaningful sub-headings
- bulleted lists
- one idea per paragraph
- half the word count (or less) than conventional writing
- use the inverted pyramid approach to writing where appropriate (the conclusion is given at the start)

Planning

You should plan all articles and content first before you write. This basic plan should include its:

- aim

Then, to achieve your aim:

- the audience you need to communicate with
- what you need to tell them to achieve your aim.

Your copy should only include information needed to achieve its original aim. This helps ensure that your copy is not excessive. Unnecessary copy dilutes messages and makes it less likely that the reader will remember what you are trying to tell them. Also, in the case of websites, the more you write the less people are likely to read it.

Jargon

Jargon will alienate a high percentage of this website’s diverse audience because it can only be understood by small groups of people.

Our challenge is to turn the language that we and our partners speak in meetings into language that can be understood by everyone. Make sure you use plain English. One way of doing this well is to imagine you are talking face-to-face to a reader who does not share the same specialist knowledge when you write.

X	“This method would support an effective, solution-focused approach to integrating working practices across the voluntary and statutory sector to facilitate joined-up working.”
✓	“This method would support standard working practices to help voluntary and statutory sectors to work together better.”

Acronyms

We need to follow a standard style for acronyms and abbreviations to ensure that our communications are easy to understand. If you need to use abbreviations or acronyms always use the full version in the first instance, followed by the acronym in brackets. After the first occasion use the abbreviated version. For example:

The **voluntary and community sector (VCS)** comprises a diverse range of organisations. You can learn more about the **VCS** on our website.

X	“The LPSB for C & YP supports IW across the children’s sector for the district.”
✓	The Local Public Service Board (LPSB) for children and young people (C & YP) supports integrated working (IW) across the children’s sector for the district.”

Talk to the reader

Try to call the reader “you” and don’t be afraid to give them simple directions or instructions. This will help you to keep your copy concise and ensure that the reader understands what you want them to do.

X	“The wakefieldvcs.org website has set up a new discussion forum to give stakeholders the opportunity to discuss the issue at www.wakefieldvcs.org/discuss ”
✓	“Discuss this issue and share your views at www.wakefieldvcs.org/discuss ”

X	“We would like groups to become involved in our newsletters by sending news stories to maria.langham@vawd.org.uk for publication.”
✓	“Send your news story to maria.langham@vawd.org.uk ”

Sentence and paragraph length

Shorter sentences convey information in a way that is much easier for the reader to understand. Try to include only one main idea per sentence, and only maybe one other related point. The size of your sentences should vary but have an average length of 15 to 20 words.

Read over your completed document and try to remove any words that are not needed or replace them with shorter ones. For example:

X	“The project created a plan in order to achieve the aims of the organisation. ”
✓	“The project created a plan to achieve the organisation’s aims.”

You should also break up large blocks of text and use short paragraphs. Insert one line between each paragraph.

Bullet points can help you to break up a long sentence. Sub-headings may also be appropriate.

Use active instead of passive verbs

As a general rule, use active instead of passive verbs. This will make your copy sound interesting and easy to understand. Active sentences include the subject, followed by a verb and then an object.

X Passive	The creation of an on-line directory of voluntary and community groups is the aim of this project.
✓ Active	This project aims to create an on-line directory of voluntary and community groups.

X Passive	The strategy was reviewed by the participants
✓ Active	The participants reviewed the strategy.

Layout and word spacing

This is dealt with by the website's own content management system to ensure that we use standard clear fonts that are big enough for our audience to read easily. As a guide, if you are circulating a paper article:

- use a font size of 12 for main body text
- avoid justified text and align your text to the left
- set the line spacing (leading) to 1.5.

Spell checks, proofing and accuracy

Always spell check your work and do not use American spellings. Ask another staff member to proof read your final document, who has never seen your document before. Ideally, check your content with those who are representative of your target audience.

Your also need to check your facts:

- who, what, where, why, how?
- names of people and how they are spelt, job titles, qualifications, company names
- acronyms and that you have spelt them out in full correctly in the first instance
- information is accurate, balanced and transparent.

How to refer to wakefieldvcs.org (publicity and reference material)

We can't assume that every reader knows what wakefieldvcs.org stands for when we write about it. We should therefore explain what the website is the first time we talk about it. The standard short description is:

"The wakefieldvcs.org website is an online resource for and about Wakefield District's voluntary and community groups. It aims to support their development, increase understanding of their work and help them and other organisations to work together."

The wakefieldvcs.org portal refers to the name of our organisation and not staff involved in it. Therefore, a singular verb needs to be used:

X	The wakefieldvcs.org project aim to help organisations to work together better.
✓	The wakefieldvcs.org project aims to help organisations to work together better.

When we refer to this website, we say "The wakefieldvcs.org website" and do not start sentences with "wakefieldvcs.org"

X	wakefieldvcs.org was developed in 2009.
✓	The wakefieldvcs.org website was developed in 2009.

Referencing

Use the Vancouver system for referencing publications, numbering your footnotes. The Vancouver system has a set order for referencing different types of publications and footnotes. You can find more information about this system on the internet. Here are the basics:

Publications with a person author

Author(s) name. Publication title. Publisher. Year of publication. Edition number. Page numbers.

Smith, P, Martin, S. Involving groups 2008. Sager, 2008. 3. 54-57.

For corporate publications, use the following style and include the publication reference code if one is available.

Project. Publication title (and code if available). Publisher (for example, VAWD). Year of publication. Edition number. Page numbers.

Punctuation

Abbreviations

These should be kept to a minimum. When we use them we write:

- i.e.
- etc.
- e.g.

Ampersands

Avoid using the symbol '&' and use the word 'and' instead.

Apostrophes

Use apostrophes to show possession or omissions in words or phrases. One exception to the rule is that you should not use an apostrophe when 'its' is used in the possessive sense. Never use apostrophes to form a plural with letters or numbers ie write EPs and not EP's, and the 1980s and not the 1980's.

Bullet points and sub-headings

These help break up complex pieces of information and to make it easier to remember. Our standard style for bullet points is:

- If the bullet point forms a full sentence, it starts with an upper case letter and ends in a full stop.

But, if the bullet point does not form a complete sentence it:

- starts with a lower case letter
- does not have a full stop at the end
- unless it is the last bullet point where we put a full stop.
 - Sub bullet points should be further indented.

Always use full, round bullet points.

Capitals

The use of multiple capital letters in copy is confusing to the eye and makes information more difficult to read. This is why newspapers and other professional documents avoid overusing them. Avoid using capital letters:

- to add emphasis
- for job titles when describing a job role, e.g. The managers attended the meeting.
- when describing subjects of study e.g. mathematics
- to describe levels of qualification e.g. level one (unless referring to a course name)

Only use capitals for the first word of a title, the first word of a sub-heading or sentence, and in the following exceptions:

- to describe the subject English
- for job titles Chief Executive, Chief Executive Officer, Director/Director of Operations, Chair and Vice President
- when describing official names of courses, such as A Level Psychology or BA (Hons) English and Media and Charity Law
- when job titles are referring to a named individual.

Captions

Accompany each photograph, image and illustration with a caption clearly explaining its purpose or what it illustrates.

Dates and times

Write 4 February 2008, instead of 4th February 2008.

Use 'from' and 'to' or 'between' when writing date or time ranges in your main document copy instead of hyphens. Only use hyphens for date ranges in tables, using the format 2008-09.

Write times using numbers and the 12 hour clock. Put a full stop between the hour and minutes and then either am or pm without a space after the numbers, e.g. *2.30pm*.

Glossary and explanation of terms

All complex terms should be explained in accessible language. If your copy is dealing with a particularly complex subject and includes many acronyms, include a glossary at the back of your document.

To describe the words found in your glossary, use descriptions used in the [wakefieldvcs.org](http://www.wakefieldvcs.org) online glossary at:

<http://www.wakefieldvcs.org/?s=21>

If you cannot find the word you are looking for, please ensure you send the glossary word and description to the single portal manager so it can be added to the website.

Hyphens

Avoid excessive use of hyphens and only use them when the meaning of a phrase or sentence would be ambiguous without one, e.g. 'man-eating tiger' and 'man eating tiger'.

Spacing

Only use one space after a full stop or comma. Put a line space after each paragraph.

Quotation marks

Use double quotation marks for speech and single quotation marks for speech within a quote. When you are writing several paragraphs of quotes, use open quotation marks at the start of each paragraph and only use closed quotation marks at the end.

Numbers

The standard style for writing numbers is that we should write the numbers one to ten in text. From 11 onwards we use numbers. We can use a word in a number is used at the start of a sentence, though it is best to avoid this. Per cent is also written in full, unless used in a table or graph. Percentage is one word.

These rules do not apply for tables or graphs. Also, use figures when writing about money e.g. £5.

Questions?

The single portal manager can support the production of your editorial copy and provide further guidance. If you would like any editorial support or have any questions or suggestions about this guide, please contact:

Maria Langham
Single Portal Manager
Voluntary Action Wakefield District
11 Upper York Street
Wakefield
WF1 3LQ
Tel: 01924 367418
Email: maria.langham@vawd.org.uk

These editorial guidelines will be reviewed on a six-monthly basis. In the interim, if you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please contact the single portal manager.

Updated: April 2010