*Sharing solutions for
better regional policies*

Interreg Europe website – content style guide

All editors in charge of producing and publishing content for the Interreg Europe website should follow the guidelines laid out in this document.

Voice and tone – key principles

Write using clear, plain language. Use the tips below to help you write in a way that is easy for your audience to understand and remember.

Sentence length

- Use an average sentence length of 15 – 20 words (never go longer than 30).

- Mix sentence length – short sentences can be very effective.

- Say only one thing per sentence. When in doubt, use a full-stop.

Vocabulary

- Use everyday words that you would use at home – vocabulary that your grandparents, neighbours, and friends would understand

- Avoid jargon and acronyms whenever possible!

Tone

- Use a conversational tone rather than an academic or overly formal one.

- This does not mean you should use slang or dialect – your writing should still be professional and correct – but your tone should engage your reader and not put them to sleep.

- Use first and second personal pronouns to refer to your organisation and reader (we, us, and you).

Structure

- Put the most important fact at the beginning of your text so that readers can find it easily – don't bury it in the middle.

- Use bullet points rather than long paragraphs.

Content

- Think like a journalist. Make sure you answer the 5Ws: Who? What? When? Where? Why?

- Use active sentences, not passive ones.

E.g.

Correct, active: The European Commission published the document in January.

Incorrect, passive: The document was published in January by the European Commission.

Writing for the web

Chunking Helps Content Processing

- Divide information into clearly distinct groups of related content (called 'chunking') – this will help users process, understand, and remember it better
- Avoid walls of text, which can appear intimidating or time-consuming
- Simply chunking your text isn't enough — you also need to support scanning by making it easy to quickly identify the main points of the chunks.
  You can do this by including: headings and subheadings, highlighted keywords (bold, italic, etc.), bulleted or numbered lists, a short summary paragraph for longer sections of text.

"Learn More" Links

Learn More or *Read More* as standalone link labels create uncertainty for users and are bad for accessibility. Use descriptive labels instead of standalone *Learn More* text, your copy will benefit in several ways:

- Links will be more accessible.
- Links will be more enticing to users and potentially more persuasive.
- Users will feel more confident as they click from page to page.
- More keywords on the page will help search-engine optimization.
- Meaningful links will stand alone and help users who are scanning the page.

Content Usability

On the average web-page visit, users read only 28% of the words[1]. There's so enormously much information available on the web that people usually scan instead of read. The key point is to grab users quickly, and get them interested before they decide to leave.

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[1] https://www.nngroup.com/articles/how-little-do-users-read/

- Write for how users read on websites: clear headlines, descriptive sub-headings, scannable layout.
- Focus on information of interest to users, not on the things you want to promote.
- Communicate immediately at the top of the page that your content is indeed interesting and useful to users.

Related content principle

Links that follow up on the user's current interest encourage site exploration and reduce bounce rates. With the proper invitation, people will stay longer on your site.

- End articles with links to related content. Keep the conversation going by providing additional insight when the audience is most receptive.
  E.g.: All news and events pages can be completed with 'related news/ events' sections. In addition, make use of the right column of the pages and personalise CTAs (Call To Action) or buttons.
- Choose relevant related links and don't use more than 7

Featured image

Articles with images are more likely to be shared and clicked in social media. Content with images is much more visually prominent in social streams. Images also make your message more memorable, thanks to the pictorial superiority effect[2]. Interreg Europe's communication strategy seeks to capture the life behind the projects and so we focus on what is inside the projects: the people, the benefits, the positive feedback, the actual impact as main focus points for digital communication.[3] We encourage you to apply this in your selection of images for web communication.

- Avoid publishing an article without an image.
- Comply with copyright rules! The internet is not a free self-service; in most cases, photos that are 'free to use' still require you to mention the source.

Videos

- The combination of movement and sound make video the most compelling format for content. Adding video to the top of a post is one of the best ways to get visitors to stay.
- Embedding videos to posts. By default, when copy-pasting the code from YouTube to your website, the option "Show suggested videos when the video finishes" is selected. Make sure to unclick it. If not, YouTube might suggest videos that are completely unrelated.

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[2] http://brainrules.blogspot.fr/2009/12/worth-thousand-words.html
[3] Interreg Europe digital strategy (2015) p.6-7

Word, PDF or HTML

- HTML has various advantages compared to PDF when it comes to websites: easily measured (traffic analysis), easily updated and shared. Moreover, it ensures interactivity and search engine optimisation.
- If you are uploading documents, please use pdf which is downloadable, easy to print and relatively secure. PowerPoint presentations need to be converted to pdf before uploading. Don't upload Word or Excel (or open office equivalent) documents to the Interreg Europe website, unless strictly necessary.
- Pay special attention to not upload infected files to the website.

Font size, bullets & more

- Title – Heading 1 (H1)
- Sub-title – Heading 2 (H2)
- Use square bullet points.
- In a numbered list, use number followed by bracket. E.g.: 1)
- Use left-aligned text. Left-aligned text is easier to read than justified text, which in turn is easier to read than centre- or right-aligned text.

Interreg Europe style guide

Introduction

The Interreg Europe style guide is designed to be provide guidance on writing and formatting documents or text by Interreg Europe staff or on their behalf. It is part of the programme's branding, to ensure coherent and consistent presentation across all programme communications. It is not intended for external use.

If you have any queries about using this guide, or doubts about the terms employed, please contact:

Petra Polaskova

Communication and Contact Points Coordinator

p.polaskova@interregeurope.eu / +33 328 144 118

Abbreviations, acronyms, contractions

Abbreviations – as a general rule, do not abbreviate in official documents or external communication. Internally, Interreg Europe can be abbreviated to IR-E (not IE, IRE) but never in external communication.

Acronyms – Spell out an acronym the first time it is used with the short version in brackets e.g. massive open online course (MOOC).

If the abbreviation or acronym is universally well-known, there is no need to spell it out e.g. NATO, PDF

Contractions:

ampersands (&)

Ampersands should only be used if they are part of official titles or names. Otherwise, spell out 'and'. E.g. Johnson & Johnson; Research and innovation; Environment and resource efficiency

measurements

When discussing large numbers in text, it is fine to use k/m/bn as shorter ways of spelling out 1,000/1,000,000/1,000,000,000 (or writing out 'one thousand'/'one million'/'one billion'), as long as you are consistent throughout the document. For multiple millions/billions you can use a mixture of words and numbers (e.g. 7 million, 8bn); again, ensure you are consistent throughout.

Capitalisation

Capital letters – are used in very specific cases, but there are always exceptions. Our tendency is to avoid using capital letters, remaining consistent but retaining clarity.

- Job titles get capital letters, but not jobs or job descriptions e.g. E. Siweris, Programme Director but E. Siweris, director of the programme; (see Names and titles for more)
- Names of programme bodies use lower case e.g. monitoring committee, certifying authority, managing authority, first level controller, project partner, joint secretariat, lead partner except for the following : Partner States, European Commission
- Programme documents are also lower case e.g. programme manual, subsidy contract, progress report….except for Regulation (EC), Directive (EC), European Commission Communication on …
- Document titles use sentence case (first word capitalised), not title case (each word in title capitalised)

Numbers

When writing numbers in sentences, 0-9 should be spelt out in words, figures are used from 10 onwards. E.g. the programme has two priorities; there are four topics; there are 450 good practices in the database

This also applies to sequences, e.g. first, second, third, 63rd (not 1st, 2nd call etc.).

If a sentence includes a mixture of numbers above and below ten, use figures for easier comparison by the reader, e.g. Project A has 10 partners, while project B has 4.

Euros

EUR in front of the figure+ comma to indicate thousands and dots before cents

E.g. EUR 925; EUR 1,000; EUR 1,000,000.50

NB: the sign € should be avoided because it can cause technical problems in some countries or when converting documents into PDF for example.

Dates

Always put the date before the month - XX Month XXXX. Never precede the date with 'the'.

E.g. The call closes on 15 January 2009 (note we do not use st/th/rd for dates – 15 not 15th)

Times

In principle we use the 24-hour clock, but 12-hour clock is also acceptable especially if addressing mainly UK. Make sure use is consistent throughout the text – do not use both together. The 12-hour clock has a full stop between hours and minutes, and uses am/pm to indicate morning or afternoon. The 24-hour clock uses a colon between hours and minutes, and omits am/pm.

E.g. the event starts at 10am and ends at 2.30pm

The event runs from 9:00 until 18:00.

Closing date for applications is noon on 14 April.

Punctuation

General approach

Try to use as little as possible, without losing clarity or meaning.

Apostrophe

's indicates possession – Erwin's photo; Nuala's computer; plural nouns that already end in s just take ' – the winners' circle; if the name already ends in s, consider rearranging if the pronunciation would be too difficult – Nicolas's book OR the book belonging to Nicolas.

There is no need to indicate possession of inanimate things – project's website should be project website

It's is a contraction of 'it is'. No apostrophe is used in **its** when it means 'belonging to' – the project sent its progress report, and it's complete.

Bullet points

Interreg Europe style templates use square bullet points

Don't add punctuation to lists of items

Further reading:

- Programme manual
- Cooperation programme
- Style guide

If the bullet points form a complete sentence with the preceding text, add a full stop to the end of the last item

You can find further information on project implementation in:

- the programme manual
- the cooperation programme
- the style guide.

If each point is a sentence in its own right, add a semicolon (;) at the end of each point, and a full stop after the last one.

The total budget for the programme is EUR 359 million:

- EUR 322.4 million is available to co-finance interregional cooperation projects implemented by EU partners. Partners from Norway and Switzerland will be co-financed by national funds from their respective countries;
- EUR 15.3 million is allocated to finance activities carried out by the policy learning platforms; and
- EUR 21.3 million for technical assistance.

Comma

There is no comma required before the second-last item in a list, unless required to prevent confusion.

E.g. Pilot actions need to demonstrate their relevance, interregionality and additionality.

E.g. Interreg Europe supports projects in the themes of research and innovation, SME competitiveness, environment and resource efficiency, and low-carbon economy.

Use of protected space

Use "protected space" [SHIFT + CTRL + SPACE] whenever it is relevant so that dates or numbers (for example) are not cut between two lines, when you arrive at the end of a line,

E.g.

- between the currency and the amount: EUR°14.
- the day and the month in the date: 15°January°2009

This way, even if something is added in the line, the date or number will not be cut and it will automatically go to the following line.

Names and titles

In correspondence, use the first name of the recipient: "Dear John", unless for a particular reason, you feel the need to address the person more formally with his/ her last name (Dear Mr Smith). In that case," Ms" should be used for women (rather than Miss or Mrs) if you do not know whether Miss or Mrs has to be used.

References

To refer to an article of a European Regulation, Directive, of the subsidy contract, etc., use the following format: "As stated in **Article 3(2)(a) of Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006,…"**

If you want to refer to the programme manual, the following format has to be used: section 1.2 of the programme manual.

Highlighting/ emphasising text

Bold

Use bold sparingly in a text to make part of your text stand out. Punctuation that follows the bold text should not be in bold

Underline

Underline should be avoided to emphasise text as this suggests hyperlinks.

Word use and spelling

In general, the programme follows EC style guidelines, and Inter-institutional style guide for country codes and abbreviations: http://publications.europa.eu/code/en/en-000300.htm

The European Court of Auditors publication on *Misused English words and expressions in EU publications* is also very useful reference:

http://ec.europa.eu/translation/english/guidelines/documents/misused_english_terminology_eu_publications_en.pdf

Click on a letter to go directly to that section:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

A

Among or between – between is not only limited to two parties; it is used when there is a reciprocal relationship eg treaties between European countries; among is used for undifferentiated items eg it was difficult to choose among all the applications.

Annex is a verb; annexe is a noun – I will annex the document and its annexe to this email

B

C

Compare with/to – if you are making a comparison, use 'with' e.g. compared with previous calls; compare to means liken to and should be used specifically if likening someone or something to someone or something else, e.g. he compared the speaker to Barack Obama; the XX project doesn't add anything compared to the YY project.

D

Decision-making/decision-maker

E

F

Feedback – not feed-back

Foresee – prediction or suggested future; it is not a synonym of 'planned'; generally could be replaced with 'forecast/forecasted' e.g. *The lower spending rate could not be forecasted because….*

G

H

I

Important – means has higher priority; not a synonym for 'big' e.g. The spending gap is still **significant**. NOT *The spending gap is still important.*

In case – not to be used in place of 'if' e.g. If you have any questions NOT *In case of questions*

Interest – is not plural when referring to money earned on deposited funds e.g. Interest accrued on national co-financing

Interreg – spelt as a word with initial letter capitalised, not in full caps. Interreg Europe spelt as two words, first letter caps. If necessary, ***and only internally***, can be abbreviated to IR-E (see 'Abbreviation')

Intervention – should be applied to 'intervention logic' and 'categories of intervention' but that's it; Projects and policy learning platforms are not 'types of intervention' as applied in INTERREG IVC.

-ise – suffix –ise should always be used instead of –ize (capitalise, organise)

J

K

L

M

N

O

Online - not on-line

P

Policymaker, not policy-maker or policy maker

Q

R

Responsible – should not be used in front of 'person' e.g. the responsible person for financial questions. It is the person responsible for financial questions, or the person **in charge of** financial questions.

S

T

U

V

W

X

Y

Z

To be complemented by Guardian and Observer style guide : https://www.theguardian.com/guardian-observer-style-guide-a

Documentation and further reading:

1. Communication toolkit from A to Z
2. Guardian and Observer style guide
3. Content & usability: Writing for the web
4. Writing for the web articles, Nielsen Norman Group
5. Web Content Checklist: 21 Ways to Publish Better Content