

ELSA LAW REVIEW LANGUAGE MANUAL

Dear Authors,

The ELSA Law Review has been a platform for the academic minds to bring their own thoughts and analysis to the legal issues we face in the world today. This Manual has been created for the benefit of the ELSA Law Review, the participants and the Network.

This Manual is intended to provide a clear and concise reference to properly follow the stipulated ELSA Law Review guidelines. The Manual also aims to give an overview of the elements of British English, including spelling, grammar, punctuation, use of different parts of the speech (nouns, pronouns, verbs, etc.) and the use of non-discriminatory language.

Writers are encouraged to use this Manual as a working tool throughout the drafting and editing process. Adherence to these standards is essential not only for publication in the *ELSA Law Review*, but also for contributing meaningfully to scholarly dialogue within the international legal community.

Revised by Velina Stoyanova (Director for Publications 2024/2025), 2025

© The European Law Students' Association, All Rights Reserved



Table of Contents

1. Spelling	2
1.1 Difference in spelling verbs and nouns/pronouns	3
1.2 Difference in use of past tense	3
2. Quotation marks	4
2.1 Titles of Works	4
2.2 Using Quotation Marks with Punctuation	5
3. Apostrophes (possessives and contractions)	5
3.1 Possessives	5
3.2 Contractions	6
3.3 Plurals of letters, numbers and symbols	6
4. Comma	7
5. Hyphens	9
6. Dashes	9
7. Capitalisation	9
8. Spelling of institutions, acronyms and abbreviations	10
8.1 Spelling	10
8.2 Acronyms and abbreviations	11
9. Foreign quotes or spelling in British English text	12
10. Use of point of view in academic writing	13
11. Verbs with collective nouns	13
12. Verbs in legal texts	13
13. British legal terms	14
14. Writing dates	16
15. Writing Numbers	16
16. Non-discriminatory language	16

1. Spelling

There are several differences between British and American English. Some of the linguistic differences to be aware of are:

- The use of 's' instead of 'z' in the words ending with:
 - *-ise*
 - *-yse*
 - *-isation*
- The use of *-ou* instead of *-o* in the words that might include either *o* or *ou*.
- The use of *-re* instead of *-er*.
- The use of *-ogue* instead of *-og*.
- The use of *-ll-* instead of *-l-*, most frequently in the endings:
 - *-lling*
 - *-lled*
 - *-ller*
- The use of *-eable* instead of *-able*, when forming some adjectives with a suffix.

Please be aware of spelling differences of common words. An exception to the change in spelling is when it concerns the names of institutions from other English-speaking countries. Therefore, any institutional names from e.g. American or Australian English retain their original spelling, e.g. the World Trade Organization.

Refer to the table below for further reference for the examples of spelling differences.

Examples:

American	British
recognize	recognise
analyze	analyse
categorization	categorisation
favor honor behavior color favorite	favour honour behaviour colour favourite
meter liter center fiber	metre litre centre fibre
catalog	catalogue

analog	analogue
traveling traveled counseled traveler	travelling travelled counselled traveller
likable unshakable	likeable unshakeable

1.1 Difference in spelling verbs and nouns/pronouns

Certain verbs and nouns are used differently in British English compared to other variations of English. These may sound the same though have slightly different spelling.

Examples:

American noun	American verb	British noun	British verb
license	license	licence	license
pretense	pretend	pretence	pretend
offense	offend	offence	offend

1.2 Difference in use of past tense

British English is more inclined to use *-t* rather than *-ed* for the irregular verbs in their second form (past verbs), used in the past simple tense when choosing between the two options.

To know whether a verb is regular or irregular, a dictionary may be consulted. Do not forget to pay attention to the difference between American and British English.

Examples:

Infinitive	American	British
to dream	dreamed	dreamt
to learn	learned	learnt
to burn	burned	burnt
to teach	tached	taught



to spell	spelled	spelt
BUT		
to plead	pled	pleaded

2. Quotation marks

Quotation marks can be either single or double:

- *Single quotation* marks are used when highlighting a word in text or for marking direct speech.
- *Double quotation* marks are reserved for nested quotations or when quoting within a quote.

Quotation marks should be **curly** and not straight. Quotation marks can be used to make ironic statements (for example ‘so-called’), however, this is advised against in academic writing. There must be a full stop at the end of quotation marks unless there is already one within the quotation marks.

Examples:

Correct	Incorrect
‘I love Dutch mini pancakes,’ she said, ‘they are called “poffertjes” in Dutch.’	“I love Dutch mini pancakes” she said, “they are called ‘poffertjes’”
Is it sufficient to use the word ‘shall’?	Is it sufficient to use the word “shall”?

2.1 Titles of Works

In academic legal writing, quotation marks are used to enclose the titles of articles, book chapters, essays, and shorter works.

They are not used for full publications such as books, reports, or court judgments — those should instead be *italicised*.

Examples:

Titles	Correct	Incorrect
<i>Articles or chapters</i>	‘Freedom of Expression and the Margin of Appreciation Doctrine in the ECHR’	“Freedom of Expression and the Margin of Appreciation Doctrine in the ECHR”

<i>Cases cited in running text (no quotation marks; italicised)</i>	<i>Osman v United Kingdom</i>	“Osman v United Kingdom”
---	-------------------------------	--------------------------

2.2 Using Quotation Marks with Punctuation

When incorporating quotation marks into sentences, in British English punctuation such as commas and full stops are generally placed inside the closing quotation mark if they are part of the quoted material. If the punctuation is part of the surrounding sentence (i.e., not part of the original quote), it should be placed outside the quotation marks.

Examples:

Correct	Incorrect
The ECtHR held that the applicant's 'right to private life was unjustifiably infringed.'	The ECtHR held that the applicant's 'right to private life was unjustifiably infringed'.
Did the judge say 'the directive was wrongly implemented'?	Did the judge say “the directive was wrongly implemented?”

3. Apostrophes (possessives and contractions)

The apostrophe has the following uses: 1) to form possessives, 2) to show the omission of letters - contractions, 3) to form plurals of letters, numbers, symbols.

3.1 Possessives

Possessives are used to show the relationship between two things, in other words when someone/something has something.

Plural possessive represents the ownership of more than one person, place or thing. Singular possessive is used to indicate if one person, place or thing owns something.

The usage of the apostrophe in the singular and plural possessives is summarised below.

singular	plural
Jane's umbrella (an umbrella that belongs to Jane)	the cooks' hats (the hats that belong to 2 or more cooks)
professor's book (a book that belongs to a professor)	Leo and Anne's house (the house that belongs to Leo and Anne)
	<p style="text-align: center;">BUT</p> <p>when the plural of the nouns is formed irregularly, that is without -s at the end of the word (e.g. men, women, children, etc), the apostrophe is put before the s:</p> <p>the women's rights (the rights that belong to women)</p>

The apostrophe is **not used** in possessive pronouns and possessive adjectives.

3.2 Contractions

An apostrophe is used in contractions where letters have been removed between two words so that they become one word. These contractions are used when writing and talking in an informal manner. It is strongly advised against contractions when writing a formal/academic piece.

Contraction	Uncontracted	Example
-n't	not	isn't (is not); hasn't (has not)
-re	are	they're (they are)
-d	had, would	they'd (they had, they would)
-ll	will	they'll (they will)
-s	is, has	he's (he is), she's (she has)

3.3 Plurals of letters, numbers and symbols

The apostrophes are normally not used to form the plurals, but are inserted when a plural is formed with a letter, number or symbol.

Examples:

- Two A's (two letter both of which are A);
- Three 5's (three numbers that are each 5);



— Several &'s (several ampersands).

4. Comma

The comma has many uses. It is important to use commas correctly in legal writing, otherwise it can potentially misconstrue the meaning of the text. Here are some rules on how to use a comma or when to omit it. Please note, the information below is not exhaustive, but rather serves as an overview of some essential punctuational points, and you may refer to other sources for more details and further information.

- Comma is used before a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) that separates two independent clauses. The independent clauses are clauses/sentences that stand on their own as separate sentences. If the second independent clause is very short, or if it is an imperative, the comma can be omitted.

Example: John was looking forward to the debate, but he still did not know the topic.

- Commas are put after introductory words, phrases, or clauses that introduce a sentence.
 - Some common introductory words are: *yet, however, meanwhile, suddenly, besides, still, etc.*

Example: Yet, the results might not be satisfactory.

- Common introductory phrases:

Examples: Having finished the test, John left the room.

To get a seat, you should arrive earlier.

- Common introductory clauses:

Examples: Because Mark's alarm clock was broken, he was late for class.

While Jane was eating, the dog was howling at the door.

- Commas are used for non-defining clauses in a sentence. Non-defining clause is essentially a piece of information that is not essential and can be taken out of the text without changing its meaning. When deciding whether the information is essential or not, consider the following questions:
 - If you leave out the part of the sentence in question (i.e. the clause, phrase, or word), does the sentence still make sense?
 - Does the element in question interrupt the flow of words in the original sentence?



- If you move the element to a different position in the sentence, does the sentence still make sense?

If you answer affirmatively to one or more of these questions, then the part of the sentence in question is non-essential.

Example: Uluru, which is also known as Ayers Rock, is an important Australian landmark.

- Commas are **not used in defining clauses**, when the piece of information is essential to the meaning of the sentence. Most commonly such examples include:

- *that* clause after nouns

Example: The law book that was recommended by our professor is excellent.

- *that* clause following a verb that express mental action (e.g. think, dream, wish, believe, etc)

Example: Luisa believes that the interconnection between law and technology is a fascinating topic.

- some other examples:

The candidate who had the least money lost the election.

Students who cheat at the exams only harm themselves.

- A comma should be used when listing two or more items as well as adjectives in a series.

Example: The government promised to lower taxes, protect the environment, and reduce unemployment.

The Constitution establishes the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government.

- A comma **should not be used** when adjectives are non-coordinate, in other words, their order cannot be rearranged or ‘and’ cannot be inserted between them.

Example: Mr Rowles often wears a gray woolen suit.

N.B. In the above-mentioned situations, the adjectives follow a specific order (see the table below).

	Fact Adjectives								
	opinion	size	age	shape	colour	origin	material	used for/ be about	noun
That's a	wonderful	large	old	square	black	Chinese	wooden	linen	chest

BUT! Mr Rowles has a nice, happy smile.

5. Hyphens

- Hyphens can be used for temporary and permanent uses. Hyphens need to be clear and precise.
- The permanent hyphen is used to turn a verb into a noun. It is also used for certain prefixes and when the prefix form ends with a vowel and the next word begins with the same vowel.
- The hyphen is used temporarily to avoid the misunderstanding of the meaning of certain words, distinguish similarly spelt words or when the coming letter is capital.

Examples:

Permanent	Temporary
break-in (to break in)	part-time
pile-up (to pile up)	long-term
a set-up (to set up)	up-to-date

6. Dashes

Dashes are used in British English with the n - dash not the m — dash. A dash can be used to replace a colon (:), to express some concepts or a range of numbers. The n dash can be used in places of brackets or commas, linking two parts of a sentence, a range of numbers or joint authors etc.

Examples:

n dash -
Age range is 16 - 20 years old.
She is of Dutch - English nationality.
Their room - which was very dirty - needed to be cleaned.
m dash —
not used in British English

7. Capitalisation

Capital letters are used for:

- Proper nouns, the pronoun I, acronyms and titles of organisations, institutions and committees, as well as some legal documents (e.g. Treaties, EU Regulations, Directives, Decisions, etc).
- Nouns and adjectives when stating the full title of international agreements/conventions.
- Days, weeks, months, years and holidays.
- The word State in legal writings, when referring to a specific country, or replacing its name in the context, when referring to the Member States (countries - members to a specific organisation, treaty, commitment, etc).
 - Please note, the word ‘state’ may have a general meaning, e.g. the state of affairs, in this case, it is not necessary to be capitalised unless it appears at the beginning of a sentence.
- Political parties and divisions.

Lower case should be used for:

- Policies, action plans and other similar areas.
- When referencing an institution in a foreign language, keep the original capitalisation, unless it can be directly translated to English and then English rules apply.

Examples:

Capitalisation
European Commission
Commission action plan on financing sustainable growth
United Nations
Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties
Jane Citizen
Cour administrative d’appel
Australian Labor Party

8. Spelling of institutions, acronyms and abbreviations

8.1 Spelling

Always use the official designated English name for an organisation/institution. Keep the original spelling for an organisation/institution if it is spelt in English but is a variation of the English language. This is seen with the American English spelling of the *World Trade Organization*. In certain cases, if the foreign word/title/body is widely known, it is then acceptable to use the original spelling. In legal acts, use the original spelling.

8.2 Acronyms and abbreviations

If there is an abbreviation for a certain party/institution/body, use the original abbreviation (not the English one) and then follow with the English name of party/institution/body. This is seen with the *International Federation of Association Football (FIFA)*, whose abbreviation comes from French *Fédération Internationale de Football Association*

When using plural abbreviations only use -s and not -'s. There is no apostrophe before, unless it is a possessive.

Example: NGOs (non-governmental organisations)

NGO's (only correct if possessive: 'the NGO's report')

When using acronyms, the rule is that acronyms with up to five letters are written in uppercase, and when there are more than five letters, they are written in lowercase with the first letter being capitalised. There are certain exceptions to this rule which are usually seen when the institution/organisation uses all capitals. For example, *NATO* and *Benelux* follow the above-mentioned rules, whereas *UNCITRAL* is an exception. Examples of acronyms include:

- NASA
- EEC
- TRIPS
- UNCTAD
- Helios
- Interreg

Examples:

Acronym	Full Name
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICJ	International Court of Justice
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
WTO	World Trade Organization

ILO	International Labour Organization
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CoE	Council of Europe

When referring to legal institutions, treaties, or organisations, always introduce the full name **at first mention**, followed by the abbreviation in parentheses. After the initial introduction, you may refer to the body or document by its acronym alone.

Example: The **European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)**, established under the **European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**, safeguards fundamental rights across Council of Europe member states. The **ECtHR** hears complaints alleging **ECHR** violations, including under Articles 3 and 6, which prohibit torture and ensure the right to a fair trial.

Avoid repeating the full name after the abbreviation has already been introduced, unless doing so is necessary to maintain clarity - such as when multiple similar acronyms are used within the same section or paragraph.

Writers should also avoid using abbreviations that are not widely recognised or standardised in the legal field unless they are clearly defined upon first use.

9. Foreign quotes or spelling in British English text

If quoting foreign words or phrases with no quotation marks, then *italics* need to be used with all original accents in place. Keep the original English variation of direct quotes, institutions and bodies.

Italics should also be used for Latin; yet, avoid using Latin, where English can be used (ex. 'among other things' instead of *inter alia*).

Example: The court applied the principle of *non bis in idem* in its reasoning.

If directly quoting text from a foreign legal source or body, retain the original spelling and variation, including American English if used in the original.

Example: The U.S. Supreme Court held in its decision: "The freedom of speech is not absolute."

Example: The Conseil d'État of France ruled in its decision: "L'État doit garantir le droit à l'éducation." (The State must guarantee the right to education.)

Do not translate the official names of institutions or bodies. Keep their official titles, even if in a foreign language. English translation of the name may be given in parentheses.

Example: The Bundesverfassungsgericht issued its judgment concerning the ECB bond-buying programme.

10. Use of point of view in academic writing

When writing an academic piece avoid using first and second person. The third person point of view should be used as often as possible. First and second person point of view should only be used when absolutely necessary.

Example:

- First-person: 'I believe that the European Court of Human Rights has influenced national courts.'
- Third-person: 'It is widely accepted that the European Court of Human Rights has influenced national courts.'

11. Verbs with collective nouns

British English will use both singular and plural verbs when referring to a collective noun (nouns that denote a group, e.g. assembly, police, family, crew). This means that in British English both *-is* and *-are* can be used.

Be aware this rule may not apply when referring to either an individual or a body. For example, 'International Board *is*' refers to the International Board as a body, and the 'International Board *are*' refers to the International Board as a group.

Examples:

American	British
The government is doing a good job	The government is/are doing a good job
My family is coming from London	My family is/are coming from London
Which group is leading the competition?	Which group is/are leading the competition?

12. Verbs in legal texts

Verb usage in legal texts can differ from their everyday language. When using verbs in legal texts, be aware of how they should be used in the declarative, imperative and permissive sense. The imperative and permissive provisions are either positive or negative. This is seen in the EU legislation with the main clauses and enacting terms. Positive imperative is used to impose an obligation or a requirement. Negative imperative is used to impose a prohibition, and positive imperative is used to give permission to do something.

Examples:

Positive Imperative	Negative Imperative	Positive Permission	Negative Permission	Declarative
shall	shall not	may	need/may not	hereby/shall

Member states *shall ensure* the free movement of goods across their borders.

The Commission *may adopt* delegated acts to supplement this regulation.

13. British legal terms

In British English, there are certain legal terms that are not found in other English-speaking legal systems. Be sure to be aware of what they mean and do not interchange or replace them with other various legal English definitions (such as American legal terms).

Examples:

Legal terms	Definition
Solicitor	A lawyer who gives legal advice, prepares legal documents and cases, deals with all the paperwork and communication involved with their clients' cases, such as writing documents, letters and contracts tailored to their client's needs; ensuring the accuracy of legal advice and procedure, and preparing papers for court. Solicitors represent clients in disputes and in court if necessary. In complex disputes, however, solicitors will often instruct barristers or specialist advocates to appear in court on behalf of their clients.
Barrister	A lawyer who generally represents individuals and organisations in courts and tribunals and may provide a specialist written legal advice. Barristers in England and Wales are referred to by solicitors to represent a case in court and only become involved once advocacy before a court is needed.
King's Counsel (KC/Silk), or Queen's Counsel (QC/Silk)	A lawyer, usually a barrister or an advocate (who may also be a solicitor who has obtained certain qualifications) appointed to Counsel to the Crown on the recommendation of the Lord Chancellor and entitled to sit within the bar of the court wearing a silk gown.

Crown Prosecution Service	Prosecutes criminal cases investigated by the police and other investigative organisations in England and Wales.
Crown Court	Court where serious criminal cases such as murder, rape, robbery are tried by a judge and a jury. The Crown Court also deals with the appeals against conviction or sentence of the magistrates' court.
Chambers	Can refer to the private office of a judge or the offices of a barrister or group of barristers.
Magistrates' court	Lower court that deals with summary offences (less serious cases, e.g. motoring offenses, minor criminal damage, etc.) and also deliberates if there is sufficient evidence to send a defendant to the Crown Court. The magistrates' court, in certain situations, can also deal with more serious offences such as burglary and drug offences. The magistrates' court may also hear family cases involving the arrangements for a child to be taken into care or put up for adoption, orders to prevent domestic abuse, etc.
Magistrate	Volunteers who hear cases in courts (criminal court, family court, or both) in their community.
Attorney General	A senior legal advisor to the government, responsible for legal matters concerning the state. In England and Wales, the Attorney General also oversees the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).
Common Law	A body of law developed through judicial decisions and precedents, as opposed to statutory law. Common law is the primary legal system in England and Wales.
Tort	A civil wrong that causes harm or loss to another person, leading to a legal liability. Examples include negligence, defamation, and trespass.

14. Writing dates

In British English dates are written as day/month/year. It is imperative to be written this way in order not to confuse readers. Do not use 'th' with dates, only the number and month and do not add 'the' before the date. The use of 'th' is for ordinal numbers, or if you write a date in such a way as 'the 4th of May'.

Example:

American version	British version
02/24/2019 (February/24/2019)	24/02/2019 (24/February/2019)
April 24, 2019	24 April 2019
on April 24th 2019	on the 24th of April 2019

15. Writing Numbers

There are variations of how to write numbers, and here are some explanations and examples:

- When writing numbers, spell out numbers one to ten and use digits afterwards (e.g. eight euros and sixteen cents). Use a combination of digits and words for very large round numbers (such as 18 billion euros).
- When writing with hundreds and thousands, you may use figures or words but not a mixture (only 800 or eight hundred).
- Billions and trillions can be combined with figures (such as 5 million, 14 trillion).

16. Non-discriminatory language

When writing, use gender-neutral titles as often as possible, as well as neutral vocabulary to avoid discriminatory language. Use alternatives, where they exist, and the gender specific form only when it is absolutely necessary for the context. The same is to be said for titles such as Miss or Mr. Avoid using gender biases and pronouns.

Examples:

His/Her form	Neutral form
barman/barmaid	bar staff
manpower	human resources/personnel/workforce
female/male scientist	scientist



husband/wife	spouse/partner
himself/herself	themselves
his/her	their
and he/she is	and they are
his or her	individual(s)