



INTERNATIONAL LEGAL RESEARCH GROUP ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND TECHNOLOGY



The European Law Students' Association

Language Manual

Foreword

Dear Reader,

This Manual was originally drafted for the ELSA Law Review by Madeleine Geerarts who served as the Linguistic Editor of the ELSA Law Review in 2019/2020 and the manual was updated by Maisie Beavan, Linguistic Editor in ELSA International team 2020/2021. The Manual has been adapted to the International Legal Research Group on Human Rights and Technology by including reference to relevant terminology.

This Manual helps to go beyond simply “British English”. This Manual aims to provide a clear and concise reference for users. The Manual also aims to give an overview of the elements of British English; this includes spelling, grammar/punctuation, use of nouns/pronouns, verbs/adverbs and use of gender-neutral and non-discriminatory language.

The goal of this Manual was to be created in a manner that is clear, concise and provides a main reference point for users for what is construed in British English. Additionally, Manual serves as the tool that will facilitate review process, as well as the publishing process. In the construction of this Manual we referenced and used some of the leading sources on the British English language. We hope that this Manual serves its purpose and is a useful tool for all users.

Kind regards,

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1. Spelling

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

- The use of the *-ise* instead of *-ize*.
- The use of the *-yse* instead of *-yze*.
- The use of the *-isation* instead of *-ization*.
- The use of putting *-ou* instead of *-o*.
- The use of *-re* instead of *-er*.
- The use of *-ogue* instead of *-og*.
- The use of *-lling* instead of *-ling*.
- The use of *-lled* instead of *-led*.
- The use of *-ller* instead of *-ler*.

Please be aware of spelling differences of common words. Exceptions to the change in spelling of 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 spelling differences.

Examples

American	British
recognize	recognise
analyze	analyse
categorization	categorisation
favor	favour
color	colour
favorite	favourite
meter	metre
center	centre
liter	litre
catalog	catalogue
analog	analogue
traveling	travelling
traveled	travelled
traveler	traveller

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 past verb (past simple) tense when choosing between the two choice options.

Examples

American	British
dreamed	dreamt
learned	learnt
burned	burnt
spoiled	spoilt
learned	learnt
pled	pleaded

2. Quotation marks

Quotation marks, also known as inverted commas, can be either single or double:

- Single quotation marks (‘’) are used when highlighting a word in text or for marking direct speech.
- Double quotations marks (“”) are used when inserting a quote within said speech.

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 Dutch mini panackes" she said, "they are called 'poffertjes'
Is it sufficient to use the word 'shall'?	Is it sufficient to use the word "shall"?

3. Apostrophes (possessive and contractions)

Mistakes made with apostrophes can be easily rectified once it is understood how an apostrophe is properly used.

3.1 Possessive

Possessives are used to show the relationship between one thing and another. Plural possessive represents the ownership of more than one person, place or thing. Singular possessive is used to indicate if a person, place or thing owns something. Possessive indefinite pronouns use to indicate the possessive in pronouns that does not refer to who or what they are. Here are some explanations:

- When an apostrophe is used as a possessive for plural nouns, singular nouns or indefinite pronouns that do not end in -s, the form -'s is used.
- If the plural ends with -s then only an -' is added and is -s'.
- Nouns that end in -s have -'s added at the end.

Another reminder is that possessive pronouns have no apostrophe added. Possessive pronouns are used to replace nouns and show ownership, such as ours, theirs, yours and hers.

Examples

to indicate possession - Correct	Incorrect
Sarah's computer	Sarahs' computer
women's rights	women's' rights
builders' tea	builder's tea
Mr. James's coffee	Mr. Jameses coffee
Is this anybody's shirt?	Is this anybody's' shirt?

3.2 Contractions

An apostrophe is used for 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.

Examples

Incorrect	Correct
do'nt	don't
whos's	who's
don't	do not
it's	it is
they're	they are
who's	who is

4. Comma

The comma has many uses. It is important that the comma is used correctly in legal writing, otherwise it can potentially misconstrue the meaning of the text.

- It can be used to pair sentences and add emphasis to certain parts of a sentence.
- Pairs of commas can be used for non-defining clauses in a sentence. A non-defining clause is information within a text that can be taken out of the text without changing the meaning of it. This means that commas should not be used for defining clauses and should not be used in the start of a sentence either.
- A comma can also be used to replace words such as who or which.
- A comma can be used to link two separate sentences normally linked with a conjunction
- A comma can be used after an adverb/adverbial phrase.
- A comma should be used when listing two or more items, but should not be used for adjectives when they do not form a series. Excessive use of commas should be avoided as they can lead to very long and often confusing sentences.

Examples

Use of comma
Uluru, which is also known as Ayers Rock, is an important Australian landmark.
However, that is not an option at the moment.
The former Governor General, Dame Quentin Bryce, was the first Australian female Governor General.

Incorrect	Correct
Uluru, which is known as Ayers rock is an important Australian landmark.	Uluru, which is also known as Ayers Rock, is an important Australian landmark.
Her, position was Vice President of AA.	Her position was Vice President of AA.
I ate watermelon, biscuits, cake, and blueberries.	I ate watermelon, biscuits, cake and blueberries.

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 in 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.
- Other uses include the temporary usage of the hyphen to avoid the meaning of certain words, distinguish similar spelt words or when the coming letter is a capital letter.

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 or for concepts or range of numbers. The n dash can be used in places of brackets or commas, link two parts of a sentence, range of numbers or joint authors etc.

Examples

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

7. Capitalisation

Capital letters are used for:

- Proper nouns, the pronoun I, acronyms and titles of organisations, institutions and committees.
- Nouns and adjectives when stating the full title of international agreements/conventions.
- Days, weeks, months, years and holidays.
- The word State in legal writings.
- 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 *World Trade Organization*. In certain cases, if the foreign word/title/body is widely known or the intended readers know it then it is 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 and 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)*. When using plural abbreviations, only use -s and not -'s. There is no apostrophe before unless it is a possessive, then use -s'.

When using acronyms, the rule is that acronyms with up to five letters are uppercase and when it is more than five, they are lower case with the first letter being a capital. There are certain exceptions to this rule and is usually seen when the institution/organisation uses all capitals. This is seen with examples such as *NATO* and *Benelux* following the rules, and then *UNCITRAL* as an example of the exception. Examples of acronyms include:

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

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 still in place. Keep the original English variation of direct quotes, institutions and bodies. Italics should be used for Latin, but avoid using Latin where English can be used.

10. Use of point of view in academic writing

When writing an academic piece, avoid using first (I/we) and second person (you). The third person (he/she/it/they) point of view should be used as often as possible. First and second person point of view should only be used when absolutely necessary.

11. Verbs with collective nouns

British English will use both singular and plural verbs when referring to a collective noun. This means in British English, both *-is* and *-are* can be used. Be aware this rule may not apply when referring to either individuals or a body. This can be seen with the example of the “International Board is” refers to the International Board as a body and then there is the “International Board are” refers to the International Board as individuals.

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 to their use in 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 EU legislation with their main clauses and enacting terms and must be adhered to. Positive imperative is used to impose an obligation or requirement. Negative imperative is used to impose a prohibition and positive imperative is used to give permission to do something. Verbs in permissive provisions are permissions given or not given to do something.

Examples

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

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 that can represent clients in lower courts of law.
Barrister	A lawyer who can represent clients in higher courts of law.
Queen's Council (QC/Silk)	A barrister 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 criminal cases are tried by a judge and jury rather than a magistrate.

Chambers	Can refer to the private office of a judge or the offices of a barrister or group of barristers.
Magistrates' court	Lower courts that cover a wide range of offences and also deliberate if there is sufficient evidence to send a defendant to the Crown Court. They have limited jurisdiction.
Magistrate	Volunteers who hear cases in courts in their community and can have no formal legal qualifications.

14. How dates are written

In British English, dates are written as day/month/year. It is imperative that the date is written this way in order to avoid confusing 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 the 24th of April 2019

15. Writing Numbers

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

- When writing numbers, spell out numbers one to ten and use digits afterwards. 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 (such as 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 as often as possible gender-neutral titles as well as neutral vocabulary to avoid discriminatory language. Use alternatives where they exist, and use the gender specific form only when it is absolutely necessary for context. The same is to be said for titles such as Miss or Mr, unless the individual says so. Avoid using gender bias and pronouns. This is a frequent problem but one that is easily solved.

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 is
his or her	individual(s)

17. Links to dictionaries and other tools

- https://www.lexico.com/en?search_filter=dictionary
- <https://www.thesaurus.com>
- https://www.lexico.com/en?search_filter=ote

18. Glossary Terminology

Term and acceptable abbreviation	Meaning	Source
European Union (EU)		
United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)		
United Nations Human Rights Committee		
United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)		
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)		

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (CFR)		
European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)		
Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)		
European Commission		
European Council		
European Parliament		
Information access	Information access is the freedom or ability to identify, obtain and make use of databases or information effectively.	
Access to information	Access to information is the ability for an individual to seek, receive and impart information effectively.	
European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)		
UN Human Rights Council Resolution on the Promotion, Protection, and Enjoyment of Human Rights on the Internet.		
Computer and network surveillance (Online surveillance)	Computer and network surveillance are the monitoring of computer activity and data stored on a hard drive, or data being transferred over computer networks such as the Internet. The monitoring is often carried out covertly and may be completed by governments, corporations, criminal organizations, or individuals.	
Internet exchange point (IXP)	An Internet Exchange Point (IXP) is simply a physical location where different IP networks meet to exchange local traffic with each other via a switch. They are an	

	integral part of the Internet ecosystem.	
Autonomous system	An autonomous system (AS) is a collection of connected Internet Protocol (IP) routing prefixes under the control of one or more network operators on behalf of a single administrative entity or domain that presents a common, clearly defined routing policy to the internet.	
Internet service provider (ISP)	Internet service provider (ISP), company that provides Internet connections and services to individuals and organizations. In addition to providing access to the Internet, ISPs may also provide software packages (such as browsers), email accounts, and a personal Web site or home page.	
Deep packet inspection (DPI)	Deep packet inspection (DPI) is a type of data processing that inspects in detail the data being sent over a computer network, and usually takes action by blocking, re-routing, or logging it accordingly. Deep packet inspection is often used to ensure that data is in the correct format, to check for malicious code, eavesdropping and internet censorship, among other purposes.	
Application level gateway (ALG)	An application gateway or application level gateway (ALG) is a firewall proxy which provides network security. It filters incoming node traffic to certain specifications which mean that only transmitted network application data is filtered.	

19. Sources used

- **English Style Guide:** https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/styleguide_english_dgt_en.pdf
- **CERN English Language Style Guide:** <https://translation-council-support-group.web.cern.ch/sites/translation-council-support-group.web.cern.ch/files/styles/CERN%20TM%20English%20language%20style%20guide.pdf>
- **University of Oxford Style Guide:** https://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/media_wysiwyg/University%20of%20Oxford%20Style%20Guide.pdf