Styleguide

KT-EQUAL is all about communicating. So it's important that we communicate as clearly, directly and professionally as we possibly can – especially when we share information with the 'real world'. This guide helps to spell out what that actually means.

This guide provides the following resources for KT-EQUAL colleagues:

- brand guidelines

- advice on accessibility

- advice on transforming academic writing into writing for a general audience

This guide refers purely to **general external communications**. There probably wouldn't be any harm in taking a few of its recommendations on board when you write internal or academic documents too, but that's up to you. Besides, many academic publications such as journals have their own styleguides, which will obviously take precedence over this one if you want a reasonable chance of being published!

By its nature, a guide like this is going to sound prescriptive – at the end of the day it really is just a big long list of rules! So if you're the kind of person whose hackles rise when you read this kind of thing, then please bear in mind that many of the 'rules' in here are really intended as guidelines and advice. They are things you probably ought to try and do, all else being equal.

Having said that, there are some hard-and-fast rules too, mostly in the area of accessibility. This is an area where we have legal obligations. These obligations are clearly marked throughout this guide, and if you fail to stick to them in external publications, you're breaking the law. If in doubt, follow the third golden rule below and take advice.

1. Three golden rules

1 **Be clear.** If you do nothing else, make sure that what you're communicating is direct and unambiguous. Pretty much all the other niceties discussed in this styleguide are supposed to support this rule – but if you find a situation where following them would make your writing unclear, don't follow them! Ambiguity is too high a price to pay for pedantic adherence to rules – even, occasionally, the basic rules of English grammar.

2 **Know your audience.** The possible audiences for KT-EQUAL communications are very varied. They include academics, journalists, healthcare professionals and older and disabled people. Some of our communications are aimed at all of these, while others are intended for just some. Each audience has a different level of background knowledge and expects a different style of communication. So put yourself in the audience's shoes and be prepared to modify your presentation accordingly.

3 **If in doubt, check!** It's human nature: people are not terribly reliable judges of their own prose. Once you've stared at the same sentence for more than a minute or two, it starts to lose all semblance of sense and your chances of judging whether it's any good become pretty much zero. (Linguists call this phenomenon 'scanting out'.) Equally, people who work with a particular bit of jargon every day often become oblivious to the fact that it **is** jargon. Luckily, avoiding these pitfalls is easy: just ask a colleague, take a straw poll around the office, or run your document past someone who knows nothing about it. Or email it to someone who's paid to do this kind of thing – like me (toby@40k.org.uk). Don't be shy about getting other people's views – after all, you can always ignore their feedback if you don't like it!

2. The KT-EQUAL brand

When we're talking about communications style, the way we describe our organisation itself is a good place to start. Unfortunately, we're lumbered with a rather cryptic acronym: the name KT-EQUAL means nothing to anyone who doesn't already know what we're about. Other organisations have faced the same difficulty in the past, and they've come up with two solutions:

- Change the name to something more meaningful. For instance, NAMH became Mind.

- Adopt a tagline which is always used alongside the name. For instance, RNIB: supporting blind and partially-sighted people.

Changing our name isn't really an option, but we do already have a tagline: 'Exchanging knowledge, extending quality life'. The fact that this tagline is part of our logotype is helpful, because it means we don't need to worry about reiterating it: everywhere people see our logo, they already get the tagline too. By the way, notice that it's 'quality life', not 'quality *of* life' – this makes sense if you think about it.

Here are some things to bear in mind:

- KT-EQUAL is an acronym. (Well, technically it's a combination of an acronym and an initialism, but let's not go there.) That means it always goes in capitals: it's not KT-Equal, KT-equal, or anything else you can care to invent. If you can be bothered, then it ought strictly to be printed in small caps (KT-EQUAL) rather than sentence caps (KT-EQUAL), but that's a nicety so don't worry about it too much.

- The hyphen in the middle is just that – a hyphen, not a space or an em-dash or a star or a colon (yep, I've seen all four). Ideally, it should be the kind of hyphen that doesn't break across lines: that is, you should never see KT-EQUAL split like that. In Microsoft Word, you can insert a non-breaking hyphen by pressing CTRL+SHIFT+– on Windows or ⌘⇧– on Mac.

- Although it's an acronym, you don't ever need to spell out what KT-EQUAL stands for. Like 'Asda' or 'NATO', it stands alone, regardless of its etymology. This is an exception to the general rules about acronyms discussed later.

Rules for using the KT-EQUAL logo

- Always include our logo prominently on KT-EQUAL documents. The design of your document will determine where it goes, but if in doubt, the first page is a good place. For longer documents like

magazines, the back page is an option if the design is such that it would look funny on the front page.

- On KT-EQUAL websites, include the logo above the fold (i.e. in the top half of each webpage) on every page. Don't relegate it to a footer, and don't include it on the front page only.

- Never stretch, squash or otherwise distort the logo. Use the original graphic in its original proportions.

- Never remove any bits of the logo. For instance, don't chop off the tagline. It sounds obvious, but you'd be surprised.

- Don't try to recreate the logo from scratch – that's pretty much guaranteed to look silly. Always use the original graphic.

- Make sure that you have a suitable graphic for the size of your document. If you're making an enormous poster, don't just grab a low-resolution graphic from the web and blow it up. If you need a high-resolution version or a vector (scalable) file, contact me (toby@40k.org.uk) and I'll be happy to oblige.

- The background of the logo is white, not transparent. So please don't slap it on top of random-coloured backgrounds, or – worse still – on changing gradients or across images. One exception: there is an inverted (white) version of the logo which you can place on top of a solid, dark background colour, usually KT-EQUAL turquoise. To get hold of this, contact me (toby@40k.org.uk).

- In a similar vein, don't place the logo too close to other design elements. Allow a bit of space (designers call it an 'exclusion zone') around the outside. A good rule of thumb is that the width of the exclusion zone should be about the width of the letter L at the end of 'EQUAL').

Use of the logo by other organisations

The KT-EQUAL logo belongs to us and it represents us. More than anything else, it carries our brand. For that reason, if we allow some external organisations to use it, we need to be careful that they use it only in certain conditions and with certain quality controls in place to make sure they don't mess it up. This isn't something you need to worry about, though, so if an external organisation asks you if they can use our logo, please pass the request along to me (toby@40k.org.uk).

3. Political correctness

Much KT-EQUAL research involves concepts for which there are many different possible descriptive terms, with the potential for offending people if we use the wrong ones. Hence, the question of political correctness rears its head.

This is a tricky one. Like health and safety, political correctness gets a lot of bad press, which is unfortunate considering that its main aim is an entirely respectable one: to avoid offending people. But it's rarely that straightforward. The problems are:

- what counts as 'offensive' is subjective, and it also changes over time

- political correctness was once described as 'the enemy of style' because in trying to to be politically correct, people can be driven to construct more and more awkward circumlocutions, making sentences long and undecipherable

- the more unusual the politically-correct phrase, the more its unnaturalness draws the reader's attention to it, thus having the opposite effect to that which was intended

- at its worst, a politically correct phrase ends up actually failing to communicate what the writer intended

There's clearly a balance to be struck here between, on the one hand, being sensitive to the views of the people you're referring to, and on the other hand, maintaining the first golden rule of communication, which is to be clear.

Happily, there is an optimal solution: we use the terms that are used by the people who are being described. Naturally, this makes sure that the terms we use aren't going to cause offence. But it also tends to keep the terms concise, practical and direct, because people generally don't choose to lumber themselves with long, unwieldy or ambiguous descriptors.

What follows is specific advice and guidance for common terms related to KT-EQUAL's work, based on advice from Scope, Disability Now, Age Concern and the RNIB (which has rewritten the name behind its acronym, by the way, so it's now the Royal National Institute for Blind People).

Appropriate	Not appropriate
disabled	crippled, handicapped, invalid
disabled people, people with disabilities	the disabled, differently able, less able
has [impairment]	suffers from, afflicted by, victim of [impairment]
non-disabled	able-bodied, healthy, normal

older people	old people, the old, ageing people, senior people
has learning difficulties	mentally handicapped, retarded, backward, has a learning disability
wheelchair user	in a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound, confined to a wheelchair
deaf people, hard-of-hearing people	the deaf
blind people, partially sighted people, visually impaired people	the blind
mental health problems, mental ill health	mentally ill, insane, split personality

4. Text styles

Given KT-EQUAL's target audiences, it's particularly important that our publications are accessible to everyone, including to visually impaired people. For that reason, many of the guidelines in this section are taken from the recommendations of the Royal National Institute for Blind People. A few are taken from the Disability Discrimination Act, which has legal force for public organisations such as KT-EQUAL, or from the regulations implementing it. So tread carefully in this section – there is a lot less flexibility than in other areas.

Font

Arial is the font used throughout our printed documents. Verdana is the font generally used on the web for technical reasons. These two fonts have several advantages:

- They're commonly available on both Windows and Macs, which makes them ideal for communications that might be viewed on both systems, such as web pages and e-mails.

- They're designed to be clear and easy to read for visually impaired people and people with dyslexia.

Size

Printed normally, 11pt Arial has an x-height of about 2mm. (X-height is the typographical measurement of a font's height – surprisingly enough, it refers to the height of the letter x.) This may seem rather large, but in fact it's the smallest size recommended for readability by people who are visually impaired. The printed version of this guide uses 11pt Arial.

For long, in-depth documents, detailed lists or academic texts, it may be appropriate to use a slightly smaller size. Also, maintaining a decent font size is more important for printed documents than electronic ones, because in the latter case the reader can control the size of the text, enlarging it to suit.

There are some other situations in which you may choose to use a font size smaller than 11pt. These include:

- long strings which only make sense if they fit onto one line, such as web addresses and examples of code

- common, non-content elements on each page, such as repeated headers and footers

Emphasis

The clearest way to emphasise a word or phrase is to make it bold. Italics are OK, but can cause difficulties for visually impaired readers. If you are going to use italics, then make sure it's in a font like

Arial where the italic face is *just a slanted version of the plain face*, and not a serif font where the italic face can be *completely different*.

Repeat after me: Underlining is evil. Underlining is ugly. Underlining is difficult for people with visual impairments. Underlining is best avoided for headings and should never <u>ever</u> be used for emphasis.

Block capitals

A few words in capitals are OK in repeated page elements, but long strings of them reduce reading speed and they can cause problems for visually impaired people. Use sentence case (capital at start, lower case for the rest) instead.

Ornate and 'handwritten' fonts

Over-ornate fonts cause difficulties for dyslexic people. They also make it difficult for the text to be machine-read, a technology often used by visually impaired people, and they usually look dreadful.

If you must use a font in a specific situation to simulate handwriting, choose something simple and widely available, perhaps Comic Sans. It might be overused to the point of cliché, but it is particularly clear, especially for dyslexic people.

Never, ever write a long string of capitals in an ornate font. You don't have to be visually impaired to find that hard to read.

Colour contrast

In theory, deep blue on bright yellow is the optimum colour scheme if all you're interested in is good visual contrast, but it looks hideous. Black or dark grey on white is just fine. White on black also works well if the text is bold enough, though it can be a bit heavy on the print toner.

Avoid light grey on white. In fact, avoid any arrangement where your text is a different shade of the same colour as its background (for instance, dark green on light green).

More on colours later.

Alignment

Use left-aligned text with a ragged right margin. Fully justified text alters the spaces between words, which can cause difficulties for people who are visually impaired.

If you have more than one column of text side by side, leave plenty of space between them (the 'gutter width'). Left aligning helps with this too. If spacing is tight, add a light vertical line to separate the columns. Unintentionally comedy effects can ensue if columns are fully justified and too close together.

Common page elements

Keep page numbers, headers and footers in exactly the same place on each page, to aid navigation.

Once upon a time, it was fashionable to omit the page number on the first page of each new chapter or section. This was bizarre, because the reader was more likely to be looking for those pages by number than for any other page. Don't do it.

5. House style

House style is often thought of as part of grammar, but it's not. Grammar is normative – it's defined by the rules of the English language, and there's a 'right' and a 'wrong' way to do things (so the theory goes). House style, by contrast, is arbitrary – its rules are chosen and adopted for internal consistency, not because they reflect the one 'correct' way to do things.

When it comes to grammar, all we really need to say is 'Get it right!' – remembering of course that this should be subordinate to the golden rule about clarity. But when it comes to house style,

Number

Singular nouns take singular verbs:

☑ KT-EQUAL is a national network of researchers

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This seems incredibly, patronisingly obvious. But you'd be amazed at the number of times you see things like:

☒ The university are focusing on medical research

☒ The council are trying to cut costs

☒ The team want to try a new approach

…all of which are technically wrong, because 'university', 'council' and 'team' are singular nouns. The key thing to remember here is that a noun can be grammatically singular even if it's an obviously plural institution like a university or a team. Yes, there are many people in a team, but we're only talking about one team in total, so it takes a singular verb.

While we're at it, be careful to avoid situations where you might have to make an awkward switch from singular to plural:

☒ **awkward:** KT-EQUAL welcomes [singular] all its members and we love [plural] them all equally.

☑ **better:** At KT-EQUAL, we welcome all our members and we love them all equally.

6. Abbreviations

Go easy on abbreviations in non-technical writing. If they can comfortably be avoided, avoid them.

For instance, after referring to 'the Chest, Heart and Stroke Association' at the start of your document, consider subsequently calling it 'the association' rather than 'the CHSA'. This makes for a smoother reading experience – the reader doesn't have to keep checking back to remember what it means. (It wouldn't work if you referred to more than one 'association' in the course of the document, for obvious reasons.)

Spelling out abbreviations

If you need to use an abbreviation repeatedly, spell it out the first time you use it, then use it consistently after that:

- The Medical Research Council (MRC) yesterday published…

But don't fall into the trap of spelling out an abbreviation and then never using it again. There's no point. Just drop the abbreviation and use the full phrase.

Also, use your common sense. Few things look sillier than spelling out very common abbreviations for no good reason.

☒ According to a report by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), humans share 98% of their deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) with chimps.

That might be appropriate if you're writing for a foreign audience or in a very formal publication, but otherwise it's pretty daft.

Acronyms

Finally, don't put full stops or spaces between the letters of acronyms and initialisms:

☑ GMC

☒ G.M.C.

☒ G M C

(Think about it: would you write 'K.T.-E.Qua.L.'?)

7. Documents in alternative formats

The law requires us to make documents available in alternative formats on request. These might include physical large-print, image-free or audio recorded formats, but in many cases supplying text in an accessible electronic format meets the user's requirements because then they can manipulate it in whatever way suits them best.

It's also good practice, but not legally obligatory, to include a statement on printed documents indicating that other formats are available. And – obviously – print that statement in large print.