



Style guide

How to write like Sainsbury's

Consistent writing

This section works alongside our tone of voice guidelines. Making sure that on top of sounding consistent, our writing looks consistent too. It covers how to write dates, website URLs, numbers and much more.

Abbreviations and acronyms

Always write the full version first, unless you're sure your reader will know what you're talking about. So it's fine to say "M&S" (rather than "Marks & Spencer"), because everyone knows what M&S is. But if there's any chance your audience might not know what something stands for, write it out in full and put the acronym after.

Then you can just use the shortened version later. Like this: "Our Chief Executive today called on the food industry to include multiple traffic lights (MTLs) and reference intake (RIs) amounts on all packaging. RIs are becoming more important as..."

But when you're using acronyms and abbreviations, don't include full stops. So it's not "B.B.C."

However, when writing 'Helping everyone eat better' as an acronym (internal communication purposes), we should use full stops between each letter: H.E.E.B"

If you're only mentioning an organisation once in a piece of writing, you don't need to include the short version as well.

Sainsbury's
Helping everyone eat better



Ampersands vs and

Don't use an ampersand to replace 'and' in normal sentences. So don't say things like "Get the best of Nectar on your smartphone & tablet".

The only exception to this is if it's a company name or makes up part of a short, snappy headline, such as "Fish & chips", where "and" would hinder the creative execution.

Brackets

Use brackets to include information that adds to or clarifies what you've already said. For example, "Online deliveries cost between £2.99 and £5.95 (unless you're spending less than £40)."

Remember not to include any essential information in brackets – if someone's skimming they might assume they don't need to read it. And always use round ones (), not square ones [].

Punctuation with brackets

If the text in brackets is part of longer sentence, the full stop (or any other punctuation) goes on the outside (like this).

If the whole sentence is inside the brackets, the full stop goes on the inside too. (Like this.)
Easy as pie.



Bullet point formatting

If your bullet points have an introductory sentence that ends with a colon (like this one), then:

- Start each point with an uppercase letter
- Amend to reflect uppercase rule
- Finish the last one with a full stop.

If you're doing something like a contents list or a PowerPoint presentation using bullets, you might want to skip the full stops all together.

Whatever you decide, make sure you use the same style consistently throughout.

Capital letters

We always use sentence case at Sainsbury's. And if you're not sure, stick to lower case (unless it's the name of something or someone). But use upper case for proper nouns (like London or Mike).

In headlines or adverts, only capitalise the first letter e.g. "Same price, different values".

Don't use caps to emphasise words like FREE or NEW. Your words should speak for themselves without the need for shouty capital letters. And they CAN BE QUITE HARD TO READ.

The only exception to this is for some instore cases (as we have Behavioural Economic data to show when capital letters can be more effective). But there should never be more than two words capitalised. Speak to the Instore team to find out more.

Job titles should be upper case (the Chief Executive or HR Manager), as should team names (the Marketing team).

ABCD

Dates and times

Dates

Style dates as 2 March or 27 December. Make sure that you don't use superscript. There are instances where we may use the "st"/"th" suffixes in our comms, but these should be addressed on a case by case basis.

If you're writing ranges of dates, use a dash with a space either side. So 4 – 7 April (you only need to say the month once).

Same goes for a range of years. So say 2001 – 2021

If you need to shorten a date, for example if space is tight, use the style DD/MM/YY.

Times

We use the 24-hour clock. So 17.30, not 5.30pm.
And make sure you use a full stop and not a colon.



Ellipses

We use an ellipsis to show something's missing from a sentence or for dramatic effect.

Like this: The customer said "Please pass our thanks on to the team ... we think they're brilliant" (to show some of what the customer said is missing). Or this: "Our new range will have you cooking up a storm. Just don't get stuck with the washing up..." Remember to put a space after an ellipsis if it's in the middle of a sentence. But if it's at the end of a sentence you don't need a space (or an extra full stop). And don't use too many of them – they can make your words look a bit messy and hard to read.

Numbers

Use words for one to nine and figures from 10 onwards.

The only exceptions to this are if you're talking about steps (e.g. "go to step 2"), measurements (4cm) or page numbers (page 2), or any other situation where writing it out wouldn't make sense (like in an address or in a table). You should also write the number out in full if it's at the start of a sentence (e.g. "Twenty thousand people said they preferred our own brand").

Don't mix numbers and figures – so don't say "Only nine out of 12 people liked it". Pick one, depending on the numbers. If they're both small, write them

out in words ("Only nine out of twelve people liked it"). But if one of them is a huge number, it might look better to use figures ("Only 9 out of 15,000 people liked it").

Put commas in any numbers over 999, i.e. 1,500 or 1,200,000.

Always use the full word for million and billion, e.g. "Over 10 million people took part", unless you're talking about money. In that case use '£2m' or '£5bn'. You don't need a space after the figure.



Percentages

%

If you're using percentages in a table, use the symbol %.
Elsewhere, write out the word per cent (with a space). Always use figures, even if it's less than 10, e.g. 6 per cent.

Tricky words

Affect or effect

Affect is the verb and effect is the noun. When you affect something you have an effect on it.

Et cetera

Etc. is a Latin abbreviation that means "and other similar things". You can use it to avoid giving a complete list. But remember to include the full stop after.

Every day/everyday

Every day is two words, unless it's an adjective. We help people spend less every day, by lowering prices on everyday products.

Example

E.g. is a Latin abbreviation and a quick way to mention an example. Use e.g. to introduce one or more examples and remember to include the two full stops.

Instore

When writing for Sainsbury's, we always say instore as one word.

License or licence

Licence is the noun and license is the verb. So if you're licensed to drive you must have a driving licence.

Web and email addresses

If you're writing a web address, don't include the 'http://' or the 'www'. So it's "go to [sainsburys.co.uk](https://www.sainsburys.co.uk)" (not "go to www.sainsburys.co.uk").

Don't italicise email or web addresses. And remember that the word 'email' doesn't have a hyphen in it.

When it comes to extensions, we use a capital letter to show the start of each word, just so it's a bit easier to read. So, we'd write "[sainsburys.co.uk/DoubleUp](https://www.sainsburys.co.uk/DoubleUp)" (not [doubleup](https://www.sainsburys.co.uk/doubleup)). That's the same for single word extensions too, "[/Nectar](https://www.sainsburys.co.uk/Nectar)" (not [/nectar](https://www.sainsburys.co.uk/nectar)).

For any questions, please speak to a member of the Brand Expression team
brand.clinic@sainsburys.co.uk

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