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Government Style Guide

15 October 2008

This in-house English style guide for Government was compiled to provide guidelines for drafting documents in English. It introduces, with practical examples, the main rules governing the use of English in administrative documents.

The guide is by no means exhaustive nor can it cover all linguistic/cultural variations. Should you require further assistance, please contact kielipalvelu@vnk.fi

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1. CAPITAL LETTERS

1.1 Names

As a rule, capitalise all nouns and adjectives in names of organisations and specific institutions and their subdivisions such as ministries and their units, government agencies, public bodies, international organisations, directorates-general, directorates, committees, working groups etc.

- Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Employment and the Economy
- Department for Administration and Specialist Services, Government Communications Unit
- Finnish Immigration Service, National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES), Geological Survey of Finland (GTK)
- Supreme Court, University of Helsinki, National Library of Finland
- United Nations, Council of Europe, European Commission
- Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Directorate-General for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs
- Grand Committee, European Science Foundation, Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations, Working Group on IT Management

In cases where this rule would produce a long series of capitalised words, use discretion, especially where the name of a department, committee or programme reads more like a description of its function than a real title:

- Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of the Directive on the introduction of recording equipment in road transport (tachograph)
- Joint FAO/EC working party on forest and forest product statistics

Use lower case for general references:

- Decisions of *administrative courts* can be appealed to the Supreme Administrative Court.
- Two separate Commission *units* are involved.
- It was decided to set up a number of *working parties*.

1.2 Legislative and other formal instruments

As translations of the Finnish acts have only an unofficial status, use the following formula when referring to a Finnish act or decree:

- Social Welfare Act (Sosiaalihuoltolaki 710/1982)
- Social Welfare Decree (Sosiaalihuoltoasetus 607/1983)

It is recommended to always provide the entire name in Finnish, the reference number and the year of issue. If an act has not been translated into English, the title may be translated into English with lower case letters:

- As provided by the communicable diseases act (Tartuntatautilaki 583/1986)¹

For EU Directives, capitalise only the word *Directive*

- Commission Directive 2004/29/EC on determining the characteristics and minimum conditions for inspecting vine varieties

When referring to a particular directive use a capital letter:

- The provisions laid down in the aforementioned Directive are restrictive in nature.

In a general reference, use lower case:

- Over the years, the European Union has issued numerous directives and regulations.

1.3 Official titles

Capitalise the titles of officials and their offices:

- The State Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office represented the ministries at the meeting.
- Sauli Niinistö was chosen as Speaker of Parliament in April 2007.
- The current President of the Republic of Finland is a former Minister for Foreign Affairs.
- The Judges and Advocates-General of the Court are in session.
- Javier Solana serves as the European Union High Representative for the Common Security and Foreign Policy.
- Thousands of pilgrims packed into the St Peter's Square to hear Pope Benedict XVI give his Easter address.
- Mr Koivunen, Human Resources Specialist, will be attending the meeting.

¹ See separate file (Säädösviittaus) for more information on translating acts and decrees (in Finnish only)

Do not capitalise job descriptions:

- It is not every year we elect a new president.
- We know very well that popes have often affected the course of history.
- As a human resources specialist for many years, I've seen it all when it comes to job applications.

1.4 Political entities

Remember to capitalise *specific* political entities and to use lower case when the reference is *general*.

Government

Always use upper case when referring to a specific government

- The Government resigned last night.
- The Argentine Government sent troops to the area.

and specific past administrations such as

- The Lipponen Government was appointed for its second term in spring 1999.

Use lower case only when referring to a nonspecific government or to one that has yet to be formed

- all the governments since the war
- the next majority government would raise pensions

Also, use lower case in all adjectival contexts

- a government official, a government decision, government expenditure

A further instance of lower case use is in phrases such as *the Bosnian government troops* or *the British government-backed trade delegation*, when the use is again principally adjectival.

Parliament

Capitalise parliament always when referring to the Parliament of Finland and when the word forms part of the institution

- Last year, Parliament celebrated its centennial.
- The seat of the European Parliament is in Strasbourg.
- The Canadian Parliament is bicameral.

However, use lower case in contexts such as:

- The conference was attended by representatives of the Finnish parliament (Eduskunta), the Swedish parliament (Riksdagen), the Saami parliament (Samediggi) and the Russian parliament (Duma).

Use lower case for the adjectival form

- a parliamentary session, a parliamentary document

State

Write the State when the word can be replaced by the name of a country, e.g. Finland,

- The State intends to continue its participation in international development cooperation.

but use lower case for

- state aid, state majority-owned companies

NB:

- Nordic countries, Baltic states
- but: EU Member States

1.5 Political parties

The full name of political parties is upper case, including the word party:

- Centre Party, National Coalition Party, Finnish Social Democratic Party

When referring to a specific party, write

- Labour, the Republican nominee, a prominent Liberal, etc

but use lower case in general references

- liberals, conservatives, communists

When writing a political, economic or religious label formed from a proper name the first letter should be capitalised:

- Finlandisation, Thatcherism, Christianity, Buddhism, a Blairite
- a Marxist ideology, Christian values, the Islamic world

1.6 International agreements

Follow the specific/general rule for treaties, conventions, arrangements, understandings, protocols, etc:

- the Treaty of Tartu, the Paris Peace Treaty, the Kyoto Protocol, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

but

- by treaty, under an agreement, the parties agreed to a memorandum of understanding

1.7 Permanent and ad hoc bodies

Permanent bodies require capitals:

- Commission Delegation in the United States
- Finnish Delegation to the Nordic Council
- Finnish Delegation to the Council of Europe

while ad hoc groups do not

- Polish delegation to a meeting

1.8 Events

Use initial capitals throughout for events such as

- New Year's Day, Kalevala Day, Women's Day, No Car Day, the International Year of the Child, the Second UN Development Decade

1.9 Quotations

Start with a capital in running text only if the quotation is a complete sentence in itself:

- In his final speech to the Labour Party conference, Tony Blair said "We proved that economic efficiency and social justice are not opposites but partners in progress."
- The American Government favours 'a two-way street in arms procurement'.

2. NUMBERS

2.1 General

It is important to maintain consistency within a text. As a general rule write low numbers (up to nine inclusive) in words and larger numbers (10 and above) in figures.²

- In 2007, the Prime Minister's Office employed 237 persons in four departments.
- After the meeting, six delegations held a press conference in 13 languages.

At the start of a sentence, write all numbers in full or, if this is stylistically not possible, make use of devices such as inversion:

- Fifty proposals were rejected.
- Altogether 92 directives were adopted at the meeting.
- Of the total, 15 Member States were in favour of the agreed reforms.

Use figures if units of measurement are denoted by symbols or abbreviations:

- EUR 50
- 5°C

If the units of measurement are spelled out, the numbers, too, may be spelled out (e.g. fifty euros, five degrees Celsius) or they may be written with figures (e.g. 250 kilowatts, 500 metres).

With ordinals, write out up to twentieth then use figures, but for birthdays and anniversaries, write out up to the tenth, then 11th, 45th etc:

- The event was organised for the eleventh time.
- The organisation will celebrate its 15th anniversary next year.

2.2 Hundred and thousand

Hundred and thousand can be written with either figures or words:

- 300 *or* three hundred members
- EUR 5 000 *or* five thousand euros

When grouping thousands, use either commas or insert protected spaces:

- The website has approximately 4,000 visitors every day.
- After 5 769 pictures, the camera suddenly stopped functioning.

² See 2.13 Numbers in figures.

2.3 Million and billion

Million and billion may be combined with figures: 2.5 million, 3 million, 31 billion.

The use of billion to designate a thousand million (in Finnish *miljardi*) is standard usage.

2.4 Decimals

Note that even though in Finnish we say "desimaalipilkku", in English a full stop is used to separate whole numbers from tenths, hundredths etc.:

- 1 inch equals 2.54 centimetres (spoken: two point fifty-four or two point five four)

With decimal notations, it is best to restrict to two decimal points in text, rounded up or down (e.g. EUR 1.53 million), though in headlines try to avoid decimals altogether.

Do not mix fractions and decimals in the same text.

2.5 Ages

Age is usually expressed as follows

- Joe Brown, 33, is a porter working at the Sunny Days Hotel.
- Andrew Hunt, who is 74, still occupies a prominent position in the human rights campaign.
- She was in her late forties when appointed to the Ministry of the Environment.

2.6 Dates

Write dates as follows:

- The decision was adopted on 23 July 1997.
- The new Act entered into force on 1 January 2008.
- The summit will take place on 12-14 September.

However, when space is limited, the month can be written as a number:

- 23/07/2008 *or* 23.7.2008

When referring to decades use:

- The national agency was established in the Forties *or* forties.
- The invention saw daylight in the early 1980s but was commercially exploited only in the 1990s.

2.7 Time

Use the 24-hour system.

When writing times, use a point between hours and minutes:

- The meeting is scheduled to begin at 11.30.
- The flight will leave Helsinki on Sunday morning at 7.45 and arrive in Montreal at 19.05.

For midnight either write the word midnight or use 24.00 (for periods ending then) or 00.00 (for periods starting then).

For duration use h:

- The time allowed for the debate is 2½ h.

2.8 Time spans and other ranges

When citing periods of years, do not repeat the century if it is the same, but always include the decade:

- The Russians were actively involved in the process in 1870–1901.
- Special reference was made to events of 1939–45.
- Finnish membership of the European Union: 1995–2008
- The new financial perspective will cover the years 2008–13.

Note that 1990–91 is two years. Single marketing years, financial years, etc. that do not coincide with calendar years are denoted by a forward slash and refer to a period of twelve months or less:

- The report covers the entire budget year 2007/08.
- Finnish skiers were very successful during the winter season 1998/99.

Note the following patterns:

- from 1990 to 1995
- between 1990 and 1995
- 1990 to 1995 inclusive

When a range is written out, repeat symbols and multiples:

- The value of total output increased from EUR 20 million to EUR 30 million a year.
- The test conditions varied between 10°C and 70°C.

When a range is indicated by a dash, do not repeat the symbol or multiple if they do not change:

- The estimated annual expenditure is EUR 20–30 million.
- The temperature is likely to be 20–30°C.

If the symbol or multiple changes, however, leave a blank space on either side of the dash:

- 100 kW – 40 MW

2.9 Per cent and percentage point

Per cent is preceded by the number in figures rather than the word. Use the % sign in headlines, and spell out *per cent* in text:

- According to a US government study, almost 25 per cent of spying is related to commercial secrets.

Note that in English the % sign is always closed up to the figure:

- An increase from 5% to 7%.

Percentage points: If the mortgage rate rises from 8 per cent to 10 per cent, it does not rise by 2 per cent, but by two percentage points. Similarly if a political party's support drops from 50 per cent to 40 per cent in an opinion poll, it has lost ten percentage points or 20 per cent of its support.

2.10 Hyphenating

Compounds such as half-hour, half-dozen take a hyphen; half an hour, half a dozen do not:

- The State Secretary delivered a half-hour speech.
- The speech lasted for half an hour.

Hyphenate when fractions are adjectival but not when they are nouns:

- There was a two-thirds increase in the use of electronic services.
- Three quarters of the conference room was empty.

As a rule, avoid combining single-digit numbers and words using hyphens but write out instead:

- The ministers agreed on the financing of the next three-year period.
- We definitely need a five-door car.

There are, however, certain set phrases such as:

- 40-hour week, 24-hour clock, 4-wheel drive

When two numbers are adjacent, spell out one of them:

- For the experiment, they needed 90 fifty-gram weights.
- The secretary bought seventy 25-cent stamps.

2.11 Telephone

In texts intended for national distribution, write: (09) 160 12345

For international callers: +358 9 160 12345

Group the telephone number in a manner clearly indicating the extension number.

2.12 Miscellaneous

Always use figures for statistics, for votes, for ranges denoted by a dash and for serial numbers:

- 13 new officials were appointed in 2002, 6 in 2003 and only 2 in 2004
- 12 delegations were in favour, 7 against, and 6 abstained
- see Ranges, 3.14–3.15
- Chapter 5, Article 9, Item 4

unless you are quoting a source that does otherwise:

- Part One of the EEC Treaty

2.13 Numbers in figures

Cardinal numbers		Ordinal numbers (the)	
0	zero, nought, o ³		
1	one	1st	first
2	two	2nd	second
3	three	3rd	third
4	four	4th	fourth
5	five	5th	fifth
6	six	6th	sixth
7	seven	7th	seventh
8	eight	8th	eighth
9	nine	9th	ninth
10	ten	10th	tenth
11	eleven	11th	eleventh
12	twelve	12th	twelfth
13	thirteen	13th	thirteenth
20	twenty	20th	twentieth
21	twenty-one	21st	twenty-first
22	twenty-two	22nd	twenty-second
23	twenty-three	23rd	twenty-third
24	twenty-four	24th	twenty-fourth
100	a/one hundred	100th	hundredth
101	a/one hundred and one	101st	hundred and first
110	a/one hundred and ten	110th	hundred and tenth
200	two hundred	200th	two hundredth
1,000	a/one thousand	1,000th	thousandth
1,001	a/one thousand and one	1,001st	thousand and first
2,000	two thousand	2,000th	two thousandth
10,000	ten thousand	10,000th	ten thousandth
100,000	a/one hundred thousand	100,000th	hundred thousandth
1,000,000	a/one million	1,000,000th	millionth
1,000,000,000	a/one billion	1,000,000,000th	billionth

³ O [ou] is used in spoken English to mean zero or nought, for example when you are telling someone your phone number: "My phone number is six o four double two (60422)".