

find friendship

give support

get involved

get active



Trefoil Guild

**Our tone of voice
guidelines
version 1**

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Read me for
handy writing tips

Useful research to
support our tone of
voice

find friendship

give support

get involved

get active

Our tone of voice



Trefoil Guild

Why tone of voice matters

The words we use create an impression in people's minds. And they do this whether we consider them or not.

Think about the difference between 'Hello, it's a pleasure to meet you' and 'Hi, how's it going?'. You'd most likely think differently about the person speaking, depending on which of these they said. Just as you'd see an organisation that writes 'Register your interest in becoming a member' differently from one that says 'Join us'.

Whenever we communicate for Trefoil, we want to sound true to ourselves and our purpose.

It's just as important to do this when we communicate with each other internally, as it is when we speak to members and the outside world.

This means thinking about the tone and style of everything we write – from board of trustee agenda papers and PowerPoints to our PR publications and social media posts. Our words everywhere should consistently reflect who we are today.

These guidelines will help us to write consistently in our tone of voice and house style. And this in turn will help our messages hit home and our unique personality shine through.

Our tone of voice and accessibility

Our tone of voice helps us get our messages across clearly. It helps us make sure that every piece of Trefoil communication is easy to read and accessible to our wide range of audiences. And this helps us be more inclusive, modern and relevant.

We're an organisation that welcomes all. So, we use simple language and a clear structure to make our communications accessible for everyone, including people using assistive technology or with cognitive or reading problems.

Our tone of voice techniques and stylistic choices are based on readability research and you'll find evidence for our decisions sprinkled throughout these guidelines.

A note on reading age

We aim for a reading age of 9, which is the reported UK average and the same level as gov.uk.

Apps like Hemingway can help you check the reading age of your writing based on things like sentence length, vocabulary choice and passive voice.

See page 13 for more on avoiding passive language.

Sounding like Trefoil

Our aims include supporting Girlguiding and, as part of the Girlguiding family, we adopt the same tone of voice and style to keep consistency in our message.

Our tone of voice helps us put things across simply and clearly so that what we say is helpful and accessible to all. It encourages us to tune in to the needs of others and write and speak in a way that's helpful to our various audiences.

Our tone of voice also helps us bring our brand to life so that we create the right impressions of Trefoil, everywhere.

Our key messages

Find friendship, give support,
get active, and get involved.

We have 3 tone of voice characteristics that work together to help us reflect our organisation and key messages whenever we communicate:

Straight talking

We're refreshingly clear and direct.

Thoughtful

We're people-focused and empathetic.

Encouraging

We always sound helpful and positive.

Let's take a closer look at each.

Straight talking

We welcome all members aged 18 and over so our communications are always accessible: clear, direct and to the point. We say what we mean using everyday language – and this openness builds trust and credibility.

We're straight talking in all our communications – from social media to programme activities to trustee papers.

Why this matters

Using simple, direct language that's clear to our various audiences shows we're open to all. It also shows we have the courage to speak plainly. When our messages are easy to follow, everyone can quickly find the information they need.

Sounding straight talking is about being:

- Easy to follow
- Open and honest
- Refreshingly clear and simple

We don't take it too far. We never sound blunt, sloppy or too casual.

How to sound straight talking:

- Use everyday language
- Get to the point
- Keep sentences short
- Use more verbs than nouns

Straight talking

Use everyday language

We always want to sound approachable, and for readers to feel like we're talking directly to them. So we write like we'd speak when we're being friendly and helpful. This means using everyday words instead of formal language and jargon.

Instead of...	We say...
Inquire	Ask
Amend	Change
Assist	Help
Contact	Get in touch
Provide	Give

For more everyday alternatives, see this [glossary of plain English](#).

So instead of this...

Trefoil Guild acts like a branch of Girlguiding and its members agree to support the guiding ethos – including the pledge to help other people. Many members pass on their skills and knowledge to local guiding units, from helping Brownies to work towards a badge to preparing older girls for a camping adventure.

We'd write...

Trefoil is part of the Girlguiding family, and we aim to support them and help others by carrying the spirit of Girlguiding into our communities. We ask our members to agree to this when they join us. Many members support Girlguiding directly by assisting or leading units, and others give support in different ways.

Top tip

Struggling to find the right words? Ask yourself: what am I really trying to say? Think of how you'd say something to a friend – and write that down. This will give you the essence of what you're trying to communicate, which you can then edit until it's just right.

Straight talking

Get to the point

We don't beat around the bush. Whatever our message, we get right to it – and focus on what matters most to our readers. For example, if we have a change in the way we process subscriptions, we tell members this using the same message across The Trefoil magazine and our social media.

We also respect people's time by being concise. This gives our writing clarity and confidence – and helps our messages come through at a glance. We make every word count – if it's not adding anything to the message or the tone, delete it.

So instead of this...

If you are not sure how to proceed and need further advice on this, please contact your county chair or the Trefoil office who can advise on this.

We might say...

If you're unsure about next steps, ask your county team or the Trefoil staff for help.

Less is often more

Simplicity is the key to understanding. Girlguiding's 2021 tone of voice testing showed a unanimous preference for shorter, simpler communications. People said things like:

'Brevity is key - most of us do this on top of full-time jobs and families so we need the minimum amount of comms.' - Volunteer

'You need to get to the point in less words.' - Volunteer

'It needs to be easy to read on my phone.' - MP

Straight talking

Keep sentences short

Short, focused sentences will give your writing energy and clarity. Aim for no more than **15 to 20 words**. Try to stick to 1 idea per sentence, as this helps keep the meaning crystal clear. And put the most important information first.

Keep your paragraphs snappy, too: around **4 or 5 lines max**. Varying the length of your sentences can help give your writing pace and rhythm. And the occasional short sentence can add impact. Like this.

So instead of this...

The Trefoil is a member-led publication which means it's mostly full of stories, letter and photos that you send in to us. As you might expect, we receive far more than we can print, so our extra! Blog here showcases some of the additional stories and photos you have sent us. It will be updated throughout the year so don't forget to check back regularly and if you want to see your words and photos here you will need to submit them to us using this form.

We'd say...

The Trefoil is a compilation of stories, letters, and photos that you send in to us. We receive loads and can't always publish all of them so our extra! Blog showcases some of the additional submissions. It will be updated throughout the year. And if you want to see your words and snaps published, email them to us.

Did you know?

Research shows a clear link between sentence length and comprehension. We know, for example, that people understand more than 90% of a sentence with 14 words. At 43 words, the comprehension rate drops to less than 10%.

Straight talking

Use more verbs than nouns

Verbs (or 'doing words') inspire action – words like run, change and sign up. They have more energy than nouns like behaviour, consideration and analysis. And words like those often have verbs in them anyway: behave, consider, analyse. Your writing will sound more dynamic and confident if you go straight to the verb.

So instead of...

Our policies are supporting documents for members to refer to when they are looking for additional support or understanding when dealing with an issue or planning meetings.

We'd write...

Our policies support members to understand Trefoil, plan meetings, and solve problems.

Being straight talking when naming

A key part of making Trefoil feel open and accessible to all, and especially people new to our organisation, is talking about projects and initiatives in simple and descriptive language. This means instead of coming up with names that are hard to unpick, like TRIO and TOPAZ, we keep our project descriptions straightforward and clear.

So we might talk about our international opportunities, for example, or talk about welcoming new volunteers.

We reserve creative names for unique initiatives and events that we can specifically market.

Thoughtful

We always begin by thinking about who we're writing to. What do they already know and need to know? Where will they be reading our message and what mindset will they have? What do we want them to do, think or feel as a result? Then we plan and write communications that share the right information in accessible language, sounding natural and helpful.

This also means thinking about the best channels and formats to use to get our information across.

Why this matters

Taking the time to think about our readers helps us make sure our communications hit the spot, every time. And our focus on people helps us come across as warm and welcoming.

Sounding thoughtful is about being:

- Easy to follow
- Open and honest
- Refreshingly clear and simple

We take care to never come across as overly familiar, patronising or too wordy.

How to sound thoughtful:

- Put people first
- Acknowledge why things matter using warmth and empathy
- Help people find key information with good signposting

Thoughtful

Put people first

We put people front and centre in our sentences by using active language instead of passive.

Passive sentences avoid saying who's responsible for doing something, and can sound vague and evasive as a result.

Take this example: a toolkit has been developed...

The question is by who? It's usually much more helpful and human to start with the answer to this question. So in this case, we'd say: we've created a toolkit...

Always think about who the 'doer' is in a sentence and start with them. You'll naturally use a lot more words like 'you', 'we' and 'our', which will help you sound more direct and personal. And being clear about who's doing what helps us be more open and transparent.

So instead of...

In Trefoil Guild, members aged 18 and over make new friends, travel, explore, serve their communities, and help Guiding (and Scouting) thrive across the UK!

We'd say...

We welcome everyone aged 18 and over. Trefoil is a place for to find friendship, get involved and active, and give support to others. This support from our members helps Girlguiding and Scouts thrive.

Thoughtful

Acknowledge why things matter using warmth and empathy

We show our readers we understand them by acknowledging what they're likely to be thinking or feeling, where we can. But we're careful not to make assumptions – it's a fine balance.

We also focus on the impact of what we're talking about on our audience. For example, if we're explaining a change in finance processes to treasurers, we say how and why this is an improvement for them and their Trefoil.

Not only does this make it clear that we can see things from their point of view, it also helps us make sure we're writing in a way that's meaningful and appropriate to our audience.

So instead of this...

Trefoil Guild offers a wonderful opportunity to meet like-minded people to share your next adventure with – whatever that might be – whether you're involved in Girlguiding or not. But it's not all about the girls – there are plenty of opportunities for members to try something new, take on a new personal challenge and escape the daily routine. The best thing is that what you do is up to you!

We might say...

Offering opportunities is a key part of Trefoil. So when you meet with your Trefoil Guild you can find like-minded friends to share your adventures and challenges with. The great part is that you have the choice to get involved with what works best for you.

Thoughtful

Help people find key information with good signposting

Think up front about the essential things you want your reader to know. Then make these stand out by putting them in places people will easily see them: at the starts of sentences and paragraphs – and in titles, headings, links and bullet point lists.

If you're writing something longer and more complicated, it's also useful to 'layer' your information – moving from a summary of the key points through to more detail. This gives people the option to read to the level of detail they need. It also helps us keep our communications as accessible as possible for disabled people.

Instead of writing this...

The below list also contains a breakdown of the 2023 fees for your county and country or region, as submitted by the county and country or region officials, and the national amount. The FULL TOTAL to pay to The Trefoil Guild is included at the bottom of the list. It is the responsibility of the guild to make sure members subscriptions are collected in good time and paid online OR sent with attached Guild Bulk Subscription Payment Form in time for the deadline of 22 February 2023.

We'd write something like this...

In this email you can find:

- A list of members we're expecting to renew in 2023.
- A breakdown of the national, country or region, and county fees as confirmed by your local team.
- The full total to pay to Trefoil Guild at the end of the list.
- Details on how to pay and our postal address.
- When to pay by: 22 February.

Thoughtful

Help people find key information with good signposting

Accessible linking

Avoid using link phrases like here, click here and find out more, which give no information at all to people scanning the links or to people using screen readers.

Links need to be clear and meaningful, showing in a short phrase where they'll take people to. Not only does this help key info stand out, it makes links accessible.

Don't: Our latest updates on Coronavirus and Trefoil can be found here and should be checked regularly.

Do: Please stay on top of our updates on Covid and Trefoil.

Readers of all abilities scan read to find useful information – especially time-poor people, and even experts and academics. This is particularly true on screens. Studies have shown that people read on average 20% to 28% of a webpage and only 19% of email newsletters.

Encouraging

Put simply, we help people do things. We give support to each other, whatever our role in Trefoil. And we help create a space to find friendship and get involved. So our communications are helpful and purposeful – written with an outcome in mind.

Sounding encouraging means sounding like real people when we write – like a good friend who's with members all the way. And it means using energetic, positive language to encourage people.

Why this matters

To inspire people to do things, our language needs to have clarity and energy. We are a youth brand, and we want to sound like one.

Sounding encouraging is about being:

- **Positive**
- **Energetic**
- **Motivating**

We don't go too far and sound over the top or like we're trying too hard. And we avoid just adding lots of exclamation marks.

How to sound encouraging:

- **Imagine it's a conversation**
- **Be positive, where you can**
- **Show, don't just tell**
- **Be playful (when the time is right)**

Encouraging

Imagine it's a conversation

We can only encourage people if we connect with them – and thinking about our writing as a conversation will help us do this.

How might the other person feel about what you're writing? If they were sitting right in front of you, what would you say to encourage them? Write with this in mind.

Techniques for conversational writing:

- **Choose everyday words** (also part of being straight talking!)
- **Use contractions** (such as 'don't' instead of 'do not' or 'we'll' instead of 'we will') just like we do when we're talking. You can also start sentences with 'and' or 'but' if it helps the flow of what you're writing.
- **Ask the occasional question to get people thinking and inspire them:** 'What's your next adventure?' 'How will you rise to the challenge?' And sometimes bring in the answer, too: 'Not confident on a paddle board? Not a problem.'
- **Address people directly with 'you'** – and use people's names where you can. We're all in this together. Emails to members with KEY access, for example, shouldn't feel like they're coming from a taskmaster, but from a peer: 'We're getting in touch to see how you're getting on with KEY. Anything we can do to help? Just let us know.'

Encouraging

Be positive where you can

We put things positively rather than negatively where we can. We point out benefits and positive outcomes where they exist. We celebrate wins, even tiny ones. And we always try to suggest a way forward – using calls to action to add energy and inspire people to get going.

Not only does this show we can see things from people's point of view, but that there's a positive purpose to our communications.

This means instead of writing...

You won't be able to access KEY until you've completed your data protection and access training.

We'd say...

As soon as you've done your training you can start using KEY.

Top tip

The best way to see if your writing is in the Trefoil tone of voice is to read it out loud.

Does it sound natural as you speak it? Like something you'd actually say? If not, keep working on it.

Encouraging

Show don't tell

We always want to reflect and celebrate the fun, varied and inclusive experience of Trefoil.

A great way to do this is to paint a picture of what Trefoil is like – to use description and evocative language to make things specific and real for our audience.

So instead of talking about something in the abstract, we give examples, tell stories and bring in the real voices of our girls and volunteers.

Instead of this...

Being a Trefoil members is all about having the space to try new things. Through taking part in a range of different activities members challenge themselves and make new friends.

We might write...

We try new challenges and get involved in all sorts of exciting activities. We laugh all the way and encourage each other to keep on going, never mind which one of us capsizes the canoe or dances out of time.

Encouraging

Be playful (when the time is right)

We want to come across as real people when we communicate – authentic and likeable. This means sometimes showing the fun side of Trefoil in our writing.

When it feels right, we can be a bit playful – perhaps adding a casual phrase, a story, or even a little humour. Don't be afraid to have fun with your writing (as long as it's appropriate).

This helps us show the human side of Trefoil – and helps make our communications feel genuine and engaging.

For example...



Trefoil Guild UK

@TrefoilGuild • Nov 15

Life is more fun when you have adventures. What's the most adventurous thing you have ever done? [#GetInvolved](#) with Trefoil and you might just try something even more intrepid!

2 techniques for playful writing

Get creative

Try metaphors, similes, alliteration and repetition.

- Marshmallow moments by the fire. Sleepy smiles after a day well spent.
- We know your time's precious, so no tedious training here. Just essential learning to help you level up and get the most out of your role.

Bring in the unexpected

We can put a smile on people's faces by adding an original twist to a list: What can you expect on a Trefoil overseas holiday? Forest exploring, crafting workshops and pancake making on old bean tins.

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Our style guide



Trefoil Guild

Writing with style

Whenever we write, we need to be consistent and error-free. This shows people that we're professional and credible – and some people really notice the details and expect us to get them right. This guide will help you make sure you're always using the right style for Trefoil.

This style guide covers the specifics of our writing across all channels. As most of our communications are online, our style reflects best practice for readability on screens – putting accessibility at the heart of our stylistic decisions.

If you need to look something up that isn't included here, check the [Guardian/Observer style guide](#). This is our default guide for advice on how to handle things like punctuation, capitalisation, spelling and grammar.

Our house style

Abbreviations and acronyms

Try not to use internal abbreviations in external communications. Always think about whether people will understand them, and if there's a more natural way to say it.

If you have to use an acronym that people might not be familiar with, always spell it out the first time. Then put the abbreviation in brackets, like this:

We use a high level of security to protect your data. When you log in to your member account you may be asked to answer a memorable question, also known as two-factor authentication (2FA).

A note on plurals: to create a plural of an acronym, add an 's' to the end without an apostrophe, as in 'there are several PDFs'.

Usually, when you pronounce each letter of an acronym, it's written in all capitals, like HIV. When you say the acronym like a word it only takes an initial capital, like Aids.

Some Trefoil acronyms that are said like a word still appear in all capitals, like STARS or TOPAZ. Only use block capitals for acronyms like these – otherwise, avoid them. KEY, our database, should be treated as an acronym like this and written in block capitals.

A note on accessibility

Screen readers often struggle with how to read out abbreviations and acronyms – another good reason to keep them to a minimum.

Our house style

Capital letters

We capitalise each main word for:

- Hashtags (for readability): #GetActiveTrefoil
- The names of things (proper nouns)
 - Brands: Adidas, Twitter, Google
 - Places: London, Europe, Waddow Hall
 - People: Prince William, Beyoncé
 - Awards – but not the word award itself:
Voyage award, Thanks and Recognition award
 - Unique and marketable Trefoil events, initiatives and publications – here are the ones we capitalise:
 - The Trefoil
 - Trefoil Annual Meeting
 - Trefoil Walk 2023
 - Trefoil Gathering 2023

If you're creating a new event or initiative, please speak to the Trefoil office team about naming.

We capitalise the first word only of:

- The first word in any new line of text (in tables, lists, on badges, in email signatures, etc)
- Titles, headings, subheadings and online navigation elements like menu items and button labels

Why minimise capitals

Studies have shown that capital letters catch the eye and slow down reading in general. For some groups, such as people with visual impairments or dyslexia, capital letters can make it harder to recognise word shapes.

Our house style

Capital letters

We don't capitalise:

- Things in general: uniforms, insurance policy, training materials, volunteers, activity centres
- Job titles, volunteer roles, teams and committees, for example:
 - We'll be sending a free resource pack to all Trefoil county chairs.
 - Our national president is Della Salway.
 - Eileen Martin, our national chair, attends the annual meeting every year.
 - Contact the Trefoil office if you need more information.
 - Our finance and general purposes committee meets every quarter.
- Badges, schemes, topics, themes, or qualifications in running text (we capitalise the first word only if it's at the start of a line): STARS challenge includes the themes skills, together, action, roam, and self.
- The words we use to describe Trefoil areas, such as 'regions', 'counties', etc: our Bedfordshire county, our Tamworth Trefoil Guild
- Any word to make it feel more important
- The words in URLs are always lowercase: trefoilguild.co.uk/about-us

Please note: in running text, where the general description of something is the same as its 'official' name, we go with lower case for readability. For example, our code of conduct or the terms and conditions for our website.

If you need to check capitalisation for a particular **Girlguiding** or **Trefoil** term, go to our glossary.

Our house style

Conjunctions, contractions and dates

Conjunctions

There's nothing wrong with starting sentences with conjunctions like 'and', 'but' and 'or'. It's perfectly grammatically correct and is more common these days – in fact, it can be a useful way to add a bit of energy to your writing. But use them sparingly and make sure they're followed by complete sentences.

Contractions

Contractions shorten phrases by adding an apostrophe like 'it's' or 'isn't'. We use contractions to give our writing a more natural, human tone – words like 'I've', 'we've' and 'you'll'.

In speech, we sometimes avoid contracting 'not' for emphasis: I did not do that! So you might want to replicate this in writing. The trick is to read your text out loud to make sure it sounds natural and flows properly.

Dates

We use this format for dates: day, month then year, as in 12 January 2023. We don't use suffixes (12th, 20th, 1st) as these can cause spacing issues and can affect **readability**.

It's often helpful to say the day too – and you only need to specify the year when it's not obvious: Thursday 12 January.

If you're using dates in a table, it's fine to abbreviate the longer names of months (12 Jan 2023).

For decades, we talk about the 1990s or the '90s, never the 1990's, and make sure we're consistent.

Our house style

Email addresses, hashtags, headings and ie or eg

Email addresses

Write email addresses in lowercase. If you're writing an email address at the end of a sentence, it's fine to follow it with a full stop.

Hashtags

Initial capitals for each word in the hashtag:

#TrefoilAnnualMeeting

We use these in social channels like Twitter and Instagram. Avoid using hashtags in other places, as they're harder to read than normal text and have no real function beyond social media. The only exception is if the hashtag is part of the official name of something.

Headings

Only the first letter of the first word should be capitalised, unless it's a proper noun.

For example: How to use the Trefoil brand

ie and eg

Avoid using these abbreviations. They indicate Latin phrases, and it's much clearer to write out what they mean in plain English. They're also harder for screen readers to pick up.

Remember: ie means in other words, while eg means for example.

If you're short of space and have to use the abbreviations, use them without full stops.

Our house style

Money, numbers, percentages and phone numbers

Money

Use the £ symbol instead of writing out the word 'pounds'. And don't use decimals unless there are pence to include: £45 not £45.00

Numbers

We write all numbers as digits. **Research has shown** this is much better for readability especially on screens.

If it feels awkward to start a sentence with a number, try to reword it to avoid this. And if you're using 'one' in a phrase where the digit looks strange, write it as a word instead: 'she's one of a kind', for example.

When talking about ages, we hyphenate the compound: 90-year-olds.

Percentages

To help with readability, always use the symbol instead of spelling out the word: 50%, not 50 per cent.

Phone numbers

Break these after the area code, for example:

- 020 7834 6242
- 0151 668 0493
- 028 9042 6025 not 0289 042 6025 (Northern Ireland)

Break UK mobile numbers into groups of digits: 5 then 3 and 3: 07XXX XXX XXX.

Our house style

Prepositions, singular or plural, spelling, times and websites

Prepositions

It's fine to end sentences with words like 'of' or 'to' or 'from', just like you would when speaking. You'd say 'who should I speak to?' not 'to whom should I speak?'.

Singular/plural

Trefoil Guild and Girlguiding take a singular verb: Trefoil Guild is a place to get involved...

Spelling

We use British spelling not American. If in doubt, check the [Guardian/Observer online style guide](#) or the Concise Oxford English Dictionary.

Times

Write times like this: 9.30am, 10pm

Use the 12-hour clock (11pm) rather than the 24-hour clock (23.00).

Websites

We don't include the 'www' when writing website addresses: trefoilguild.co.uk.

This is no longer necessary, and people usually leave it out when speaking web addresses, plus not all web addresses include it.

Avoid giving links or breadcrumbs (such as Get involved > find a Trefoil > apply) in printed text and PDFs, as these can easily become outdated and impossible to follow. Instead, say 'look for <X> on our website'.

Punctuation

Ampersands (&)

Only use ampersands in brand names (Marks & Spencer). In normal sentences, spell out the word 'and' to help with readability.

Apostrophes

Apostrophes can be tricky. But they're important – getting this basic punctuation wrong looks unprofessional and can irritate people.

We use an apostrophe for 2 reasons:

1. To show that a letter or letters have been left out: don't forget, I'm here. See **contractions**.
2. To show possession: this month's publication. If the owner is plural, the apostrophe usually comes after the s. If the plural doesn't end in an s, you put the apostrophe before the s: children's.

So, the bees' knees is talking about more than 1 bee. And the bee's knees? Just the 1 bee.

There are 2 situations that can cause problems, so watch out for them:

1. Ordinary plurals don't need apostrophes. 'We sell apple's and pear's' is wrong.
2. It's or its? It's means it is or it has. Its means belonging to it, which is unusual because it shows possession but doesn't need an apostrophe: the company is confident about its future.

Punctuation

Brackets

Use these sparingly to hold 'by the way' information – too many can get in the way of readability. We use round brackets (like this), not square ones [like this].

If you're putting a whole sentence into brackets, put the full stop inside too. (This is a full sentence in brackets, so it has its full stop inside.)

If you're only putting part of a sentence inside the brackets, then you need to put the full stop outside (like this).

Colons

We use colons mainly to introduce lists. They can also be used in sentences to introduce a quotation or when the second part of the sentence is expanding on the first. But it's usually better to split ideas into shorter sentences.

Commas

Use commas in sentences where you'd pause if you were saying it out loud.

Dashes

These can be used between parts of sentences instead of commas or semicolons. They add a little more emphasis and can also be a useful way of breaking up long sentences – but be careful not to overuse them. Shorter sentences are usually more readable.

Exclamation marks

Use exclamation marks sparingly, as they can give your writing a slightly hysterical tone. We don't throw in exclamation marks as an easy way of sounding encouraging. Whenever you find yourself using one, always check how it reads without. Then only use it if you think it adds an important emphasis.

Punctuation

Forward slashes

It's best to avoid these – especially phrases like and/or, which can confuse readers.

Full stops

We use these at the ends of sentences, and that's it.

Hyphens

When referring to people by their age, we hyphenate the compound: 90-year-olds.

Sometimes 2 or more words join together as a description before a noun. It's best to hyphenate these where there's any chance of confusion:

- You need to make 3 monthly payments. (3 payments in a month)
- You need to make 3-monthly payments. (1 payment every 3 months)

Tip: when the first word ends in -ly, you don't hyphenate the compound: specially designed uniforms.

There's usually no need to hyphenate the words when they come after the noun:

- We're meeting face to face next week – but we're having a face-to-face meeting
- That document is up to date – but an up-to-date document

Avoid semicolons. These are used to join closely related sentences – it's almost always better to split them into shorter sentences instead.

Use single quotation marks. For quotes within quotes use double quotation marks.

The county chair told the committee, 'Our international adviser told me "there are lots of international opportunities for our members"'.

Look and layout

Bold

Use bold sparingly to emphasise words, numbers and dates. It's a great way of making something stand out at first glance, so bold text is ideal for key information such as headlines.

Don't overuse bold, as it can make things harder to read. And never use it for an entire paragraph – when everything is in bold, nothing stands out.

We use bold for headings in non-digital communications. For anything that's going to be read online (like our website, online PDFs and Word documents), it's best to apply our heading styles (H1, H2, etc) for consistency and accessibility.

Bold italic

Bold italic makes text hard to read, so stick with bold alone.

Headings and sub headings

Don't use end punctuation, except when you need a question mark. Don't use a full stop at the end, and think long and hard about using exclamation marks.

Use a capital letter only at the start and lower case after that.

Don't: What Members Do in Trefoil Meetings

Do: What members do in Trefoil meetings

Look and layout

Italics

Avoid using italics – they make writing look cluttered and affect readability, especially on screens.

Links

We avoid using phrases like ‘click here’ and ‘read more’ when linking. Instead we make our links clearer and more meaningful so that they stand out and indicate where they lead to.

Don’t: If you have any questions about undertaking starting your Voyage award please visit our FAQs on our website here.

Do: You’ll find more information in our Voyage award FAQs.

Lists or bullets

Introduce lists with a colon, and use bullet points like this:

- Item 1
- Item 2

Start each item in the list with a capital letter.

If the items in the list are full sentences, put a full stop at the end, just as you would on a normal sentence. For phrases, there’s no need for a full stop at the end. And each list should be one or the other, not a mixture of both.

Or, to put it another way:

- If the items in the list are full sentences, put a full stop at the end, just as you would on a normal sentence.
- For phrases, there’s no need for a full stop at the end.
- And each list should be one or the other, not a mixture of the both.

Start your lists off with bullets. Only use numbers if you’re listing a sequence or starting your list off with a number phrase (such as ‘10 great reasons to join Trefoil’).

Look and layout

Margins

Always align margins to the left – never justify, as the uneven spacing this creates affects readability.

Spaces

Use a single space after a full stop. Like this. Double spaces after full stops are related to how manual typewriters worked and are bad for readability – plus they look old-fashioned.

Use a single line between paragraphs, like here.

Inclusive language

We want everyone to feel welcome and included in Trefoil. So, we avoid language that excludes or makes assumptions about anyone.

Everyone's different and has their own language preferences. It's always best to ask or listen to how the person describes themselves, and use that language where you can.

Here's some advice on how to be as inclusive as possible when communicating for Trefoil:

- Try and use the correct terms, but don't tiptoe around something. Instead of 'we want our imagery to show diversity', say 'we want our imagery to show racially diverse people'.
- When describing a person or people with a specific characteristic, ask yourself: is it essential to the story? If it is, use the language they use where you can.
- Be specific when talking about a person or community. Name ethnic groups instead of using broad terms like BAME.
 - For example, say 'the Bengali community' rather than 'the Asian community'.
 - If you're talking about the experiences of people who aren't white, 'people of colour' is more common around the world.
- Avoid the term 'minority group' as a blanket term for underrepresented groups, as underrepresented doesn't always mean a minority. Instead use marginalised groups or underrepresented groups.

Inclusive language

- Don't use an adjective as a noun when describing someone.
 - For example, instead of 'Muslims', say 'Muslim members'.
- Bear in mind that not all families have mothers and fathers. Use 'parents and carers' if referring to this group in general.
- Unless we're talking about children, avoid age descriptors like young, old, or elderly as they can reinforce negative stereotypes.
 - If you need to mention age, be precise and give an age range such as 'people who are 60 and over'.
- When talking about disability avoid slang expressions, phrases that suggest victimhood, and negative terms.
 - For example, instead of 'confined to a wheelchair', say 'wheelchair-user' and instead of 'they're dyslexic', say 'they have dyslexia'.
 - Be careful about unintentionally derogatory words too, such as 'go crazy with the kids' and 'a mental weekend away'. If in doubt, leave it out.
- People can assume all disabled people are 'heroic' or 'inspiring' for simply existing with a disability. This can feel patronising to some disabled people. For others, this can be a good way to recognise the extra effort they have to make in a society that isn't built for them. So think about what's appropriate for what you're writing. How would the person you're writing about want to be described?

Inclusive language

- If you're writing about someone's sexual orientation, use the terms they use. If you need to be more inclusive, say LGBTQ+.
 - If you're not sure what pronoun to use when referring to someone, it's best to ask them. We sometimes use 'they' as a singular pronoun.
- Using gender inclusive language, especially when referring to a group of Trefoil members whose genders haven't been specified. Trefoil is open to everyone, and many Trefoil Guilds include members of more than one gender. Use language like 'hello Trefoil friends' or 'to all Trefoil members' rather than 'hello ladies'. In documents, avoid using 'he/she' and instead use 'they'. It improves readability and is inclusive.

For more about inclusive language

- [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/talking-about-disability) guidance for talking about disability
- The [inclusive content section](#) of the NHS digital service manual

find friendship

give support

get involved

get active

Glossary of common terms



Trefoil Guild

Glossary of common Girlguiding and Trefoil terms

Girlguiding is full of language that's unique to guiding. We need to be mindful that this is our own very special jargon, and it can sometimes feel exclusive. This glossary will help you write consistently for and about us. **Many of these terms refer to Trefoil too, and at the end of the list there is a dedicated list of Trefoil terms.**

Our style	Comments
1st response	Not First Response (our first aid training scheme)
5 essentials	Number 5 then lower case for our 5 guiding principles
A	
activities	Use in relation to the programme only – when referring to Future Girl, say 'initiatives' or 'opportunities' instead
activity centres Girlguiding activity centres	The words activity centres are always lower case. Use for internal audiences or after first use of Girlguiding activity centres. We no longer say TACs (training and activity centres). When naming activity centres, capitalise the name (Foxlease, Waddow Hall)
activity theme	Lower case
adventurers	Lower case for the Future Girl topic

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Glossary of common Girlguiding and Trefoil terms

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adviser	Not advisor Lower case for role
advocate panel advocates (people)	Lower case for both
Anglia	Initial capitals for place names
annual subscription	Lower case
area	Lower case (a broad term for our districts, regions, counties, countries and divisions)
a safe space	Lower case – if this might be confusing in a sentence, use a more straight talking word like training or resources Write levels in lower case: level 1, level 2, level 3
assistant leader	Lower case for the role
award	Lower case when referring to awards in general Capitalise the names of specific awards, but not the word award itself: Voyage award

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B	
badge	Lower case when talking about badges in general and when describing specific badges: active response badge
badge secretary	Lower case for the role
BAME	Avoid this term – say people of colour instead
barrier breakers	Lower case for Future Girl topic
be well	Lower case for the programme theme
Beaver Scouts Beavers	Initial capitals (Scouts 6–8–year-olds)
Big Gig	Both words capitalised for the name of this event
Blackland Farm	Capitalised as it's the name of a place. Never just Blackland
board of trustees the board	Lower case
branch associations branches	Lower case
Bronze award (Girlguiding) bronze Voyage award	First word only capitalised capitalise Voyage only

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Brownie Brownies	Initial capital when referring to the 7-10-year-old section
Brownie buddy Brownie helper Brownie holiday	Initial capital on Brownie only
Brownie unit	Not Brownie pack
C	
chief commissioner	Lower case
chief guide	Lower case
climbing and abseiling scheme	Lower case
code of conduct	Lower case in running text First word only capitalised at the start of a line (on the title page, for example)
commissioner	Lower case
cooperate	Not co-operate
coordinator	Not co-ordinator
county, country	Lower case, even when referring to the Girlguiding area
Covid	Not Covid-19 or COVID-19 or coronavirus

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Cub Scout Cubs	Initial capitals (Scouts 8–10-year-olds)
D	
DBS check disclosure check	Either use the abbreviation (stands for Disclosure and Barring Service check) or the simple term Only the abbreviation uses capitals
disabled girl or person	Instead of girl or person (living) with a disability
discover, grow	Lower case
district	Lower case when referring to Girlguiding area
district assistant district commissioner	Lower case
division	Lower case
doing our best	Lower case – if this might be confusing in a sentence, use a more straight talking word like standards or checklist
Duke of Edinburgh's Award	Name of award is capitalised in line with DofE style After the first mention, can be abbreviated to DofE

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E

ecard elearning email enewsletter	Without hyphens
emergency file	Lower case
Explorer Scouts Explorers	Initial capitals (Scouts 14-18-year-olds)
express myself	Lower case for the programme theme

F

fair trade	Lower case and 2 words when describing the general movement
Fairtrade	1 word with initial capital to refer to the official trademarked name
first aid first aider	Lower case
founders	Lower case Used to refer to our founders, Robert Baden- Powell and Agnes Baden- Powell
Foxlease	Initial capital for the name of the place

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Free Being Me	Each word capitalised for this module from the peer education programme
fundraising	Lower case
Future Girl Future Girl Acts	Initial capitals
G	
Girlguiding Cymru (Wales)	Initial capitals for place names
Girlguiding Inspire or Inspire (if the context is clear)	Initial capitals for our community for 18-30-year-olds
Girlguiding UK	Use only in a global context
Girlguiding Scotland	Initial capitals for place names
Girlguiding qualified trainer	Lower case to refer to someone who delivers training and has their trainer qualification
Girlguiding shop	We can also refer to this as our volunteer shop. Don't use the term trading to refer to the shop
Girlguiding Ulster	Initial capitals for place names
Girlguiding's strategy or our strategy	Lower case on strategy We no longer say strategy 2020+

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Girls' Attitudes Survey	Initial capitals Don't use the abbreviation GAS externally
Glenbrook	Initial capital for the name of the place. Our newest activity centre
GO	Capitals for the abbreviation of our membership system (Guiding Organiser)
GOLD Go for GOLD	Acronym for Guiding Overseas Linked with Development. The selection event for GOLD
going away with licence or scheme	Lower case
Gold award gold Voyage award	First word only capitalised capitalise Voyage only
good turn	Lower case
government	Lower case
Guide Guides	Initial capital for our 10-14-year-old section. Use only in relation to the members of this section – when referring to everyone say 'all girls in Girlguiding'
The Guide Association	The legal/financial entity – only use when necessary: for example, 'please make cheques out to The Guide Association'

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Guide camp permit	First word only capitalised
Guide law	Only Guide capitalised
guiding	Guiding is what we do (verb) Lower case, except when it's in a sentence with Scouting (Guiding and Scouting) or a global context (World Guiding)
guiding magazine	Lower case
girls	How we refer to our members in the sections – no need to say 'girls and young women'
H	
have adventures	Lower case for the programme theme
I	
ICANDO	All capitals for our activity centre in London
innovate	Lower case for skills builder topic – see skills builder for more info
interest badges	Lower case: fitness interest badge, book lover interest badge

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International Scout and Guide Fellowship (ISGF)	Spell out with initial caps at first mention then use acronym ISGF
International Women's Day	Initial capitals and apostrophe before the 's'
internet	Lower case
J	
jamboree	Lower case, unless referring to the name of a specific one; Jamboree Denmark
joint unit	Lower case
K	
know myself	Lower case for the programme theme
L	
large bus permit	Lower case
LaSER	Abbreviation of London and South East England
leader	Lower case for role
leader in training	Lower case
leadership qualification leadership team	Lower case
lend a hand	Lower case

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LGBTQ+	How we refer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans plus community – this is in line with Stonewall's guidance
Little Giggle	Capitals for the event name
local authority	Lower case
London and South East England	Initial capitals for place names Often abbreviated to LaSER
Long Service award	Name of award capitalised (but not the word award)
M	
Magic and Mayhem	Capitals for the event name
Making guiding happen	Monthly enewsletter with information for volunteers First word only capitalised
marketing team	Teams are lowercase
members	Lower case Avoid using externally: say volunteers and girls instead
member area (on the website)	Lower case

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member organisation (of WAGGGS)	Lower case
mentor	Lower case for the role
mentoring	Lower case
Midlands	Initial capitals for place names.
N	
no one	No hyphen, 2 words
North East England North West England	Initial capitals for place names
O	
online design centre	Lower case
online shop	Instead of web shop
order code	Lower case Girlguiding order code, not Trading Service order code Put code before price when describing items
P	
parent and carer	Lower case – not parent or guardian.

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patrol patrol sleepover	Lower case
patron	Lower case
Pax Lodge	Capitalise place name
peer education	Lower case
peer educator	Lower case for role
peer group residential events	Lower case
planet protectors	Lower case for Future Girl topic
programme	Lower case
promise promise badge promise sign	Lower case
promise celebration	Lower case. Not enrolment
Q	
the Queen	Always capitalised We can initially say Her Majesty The Queen, then HM the Queen or the Queen on other mentions
Queen's Guide award	Name of award capitalised (but not the word award)

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R

Rainbow Rainbows	Initial capital for our 4-7-year-old section.
Rainbow helper	Lower case for helper
Ranger Rangers	Initial capital for our 14-18-year-old section.
region	Always lower case
residential	Lower case
respect makers	Lower case for Future Girl topic

S

Scouting Scouts The Scout Association	Always capitalised In sentences that refer to both, guiding always comes first and is upper case: Guiding and Scouting
Scout Network	The Scout section for 18 to 25-year-olds
Scouts	The Scout section for 10 ½ to 14-year-olds
second	Lower case when referring to the deputy leader of a patrol or six
section	Lower case

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self believers	Lower case for Future Girl topic
Silver award (Girlguiding) silver Voyage award	First word only capitalised capitalise Voyage only
Silver Fish award	Name of award capitalised (but not the word award)
six	Lower case for this Brownie grouping
sixer	Lower case when referring to the leader of a patrol or six
skills builders	Lower case. Skills builder names are also lower case: eg first aid skills builder, innovate skills builder Write topic name + skills builder + stage number: innovate skills builder stage 2
skills for my future	Lower case for the programme theme
Sparkle and Ice	Initial capitals for the name of the event
social services	Lower case unless referring to a specific body: Hertfordshire Social Services
South West England	Initial capitals on place

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survival skills	Lower case for the unit meeting activity topic
T	
take action	Lower case for the programme theme
task and finish group	Lower case
Theme award	First word only capitalised
they	Use as a gender-neutral third-person pronoun
trainer	Lower case for role
trainer qualification	Lower case
trans (adj)	Lower case, preferable to transgender. Don't say transexual
trading team	Lower case
travelling abroad training programme	Lower case
trefoil	Lower case
Trefoil Guild	Initial capitals for the Name and when referring to the shortened version Trefoil
trustee	Lower case

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tweet	Lower case (for verb and noun)
Twisted Tech	Initial capitals for the name of the event
U	
UK	England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Avoid saying 'this country' or 'this nation' when you mean the UK. Don't say 'the capital' or 'the national anthem' without specifying which one
unit	Lower case
unit helper	Lower case for role. We don't say 'occasional helper'
unit leader	Lower case for role We don't say 'guider'
unit meeting	Lower case
unit meeting activities	Lower case when referring to the activities in general Lower case for topic names: survival skills
unit meeting activity cards	Lower case
V	
volunteer	Lower case

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tweet	Lower case (for verb and noun)
Twisted Tech	Initial capitals for the name of the event
U	
UK	England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Avoid saying 'this country' or 'this nation' when you mean the UK. Don't say 'the capital' or 'the national anthem' without specifying which one
unit	Lower case
unit helper	Lower case for role. We don't say 'occasional helper'
unit leader	Lower case for role We don't say 'guider'
unit meeting	Lower case
unit meeting activities	Lower case when referring to the activities in general Lower case for topic names: survival skills
unit meeting activity cards	Lower case
V	
volunteer	Lower case

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Numbers	
75th Birthday	Celebrated in 2018
80th Anniversary	Celebrated in 2023
80th Anniversary challenge 80th Anniversary challenge badge	Only capitalise Anniversary unless describing an event. 'We are celebrating our 80th anniversary with our 80th Anniversary challenge badge.'
A	
adviser	Not advisor, and lower case.
B	
board of trustees	Lower case: 'We have 12 members on the board of trustees.'
bronze Voyage award	Capitalise Voyage only. Levels are lower case: 'My bronze Voyage award'.
C	
chair	Lower case. Not chairman - chair is an inclusive term.
country	Lower case. Never use c/r or C/R. If using with region, always spell out in full: country or region.
county	Lower case.
county chair, county secretary, county treasurer	Lower case. 'Our county chair also holds a role at region level as the region secretary.'

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F	
Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	Capitalise as titles of external platforms.
find friendship	One of our key messages, lower case.
from acorns to giant oaks	Our theme for the 80th Anniversary. Lower case and put in single quotation marks.
G	
Gathering 2023	Precede with Trefoil where possible. Capitalise the event name and specify the year.
get active	A key message. Lower case.
get involved	A key message. Lower case.
give support	A key message. Lower case.
gold Voyage award	Capitalise Voyage only. Levels are lower case.
guild	Lower case unless part of 'Trefoil Guild': 'Durham county has a new guild.'
guild chair, guild secretary, guild treasurer	Lower case. 'In my Trefoil, we have a guild chair, and a guild secretary, and are voting on our next guild treasurer.'
I	
international adviser	Lower case.
K	
KEY	Our database. All capitals.

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member account	Your details on the Trefoil website – lower case and member is singular.
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member area	Parts of the website only visible to members.
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member record or membership record	Lower case and member is singular.
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N

national	Lower case, even as part of a title – national chair of Trefoil Guild, or, 'Trefoil has national events like the Trefoil Walk 2023'.
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national chair	Lower case, like chief guide. 'Eileen Martin is our current national chair of Trefoil.'
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national president	Lower case, like chief guide.
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P

programme and development adviser	Lower case. 'Jan is our region programme and development adviser'.
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public relations adviser	lower case except for when abbreviated to PR.
--------------------------	---

R

region	Lower case. Never use c/r or C/R. If using with region, always spell out in full: country or region.
--------	--

role titles	Lower case.
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S

secretary	Lower case.
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S

silver Voyage award	Capitalise Voyage only. Levels are lower case.
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STARS challenge	Capitalise the acronym. The themes are: skills, together, action, roam, self.
-----------------	---

T

Thanks and Recognition brooch and certificate	Capitalise the award name only not the items.
---	---

The Trefoil	Use SemiBold to emphasise the title. Avoid referring to it as 'the magazine'.
--------------------	---

titles	do not use unless using Dr or Reverend as appropriate.
--------	--

TOPAZ	Acronym for Trefoil overseas partnership: adventure with zest. Use full title with first acronym use.
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treasurer	lower case.
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Trefoil	Pronounced TREH-foil. Use preferably over 'guild'. For example, 'What do you do with your Trefoil?'
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Trefoil Guild	Don't use 'the' unless it's an official document then use The Trefoil Guild. Never abbreviate to TG or The Guild.
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Trefoil Guild Anglia	Our region in Anglia.
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Trefoil Guild Annual Meeting	Do not use AGM or annual general meeting. Capitalise Annual Meeting as it is the name of the event. Include the year where relevant.
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T	
Trefoil Guild in Foreign Countries	or TGIFC. Trefoil Guild (singular) in Foreign Countries.
Trefoil Guild London and South East England	Our region in London and south east England. Commonly abbreviated to LaSER.
Trefoil Guild member	or Trefoil members. Member is lower case.
Trefoil Guild Midlands	Our region in the midlands.
Trefoil Guild North East England	Our region in north east England.
Trefoil Guild North West England	Our region in north west England.
Trefoil Guild Scotland	Trefoil Guild in Scotland.
Trefoil Guild Silver Brooch	Capitalise each as the award name.
Trefoil Guild South West England	Our region in south west England.
Trefoil Guild Ulster	Trefoil Guild in Ulster.
Trefoil Guild Wales	Trefoil Guild in Wales.
Trefoil office or office team	Not national office. All lower case except Trefoil.
Trefoil Walk	Capitalise as the name of the event. Use the year where relevant.
Trefoil website	Lower case for website. Don't include the 'www' when writing website addresses.

Glossary of common Trefoil terms

A
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T	
TRIO	Acronym for Trefoil international opportunities. Use full title with first acronym use.
V	
Voyage award	Capitalise Voyage only not award.
Voyage award coordinator	Lower case except for Voyage.

Writing for Trefoil checklist

- ☒ Does the writing sound straight talking, thoughtful and encouraging?
- ☒ Is the language everyday and active, with plenty of you, we, our, your, etc?
- ☒ Does it sound conversational, like a real (likeable) person talking?
- ☒ Are sentences and paragraphs focused, concise and easy to digest?
- ☒ Are things phrased positively, where possible?
- ☒ Have you focused on what matters (and why) to your audience?
- ☒ Do the main points stand out?
- ☒ Where possible, have you used descriptive language, examples and real voices to paint a picture?
- ☒ Are the details (like capital letters and punctuation) in line with our house style?
- ☒ Is your language inclusive?

find friendship

give support

get involved

get active

Our brand is in **your** **hands**

If you have any questions about our tone of voice and writing style or would like to add something to our glossary, please get in touch with trefoilguild@girlguiding.org.uk



Trefoil Guild