Save money on proofreading by being consistent

Advice for writers who do not have to adhere to a published or organisational style guide

If a proofreader has to spend time sorting out a lot of consistency issues in your document, the work will take longer and cost you more.

Here is a list of some **key textual elements of non-fiction material** where inconsistency often occurs, especially if there is more than one author or a document has been pulled together from several sources.

If you decide not to use a proofreader, making decisions about and checking these elements yourself will result in a cleaner-looking document and increased trust in your material.

Spelling -is endings (organisation, recognise) or -iz endings (organization, recognize)	Both styles are found in UK English but choose one or the other. If you choose -iz endings, remember that some words are always -is (for example, 'advertise', 'exercise').
Abbreviations e.g, i.e. and etc. or eg, ie and etc	Note that 'eg.' and 'ie.' (with just the one full point) are not standard. Don't use them. You may decide to use 'for example' and 'that is' in running text, and keep abbreviations for lists and captions, where space is tight.
Numbers When do you spell out numbers (two, twenty) and when do you use figures (2, 20) in running text? One option is to use words for numbers up to and including nine, and figures for 10 and above. Another is to use words for numbers up to and including ninety-nine.	What style makes sense for your writing? For example, technical material tends to use more figures than spelled-out numbers. You might also prefer figures for website text. In some contexts, a mix of words and figures can aid clarity: • The development consists of eight 3-bed detached houses.
Dates Two areas where there is often inconsistency: The use (or not) of 'st', 'rd' and 'th': 1st May or 1 May 3rd June or 3 June Showing year ranges, for example: 2018–19 or 2018–2019	You may decide to use one style (20 July 2015) in running text and another (20.07.15) in tables or captions. Note the use of an en dash (–) rather than a hyphen (-) to indicate a range. This also applies to page numbers (for example, pp 45–56). Find the en dash in Word: Insert > Symbol > More Symbols > Special Characters

Quotation marks Choose either single or double quotation marks as your primary style. Note the use of **nested quotes**. If your style choice is single quotation marks, use doubles within singles for quotations within quotations: • One screenwriter said, 'It's frustrating to be told "Your ideas are unoriginal" when all you see on TV is police dramas.' If your style choice is double quotation marks, use singles within doubles for quotations within quotations: • One screenwriter said, "It's frustrating to be told 'Your ideas are unoriginal' when all you see on TV is police dramas."	Some writers like to use double quotes for quoted material and speech: • The commissioner told journalists: "I welcome the review's outcome and look forward to implementing the new policy." and single quotes to draw attention to a word as a word: • The teachers avoided the words 'test' and 'examination' with their students. If it's your preference to mix singles and doubles in this way, it's especially important to be consistent to avoid confusing your readers.
Hyphenation of compound nouns There are widely observed conventions regarding hyphenation (too big a topic to cover here). But for some compound nouns, it's a matter of personal preference, for example: 'decision maker' or 'decision-maker' 'policy making' or 'policy-making'	Where a dictionary doesn't state a preference, make your decision and be consistent. Use Word's navigation window (CTRL + F) to check for inconsistencies in compound words by typing the first word of each compound in the search box.
Capitalisation in headings Two common style choices: Upper case for words that would be capitalised in a sentence, as in: • Evaluation of student placement opportunities in Europe and the US or Upper case for all **significant words**, as in: • Evaluation of Student Placement Opportunities in Europe and the US As headings are so evident, inconsistency will be especially jarring to your readers, even if they don't realise why. So choose your style for each heading level and stick to it.	Some examples: **Significant words** are generally considered to be the **first and last words** plus **nouns** (office, wedding, Spain), **pronouns** (you, she, it), **verbs** (go, contains, deny), **adjectives** (blue, nasty, wooden) and **adverbs** (slowly, very, there). You might also decide to capitalise **prepositions** with four or more letters (with, from, between) and **conjunctions** with four or more letters (because, unless, whether). A short word can be significant. If you are using the second style choice, remember to capitalise 'is' and 'are' because they are verbs. And 'its' is a pronoun, so would also be capitalised. A good online dictionary like Lexico will tell you what category a particular word belongs to.

This list is not exhaustive. Depending on the nature of your text, it may also be useful to consider the consistency of times of day, lists, captions for diagrams and tables, displayed quotations and capitalisation of specialist terms. **Record your decisions under headings in a table or list** so you can refer to them when writing your next document.