## Leeds Museums and Galleries: A practical guide for text interpretation



## Contents

#### Introduction – Pages 4–5

- What's covered as part of the guide?
- Our audiences
- The Quality Principles
- Creative Case for Diversity

#### Writing text: our tone of voice – Pages 7–10

#### Graphics - Pages 12-15

- Exhibition graphics and labels
- Labels for objects and works of art
- Positioning of graphics

#### Typography – Pages 17–20

- Fonts
- Backgrounds and contrast
- Typographical layout
- Printed materials for graphics

#### Grammar and punctuation - Pages 22-31

- Frequently mixed up words that cause grammatical confusion
- Our preferred formats, terms and conventions (for consistency across the service)



## Intro

This is the house style and tone guide for Leeds Museums and Galleries. The guide covers both writing text and the design factors that can make the text more accessible.

We support inclusive, accessible, concise and consistent text. It's important that we all say things in the same way – it makes it easier for our audiences to understand us.

Where there is room for manoeuvre, we've pointed it out. The guide also provides help on easily confused or frequently misspelt words.

The guide is the practical side of our Text Interpretation Policy.

Text Interpretation stands within our Intellectual Access Statement:

We want to provide intellectual access to our collection and sites. We want our current and potential audiences to find relevance and meaning in our collections by providing multi-sensory, layered interpretations.

#### What's covered as part of the guide?

The style guide includes: signage, marketing and external communications, exhibition text and design (whether developed in house, with community partners, or externally), digital resources and web text, and learning resources.

#### Our audiences

Our audiences are many and varied. We seek to attract and work with the under fives and their carers, multigenerational families, young people, schools, higher and further education groups, adults and older people. They may be local to Leeds, or they may come from further afield. They may have additional support needs. However, when our audiences arrive with us we have a duty to make the collections as accessible as possible to them. Part of this accessibility is likely to be text based.

#### **Creative Case for Diversity**

As a public service, we have an ethical duty to make our programmes as inclusive and accessible as possible. In 2014, Arts Council England launched their Creative Case for Diversity. The approach is that 'diversity is now a collective responsibility [and]...a key issue in relation to the programming and audiences, leadership and workforce of all our funded organisations.'

We want to include our audiences in how our collections are interpreted, so it aligns closely with the drive for Creative Case of Diversity.

For more information, go to: creativecase.org.uk

Since 2012, Arts Council England have been working with a range of arts and cultural organisations to devise and test a set of principles to define and evaluate quality participation within the arts. The Quality Principles were designed from all sectors evaluative systems (including the Generic Learning / Social Outcomes from Inspiring Learning for All from museums). They centre around good practice for working with young people, but can equally by used as a framework for evaluating with all audiences, and include all forms of engagement, including text based media.

#### The seven quality principles are:

- striving for excellence
- emphasising authenticity
- being inspiring, and engaging
- ensuring a positive person-centred experience
- actively involving our audiences
- providing a sense of personal progression
- developing a sense of ownership and belonging

The Quality Principles are now a standard planning and evaluative tool, and worth considering as a framework when developing interpretation and writing copy text. For more information, go to: artscouncil.org.uk/quality-metrics/quality-principles



#### Writing text: our tone of voice

Our tone of voice conveys our values and who we are as a service. We need to use the same tone for everything we say.

This doesn't mean everything has to be the same: you wouldn't give exactly the same talk to a group of five year olds as you would give to a group of adults, you would differentiate. Each of our sites is unique, but the tone we use across the service must be consistent.

#### We are:

- Accessible and welcoming
- Confident and purposeful
- Inspiring and experimental
- Robust and meaningful

#### Accessible and welcoming

We're accessible and welcoming because we want everyone to feel included. We talk in a natural, warm and approachable way.

- People like stories about people. Make your text personal. Use we/our/us (for LMG) and you/yours (for the audience).
- Write in plain English that sounds natural when read out loud.
- People have different beliefs and access needs, and language usage changes all the time. If in doubt about the content of something or how to phrase something, ask a colleague or a community partner.
- Consider reading age. Most text panels are aimed at an 11 year old, but local adult literacy studies say the reading age in Leeds is closer to that of a nine year old. You can test reading age with a Fry graph or various online resources. Layered information may have a higher reading age.
- Avoid gender bias in terms of direct language and stereotyping. For example, avoid referring to a stuffed animal as 'he' if we don't know if the animal is male or female.

#### Confident and purposeful

We're confident and purposeful because we're enthusiastic and passionate about everything we do, and we're not shy about expressing it.

- Be confident. Take pride in what you are writing, and why you are writing it.
- Use active verbs: 'Scientists have found traces of ice on Mars', rather than 'Traces of ice have been found on Mars'.
- Avoid 'museum-speak', jargon and overcomplicated technical language. It's boring to most people and will make the general visitor disengage.

#### Inspiring and experimental

We're inspiring and experimental because we've got all sorts of exciting ideas to share and discuss, and we talk about it in surprising and engaging ways.

- Be clear and use simple language. Ideas can be complex, but you can use simple words to describe them.
- Be concise and put important information first. The general visitor reads about 20% of the interpretation as they walk through an exhibition. They are more likely to read the first section than the last.
- Use lively calls to action and questions to engage the reader.
- Avoid rhetorical questions they are patronising. Exclamation marks don't automatically make something exciting!
   And avoid clichés like the plague.

#### Robust and meaningful

We're robust and meaningful because we want to be socially engaged in our practices, reflective on our processes and show multiple perspectives.

- Talk openly about the interpretation process with your community partners and co-curators. It will make everything run more smoothly.
- Admit uncertainty. We don't know everything and we are willing to learn.
   Don't 'dumb down', use simple language to talk about complex ideas.

### Writer's checklist: things to do before you start writing your text

If you are writing something, make the words you use count. Approach the first level of text as if the audience is a beginner, and layer into more complex information. Think about:

#### Our audiences:

- Who am I writing for?
  - Is text the best way to interpret for this audience?
  - Is there a more accessible way that would work better?
  - Can we engage different audiences with other methods or activities?

#### Our messages:

- What's the most important thing I want to say?
  - How can I make it work for the audience?
  - If we are being challenging, have we managed the risks?

#### Co-curation:

- Do you intend to co-curate?
  - Do all the partners understand the message?

### Writer's checklist: once you have written your text

Once you have your text, just run a few checks:

- Does the first line make them want to carry on reading?
- Is my message clear?
- Have I captured our values?
- Read the text out loud to someone if you can: does it sound odd or unnatural?



## Graphics

## **Exhibition graphics and labels**

Our text interpretation supports our objects and gives them context for our audiences. We support layered interpretation to cater for a wide range of needs.

Type of graphic	Content	Words	Type size	Type of font
Title		8 words	At least 100 point, preferably up to 240 point	Serif fonts can be used, as long as they are clear and uncomplicated.  Test how they look on leaflet size as well as writ large at the entrance to exhibition to check legibility.  Avoid all upper case letters. Ask designers for options in title case.
Introductory panel	Opening statement to outline key concepts	30 words	80 point	Sans serif, upper and lower case
	Main body of text to outline 3 key points	70 words	48 point	Sans serif, upper and lower case
	Captions	20 words	20 point	Sans serif, upper and lower case

Type of graphic	Content	Words	Type size	Type of font
Graphic panel	Main body of text to outline 3 main themes	90 words	At least 36 point	Sans serif, upper and lower case
	First paragraph to be in bold for layering	30 words	At least 24 point	Sans serif, upper and lower case
	Captions	20 words	20 point	Sans serif, upper and lower case
Single object labels	Information or a question about a specific object	30 words	At least 16 point. Consider size when labels are at the back or bottom of cases	Sans serif, upper and lower case
Information sheets		150-200 words in total per sheet	At least 14 point	Sans serif, upper and lower case
Large print sheets		150-200 words in total per sheet	At least 18 point (16 point is the legal minimum)	Sans serif, upper and lower case
Credit line			At least 10 point	Sans serif, upper and lower case
Marketing / Communications			Body Copy 9 point minimum when space is restricted. Good practice is 11 / 12 point. Please use sufficient line spacing.	Sans serif, upper and lower case
Screen subtitles			At least 14 point	Sans serif, upper and lower case
Family activities	Information or a question about a specific object		At least 14 point	Sans serif, upper and lower case

#### Labels for objects and works of art

There is an ongoing discussion in the art world about what goes first on a label: the artist, or the title of the work. As a service, we believe, this might alter depending on the message of the exhibition.

Unless there is a good interpretive reason, works of art must have the title, artist's name and date of work. The order, and any extra information, is dependent on the message you want to convey.

Labels for works of art to have: title, artist's name, date of work, artist's dates, medium and credit line.

The Artist in her Studio
Paula Rego
1993
Acrylic on paper on canvas
Credit line

Paula Rego The Artist in her Studio 1993 Acrylic on paper on canvas Credit line

#### Collage

195

Oil, charcoal and collage on board

Upon graduating from Camberwell School of Art in 1950, Frost returned to St Ives and earned money assisting Barbara Hepworth on her monumental carvings for the Festival of Britain. Like his Camberwell tutor Victor Pasmore, Frost soon found that thinking in three dimensions liberated his approach to painting. He began working with collage and constructions, which he continued throughout his career. Frost used collage to understand the dynamics between form and space in his first version of *Walk Along the Quay* 1950. As in *Collage* 1950, his use of line was directional rather than descriptive and Frost regularly employed a black square as an anchoring device.

The Pier Arts Centre Collection, Orkney

### Positioning of graphics

- Wall or screen mounted graphics should, wherever possible, be positioned within the optimum viewing band (750-1600mm above the floor). Generally, the base of a panel around 1100-1200mm above the floor will work for most people.
- Place graphics at 90° to the line of vision.
- Enable graphics to be as close to the reader as possible. People with low vision may need to be within 75mm of a label in order to read it.
- Object labels should be next to the objects they relate to, or obviously connected. Ideally, the reader should be able to see the object and the label from the same vantage point.
- Be aware of glare. Use matt materials for graphics. Glare at child height falls between 1000-1060mm.





## **Typography**

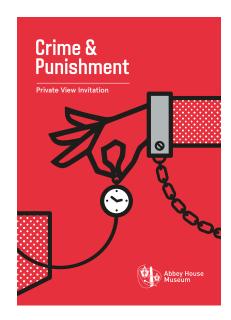
How we visually present our text affects how easily people will be able to read it.

Heading typeface	Font	Style Approved
Heading typeface	Circular Std	~
Heading typeface	Century Gothic	~
Heading typeface	Bookman Old Style	<b>~</b>
Heading typeface	Times	~
Heading typeface	Notehand	×

- Serif fonts may be used for exhibition titles, as long as they are clear and uncomplicated.
   Test how they look on leaflet size as well as writ large at the entrance to exhibition to check legibility.
- Use a solid sans serif font for main body text.
   Leeds City Council computers default to
   Calibri for email and Word documents.
- Use the font in its true form, without shadowing, or using outlines.
- When choosing a sans serif font for text that includes email or web references, check the @ sign prints correctly. Some fonts squash the @ sign.
- Avoid ornate or complicated fonts, or fonts using all capital letters.

#### Backgrounds and contrast

- Have a high contrast between text and background (around 80%). Try black or charcoal on white /yellow / light orange / pastel colours. If you are using white on a coloured background, make sure the background colour is strong, and the white text is bold.
- To see if print has a high contrast, try printing it in grayscale. If it's clear in grayscale, it will be clear in colour.
- Use a plain background for graphics. Text over an image or a highly textured background surface makes it hard to read for people who have visual impairments or perceptual difficulties. Single block colour images are fine, as long as they have an 80% contrast.
- Avoid combinations of colours indistinguishable by people with colour blindness, like red / green, or yellow / blue.
- Consider the colour of the walls in an exhibition space, or the case lining. Will any suggested colour change make it accessible? The graphic panel or label should have a good contrast to the walls.







#### Typographical layout

- If you have a lot of text on layered information sheets, consider using columns. Splitting dense (book-like) text into columns can make it easier to read as it requires less peripheral vision. Use with a wide central margin or a vertical line.
- Align text to the left and leave a ragged edge to the right hand side. Justifying text makes it hard to read as the spaces between letters aren't consistent.
- Try to use an average of 60-70 characters per line.
- Orientation of the text should be horizontal. Vertical orientation should only be used sparingly for captions or credits. Never use stacked letters.
- Use images and simple diagrams to support text.

- Avoid clipart, and never use Wordart.
   The shadows and curves make text hard to read.
- Underlining and italics make things hard to read if you have visual impairments.
   Use bold for highlighting a word or concept.
  - Design lines under text are acceptable as long as there is a good leading space.
  - Italics can be used for Latin, scientific and taxonomic names.

### Printed materials for graphics

- Use matt inks and papers as glossy surfaces create glare.
- Choose an uncoated paper at least 90gsm (standard photocopier paper is about 80gsm). This stops printed words showing through from the back and helps people with visual impairments.
- Laminating pouches are for resources, activity sheets and emergency, temporary signs only. They are not for labelling objects and exhibitions. If you have to use them, use matt pouches.



## Grammar and punctuation

We would like to be as grammatically correct as possible. The English language has some steadfast grammatical rules, but others can be played with for effect. For instance, starting a sentence with 'But' or 'And' in the right circumstances can make text more interesting. If in doubt, ask a colleague to check what you have written, or read it out loud. If it sounds wrong, it probably is. Below are some common mistakes that we seek to avoid.

Abbreviations	The first time you use something that you're going to abbreviate, spell it out and put the abbreviation in brackets. You can then use the abbreviation for the rest of the document.  If you are writing text (as opposed to a list or table) write these out in full.	c	Key Stage 2 (KS2)  circa (not c. – also see dates)  for example (not eg)
Apostrophes	Apostrophes are used to show letters that have been missed out.	٧	We didn't [did not] have enough time.
	They are also used for possession.		The Housekeeper's keys could weigh up to 1 kg. The BBC's guidelines.
	If you are using an apostrophe to indicate possession and the word ends in s, add another s after the apostrophe. It's always better to try to rewrite the sentence to avoid this.		It was James's pen. I borrowed the pen from James.

Apostrophes	Apostrophes are not used for plurals.	Machines not machine's ABCs not ABC's.
	They aren't used for years or decades either.	The 1980s or 80s not 80's. People in their 50s not 50's
Archives	Use lowercase a when referring to our archive. Use a capital A when referring to a specific archive.	The Kitson Archive (LAG).
	Use archive (singular) when you are talking about a specific archive.	This document is from the industrial archive.
	Use archives (plural) when you are talking about archives in general:	New finds from the archives.
Capitals	Most headings don't use capitals.	Buy your tickets here (not Buy Your Tickets Here)
	Don't use all capitals – it's really hard to read.	Nesyamun (not NESYAMUN)
	Use title case for exhibition titles / logos (capitals for each main word, but not for things like of and and).	Voices of Asia Our Cousin Florence Crime and Punishment
	Do capitalise proper nouns:  If you need to preface a place name with the, don't capitalise the.	Museum areas: Brodrick Hall (LCM), Drawing Room (LH), Miss Scott's Room (TN), Lyon's Gallery (LAG), Learning Space, Community Space  Titles: Visitor Assistants, Learning Facilitators, Leeds City Council, Curatorial team Kala Sangam will be performing in the Brodrick Hall.
	Don't capitalise (unless it's a proper noun, or name, or something)	archive, collection, council, email, museum, northeast (not north-east), northwest, online, police, southeast, southwest, toilets, volunteers, way out, website, worldwide

Ellipses (three dots)	Ellipses are used in quotes to indicate where words have been taken out. Use a space after, but not before.  On a Windows PC, you can create ellipses by pressing alt+ctrl+full stop, or (if Autocorrect is switched on in Word) tapping the full stop key three times.	Henry Ingram says about Temple Newsam House 'three law suits entailed upon me and an old house over my head Ye workmen say it must be immediately pulled down or it will come of itself and do more mischief.'
En dashes	An en dash is longer than a hyphen, and looks like this: – It is used to insert extra information into a sentence, in a similar way to brackets. Try to avoid them and rewrite the sentence to be more active.	The opening times are 10am-6pm.
	En dashes are also used to indicate a span of time or distance. When you use them like this, don't put a space on either side:	
	On a Windows PC, You can create an en dash by pressing Ctrl + dash at the top right-hand corner of your number pad.	
Exclamation marks	Try to avoid them – they should be used only when you would want the reader to shout.	
Full stops	Use one space after a full stop.	
Hyphens	Avoid hyphens, unless leaving them out would cause readers to 'stumble' on the words.  Don't hyphenate words over line breaks.	
Quotation marks	Use single quote marks.	'We're going in.'
	If the quote is the whole sentence, put the full stop inside the quotes.	'The Leeds Tiger used to be a rug.'
	Only use double quotes to indicate a quote within a quote. When quoting written speech, keep the style of the speaker (in terms of spelling, style, etc) even if it breaks the guidelines in this document.	'We are "bringing the House to life through stories"

## Frequently mixed up words that cause grammatical confusion

Affect and effect	Affect is a verb. Effect is a noun.	This will affect visitor numbers. It had an emotional effect on me.
Compliment and complement	If you compliment someone, you are expressing admiration for them, or praising them for something.  If one thing complements another, each of the two separate items function or look better because they are together.	The teacher complimented the Learning and Access Officer and Curator on the workshop.  The butterflies and the artwork really complement each other.
Enquiry and inquiry	Enquiry is to ask. Inquire is to make a more formal investigation (and is generally more American).  Use 'ask', 'question' or 'help' instead.	'You can ask for more information in the shop' rather than 'you can make an enquiry at the shop'.  Our Curators deal with thousands of questions every year.
Into	The Guardian style guide explains the difference between into and in to well:	One word if you go into a room. Two words in such sentences as: I called in to complain I listened in to their conversation I went in to see my friend.

It's and its	It's is short for it is. Its is possessive.	It's a lovely day for a walk. The carriage lost its wheel.
Less and fewer	Less means smaller in quantity. Fewer means smaller in number.	Visitors are spending less money than they did last month.  We have had fewer visitors than last month.
On to	Is two separate words.	
That and which	That is used to limit information.	Films that are shown on Mondays are very popular. (In other words, films are shown all week, but only the Monday films are popular.)
	Which is used to add information	Films, which are shown on Mondays, are very popular. (In other words, the films are popular, and are shown only on Mondays.)
There, their and they're	There indicates a direction. Their is possessive. They're is an abbreviation of they are	The toilets are over there. That's their choice.
Your and you're	You're is short for you are	Is that your umbrella? You're all that matters to me.

# Our preferred formats, terms and conventions (for consistency across the service)

Address format	Leeds Museum Discovery Centre Carlisle Road Leeds LS10 1LB  If you write the address over one or two lines, use commas: Leeds Museum Discovery Centre, Carlisle Road, Leeds, LS10 1LB
And	Wherever possible write 'and' out in full instead of using &.
Credits and thank yous	<ul> <li>There is a difference between credits and giving thanks. You may need to do both on the same panel.</li> <li>We credit community groups we have worked with on exhibitions and external curators (if it is part of their contract) on introductory or credit panels.</li> <li>We do not usually credit LMG staff in exhibitions and resources, unless it is relevant and substantially adds value to do so. In this case, the credit needs to be signed off by a member of the Senior Leadership Team.</li> <li>Articles and scholarly publications are credited to the author.</li> <li>Thank yous are for tenders, in kind supporters and Friends organisations.</li> </ul>
Bullet points	<ul> <li>Use bullet points for lists.</li> <li>For one sentence bullets, start with a lowercase word, and don't use full stops.</li> <li>If each point has more than one sentence, think about whether bullets points are the best way to present your information.</li> </ul>

Centuries	<ul> <li>Try to use 1800s, instead of 19th century.</li> <li>If you must use the century as a date, use numbers.         (Retribution' was painted in the 19th century.</li> <li>If you are using the century to describe something, write it out in full and use a hyphen. An example of eighteenth-century engineering.</li> <li>Use circa with caution, try 'about', or 'we know it's from about' instead. Avoid abbreviating to c. (Collections Online is an exception)</li> </ul>
Countries	<ul> <li>Britain and the UK mean the same thing – they are the short form of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.</li> <li>Either is fine. Britain possibly feels more heritage and is better for things such as exhibition labels; the UK feels more modern and is better for addresses.</li> <li>Avoid Great Britain as this refers only to England, Wales and Scotland.</li> </ul>
Dates	<ul> <li>Use day-month-year – 24 October 2011.</li> <li>Don't include Xth Xnd Xst on the day.</li> <li>For date ranges use an en dash (see 'En dashes') without a space either side 1 August – 22 August</li> <li>Avoid using the day. If absolutely necessary, use Monday not Mon.</li> <li>Use the full name of the month. If space is really tight, then shortened month names are a last resort: Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr, May, Jun, Jul, Aug, Sep (not Sept), Oct, Nov, Dec</li> <li>For historical dates, use circa with caution, try 'about', or 'we know it's from about' instead. Avoid abbreviating to c. (the exception to this will be when TMS records go online)</li> </ul>
Email addresses	your.name@leeds.gov.uk – no capitals.

Email signatures (Leeds City Council format)	Your Name Your Job Title Your Site Leeds Museums and Galleries Tel: 0113 xxx xxxx Mob: 07891 xxx xxx  Consider accessibility in your email signature. Use a sans serif font in point 11 or 12 (LCC computers are automatically set to Calibri, size 11) and a high contrast colour. Use a plain background. Advertise only one thing at once on your signature.
Fractions	<ul> <li>Write out fractions as words. Fractions presented as numbers shrinks the font size to be too small.</li> <li>Write how you would talk, so use hyphens for two word fractions, but 'and a' for others (two-thirds, two and a half)</li> </ul>
Latin names	<ul> <li>Use italics for Latin or taxonomic names. Use the common name first.</li> <li>Most of the time this information is unnecessary to a general audience.         Think about why you are using the taxonomic name. Does the public want or need to know? Does it add to your interpretation?     </li> </ul>

Measurements	<ul> <li>Use a space between the number and the unit of measurement – 3 kg</li> <li>Don't use full stops in units of measurement – cm rather than c.m.</li> <li>Use inch not "</li> <li>We usually use the metric system (rounded up or down). There are some exceptions: <ul> <li>Use miles for distances.</li> <li>Use imperial for historical measurements (e.g. track gauges for trains, costume and textiles).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Museum	<ul> <li>Use museum (lower case) if you have to. The museum will close at 5pm today.</li> <li>If possible, use we instead – it's much friendlier. We will be hosting a series of events to mark the occasion.</li> </ul>
Numbers	<ul> <li>Use words for one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight and nine.</li> <li>Use digits for 10, 11, 12 and the rest.</li> <li>In a sentence with both numbers and words, use all numbers.  This cinema could seat between 3 and 33 people.</li> <li>At the start of a sentence use words. Forty seven of these locomotives were built.  When writing thousands use a comma. 20,000, 100,000</li> <li>When writing millions use words. Three million</li> <li>Write percent out as one word (not per cent), or use %.</li> <li>For ranges of numbers use an en dash, or write it out. Between 15 and 20.</li> </ul>
Other languages	<ul> <li>Sometimes we have to use terminology from other languages. Explain to the reader what it means. Don't italicise the words. Trompe l'oeil is a way of painting that means to 'deceive the eye'.</li> <li>Use italics for Latin or taxonomic names. The tiger (Panthera tigris) is the largest cat species.</li> </ul>

Phone numbers	Use a space to separate the code from the number.
Powerpoint	Use the LMG branded powerpoint background for presentations.
Prices	For pounds and pence only use the pound sign. (£16 or £16.00 not £16.00p) A whole pound (£16 without the .00) is easier to read.
Time	<ul> <li>Use am and pm.</li> <li>Use a colon to separate hours and minutes (10:30am)</li> <li>Don't put a space between the last number and am or pm. (10am)</li> <li>Use an en dash for a time range – see En dashes. (10:30am–5pm)</li> </ul>
Vehicles	<ul> <li>Don't refer to a locomotive just as 'she' – either use the logical gender for the name of it.</li> <li>Use ordinary text, not italics. Names are not prefaced by 'the'.</li> <li>For locomotives use just the name or nickname if it has one: Jack not Hunslet 0-4-OWT</li> </ul>
Wars	<ul> <li>First World War, not World War One or WWI</li> <li>Second World War, not World War Two or WWII</li> <li>If you really need to abbreviate then use WW1 or WW2.</li> <li>wartime is all one word, and doesn't need capitals.</li> </ul>
Website	<ul> <li>Don't use www. (leeds.gov.uk/museumsandgalleries)</li> <li>When choosing a sans serif font for text that includes email or web references, check the @ sign prints correctly. Some fonts squash the @ sign.</li> </ul>

leeds.gov.uk/museumsandgalleries





