

# **STYLE GUIDE**

# **For writers, editors and consultants**

**V8 2022**

# Five rules for effective writing

## **1** Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.

Many such phrases - toe the line, ride roughshod over, stand shoulder to shoulder with, play into the hands of, an axe to grind, Achilles' heel, swan song - come to mind quickly and feel comforting and melodic, which is precisely why they should be avoided. Common phrases have become so comfortable that they create no emotional response. Take the time to invent fresh, powerful images.

## **2** Never use a long word where a short one will do.

Long words do not make you sound intelligent. In some cases, they might even make you sound pretentious and arrogant. They are also less likely to be understood and are more awkward to read. When William Faulkner criticised Ernest Hemingway for his limited word choice, he replied: "Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words? He thinks I don't know the ten-dollar words. I know them all right. But there are older and simpler and better words, and those are the ones I use."

## **3** If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.

As Ezra Pound observed: "Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree." Any words that do not contribute meaning to a passage dilute its power. Less is always better. Always.

## **4** Never use the passive where you can use the active.

The active tense conveys the message directly. "The biography was written by the actor (passive)" reads less easily than "the actor wrote the biography (active)".

## **5** Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or jargon if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

This is tricky because much published writing is technical in nature, but it should still be as accessible as possible to the average reader. If your audience is highly specialised this is a judgment call. You don't want to include unnecessary explanation, but you do want to help people understand what you're writing about. After all, you want your ideas to spread, not remain cloistered on a dusty academic shelf.

# Welcome to the IDMC style guide

**Designed to ensure that our various audiences enjoy a consistently high standard of clear, concise and accessible writing**

We publish a wide range of products, from highly formal and technical reports aimed primarily at specialised audiences to more accessible blog posts aimed at a more diverse audience. No matter what you are working on, this guide provides the framework for your output. Adhering to it will reduce the substantial sums we spend on editing. IDMC style may not match that of other NGOs, UN agencies or other organisations. It may not always be how you are used to writing, but it is how we do things. It may not please everyone all of the time, but it is non-negotiable.

# Three general points of principle:

## British vs American English

IDMC uses British English.

There are many spelling differences, a significant number of different terms, some of them mutually unintelligible, and a few relatively minor grammatical differences between British and American English. You can read more about these in the British English section below.

You can either try to commit the differences to memory, or alternatively set your spellcheck to British English. It only takes a second, and your editor will really appreciate it if you do.

## Plain English

IDMC strongly advocates the use of plain English.

Many of our reports are read by general as well as specialist audiences, and many readers may not be native speakers of English. Ask yourself whether someone who might be interested, but is not an expert in internal displacement, will understand your meaning quickly and easily. Always try to cater for the general audience so as not to exclude them.

Choose simple words rather than complicated ones. Avoid technical language, jargon, colloquialisms and clichés as much as you can. Use short, clear sentences. Try reading what you have written aloud and if the meaning of a sentence isn't clear, change it. If it sounds long-winded, break it up. You may find using bullet points helpful sometimes.

You can find more information on plain English [here](#):

<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/>

<https://identity.nrc.no/style#/clear-language/why-clear-language>

If you feel that there are areas of your text where technical or legal language is absolutely necessary, highlight them and add a note to explain why so that editors know to approach that section with a light touch. Any such highlights should be the exception, not the rule.

## Formatting

Avoid introducing complex formatting when preparing a first draft. If you must include graphs or images, make sure the captions are editable, but whenever possible leave formatting for the designers to do once the editing process is complete.

# Lessons to learn from 2022

## Displacement figures

When referring to figures in a report for the first time, and subsequently for clarity if required, use the term “internal displacements”.

Once this has been established and it is clear that report or (sub)section you are working on doesn’t discuss refugees as well as IDPs, you can simply use “displacements” or indeed just a figure on subsequent reference.

For example:

Conflict triggered 500,000 internal displacements in Sudan in 2021. Some of the fiercest fighting took place in the Darfur region, where 200,000 were recorded. Intercommunal violence in East Kordofan state led to 100,000.

Disasters triggered 300,000 displacements ...

If you want then to distinguish between new and secondary or repeated displacements, use the word “movement”. So to continue our example:

Disasters triggered 300,000 displacements, of which around 80 per cent were new movements. A second consecutive year of flooding in White Nile state, however, prompted around 50,000 secondary movements as people displaced by the 2020 floods were forced to flee again.

The fact that many of the displacements recorded in White Nile were repeated movements meant that the number of IDPs in the state at the end of the year did not change significantly.

## Triggers and drivers

Take care not to conflate these two concepts. We go to considerable lengths to establish that displacement is multicausal, and it’s important to keep the distinction clear.

Triggers are the things that force people to flee in the moment – being caught in the crossfire of armed conflict, an attack on their village or the onset of natural hazard. Drivers are the underlying factors that make people more likely to be displaced

Consider a poor family living in a makeshift shelter in an informal settlement with no drainage on the outskirts of a coastal town exposed to storms. When one strikes, destroying homes and flooding the settlement, the family members are displaced.

The storm did not drive their displacement, and we should not use that formulation. The storm triggered it, and the underlying drivers were their inability to afford to build a home resilient to the elements, or to buy one in a less exposed neighbourhood, and a lack of local authority investment in risk reduction measures in their informal settlement.

We should similarly maintain this distinction and a nod to multicausality when discussing the phenomenon of displacement. So on first reference, say for example:

Bangladesh has a long history of displacement triggered by disasters.

Or

Bangladesh has a long history of displacement associated with disasters.

Thereafter, for conciseness and to avoid unnecessary repetition, it's fine simply to refer to "disaster displacement". The same applies to other triggers.

Avoid terms that carry the meaning of direct causality, such as "caused by" and "due to", and also avoid "induced by". The latter is widely used by other organisations, but "induce" is normally reserved for what doctors do to a mother's labour when their baby is overdue.

## IDP

An internally displaced person. Some internally displaced people ✓not persons ✗

Use IDP only as a noun, not as adjective.

An IDP camp ✗

A camp for IDPs ✓

A displacement camp ✓

IDP figures ✗

Displacement figures ✓

The national IDP policy ✗

The national policy on IDPs ✓

## Durable solutions

They are pursued and achieved ✓not searched for and reached ✗

Also avoid offer, provide or give durable solutions ✗

Use help bring about, support IDPs' pursuit of, facilitate, create preconditions for ✓

These terms are more realistic and, importantly, they credit IDPs with agency over their situation.

## Time expressions

Put them at the end rather than the beginning of sentences and phrases. English prefers them, and reads more naturally with them there. It also makes for more cohesive text to discuss what then when, rather than vice versa:

In 2018, conflict and violence triggered XXX internal displacement. ✗

Conflict and violence triggered XXX internal displacement in 2018. ✓

Don't use the seasons as time references. They mean different things in different parts of the world, and in the tropics they mean nothing at all. Use early 2022, mid-2022 or late 2022 instead, or simply give a month or range of months. It's fine to use the seasons ... to describe the seasons. It gets very cold in winter in Afghanistan, for example.

## Active v passive voice

Always use the active voice. It's much more concise, direct and impactful:

Access to the area was restricted by clashes between rival armed groups. ✘

Clashes between rival armed groups restricted access to the area. ✔

## Geographic indicators

These should be lower case: north, southern, south-east, north-western (note the hyphens). The only exceptions are when such indicators are the formal names of provinces, states or regions, such as Northern province in Sri Lanka (note the lower case “p” in province).

## Remain

There's nothing wrong as such with “remain”, but we heavily overuse it. Most often “is/are” or “was/were” will suffice, and the addition of “still” makes a good alternative if you are trying to emphasise that something has been happening for a long time.

Many people remained displaced at the end of the year. ✘

Many people were still displaced at the end of the year. ✔

## See/saw

Neither geographical entities or periods of time have eyes:

Ethiopia saw an escalation of conflict in the Tigray region in 2021. ✘

Conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia escalated in 2021. ✔

December saw thousands of people return to their home areas. ✘

Thousands of people returned to their home areas in December. ✔

# Other style reminders

## Statements of fact v possibility

If you want to make a statement of fact or express a general truth, don't use "can". Use the present simple:

Displacement causes economic losses.

The many uses of English modal verbs, including "can" and "may", are complicated and confusing, but for the purposes of our reports think of them as expressing degrees of possibility.

"Displacement can cause economic losses" conveys strong possibility, but not certainty. It might be more naturally expressed as "displacement often causes economic losses".

"Displacement may cause economic losses" is less certain still.

## Past simple v present perfect

The past simple is used to describe completed actions in the past, often but not always at a specific time:

Several thousand people fled their homes in Somalia in March 2002.

They lived in displacement camps for more than ten years.

Contrast this with the meaning conveyed by the present perfect, which works as a bridge between the past and present:

Several thousand people have fled their homes in Somalia since March 2002.

They have lived in displacement camps for more than ten years.

In sentence A all the fleeing took place in March 2002, while in sentence C it began in March 2002 and continues today. The IDPs in sentence B are no longer living in displacement camps, but those in sentence D are.

## AMERICAN V BRITISH USAGE

There were multiple problems with the approach. ❌

There were various problems with the approach. ✅

Or be more specific:

There were many/several/a few problems with the approach. ✅

Access to the site was restricted due to clashes between rebel fighters and the military. ❌

Access to the site was restricted because of clashes between rebel fighters and the military. ✅

Access to the site was restricted as a result of clashes between rebel fighters and the military. ✅

There was an uptick in the number of displacements last year. ❌

There was an increase/spike/rise in the number of displacements last year. ✅



## Context ❌

Avoid this term. The humanitarian sector loves a context, but most often the word is superfluous or can be got around with something more concise or meaningful.

Historical context ❌ Background ✔

In the context of Syria ❌ In Syria ✔

In emergency contexts ❌ In emergencies/emergency situations ✔

Hundreds were displaced in the context of grave human rights abuses by the army. ❌

Hundreds were displaced as result of grave human rights abuses by the army. ✔

Grave human rights abuses by the army triggered hundreds of displacements. ✔

## Reportedly

We use this term incorrectly a lot. When a source is cited in a footnote, to say “xxx has reportedly happened” makes it sound as if we are doubting the veracity of the source. If that’s so, then of course insert the word, but it’s normally not the case.

If you feel the need to qualify, then an alternative formula might be “Local media reported that ...”, “The UN reported that ...” but most often “xxx has happened” is enough. If you are writing about an allegation, used alleged/allegedly.

## Impact

Use “impact” as a noun, but not as a verb. Use “affect” instead, or be more specific and describe the effects.

## Reporting verbs

Recounted/explained/shared/recalled/reported ❌

Said ✔

## % ❌

Per cent, except in graphics

## Currencies

We use the US dollar as our standard currency for reporting, expressed using the \$ symbol, not US\$ or USD.

The project cost \$4.5 million. ✔

For other currencies, put the symbol or letters first or write them out after the numeral: 5,000 Pakistani rupees (note the lower case). Either way, give the US dollar equivalent in brackets afterwards.

The EU donated €6.4 million (\$9 million) to the relief effort. ✔

A national identity card costs 1,560 afghanis (\$20). ✔

## Extraneous words and phrases

But not limited to ✘

This is implicit in “including”, which tells the reader that the list that follows is incomplete.

As previously mentioned ✘

This can almost always be deleted, along with the sentence that it introduces.

It is important to note ✘

Presumably we consider everything we report as important, and using this phrase too much devalues its meaning. There might be an argument, exceptionally, to say “it’s particularly important to note”, but most often it can simply be deleted.

Looking ahead ✘ and worse, going forward ✘✘

The content and grammar of the sentence(s) that follow make it abundantly clear this is what we’re doing.

# VOCABULARY

## Footnotes

Never in the middle of a sentence

## But, however and while

Avoid starting sentences with them:

While the situation is bad, it could be worse ❌

The situation is bad, but it could be worse ✔️

The army launched an offensive to restore security. However, the effect was the opposite ❌

The army launched an offensive to restore security. The effect, however, was the opposite ✔️

The army launched an offensive to restore security, but the effect was the opposite ✔️

## Academic writing ❌

Avoid terms that make our copy sound like an academic essay: Moreover, furthermore, nevertheless, notwithstanding, thus ... inter alia ❌

In addition, please avoid 'in addition'. Use "also" instead, and you might occasionally want to consider "as well" or "too" as alternatives.

Avoid	Instead
a lot	Two words, not alot.
actor	Avoid whenever possible. Stakeholder is often a useful alternative, or try to be more specific - agencies, organisations, bodies, entities, sectors, humanitarians. If you want an all-encompassing term, think about alternatives such as "all of those involved in the humanitarian response". If you must use "actors", do so only as a last resort and don't be surprised if it gets edited out.
Afghans	Afghans are people, afghanis are units of currency.
affect/effect	The number of mistakes was not affected (verb) by the exhortations in the style guide. The exhortations had no effect (noun) on the number of mistakes.
aim to do	People aim to do, laws and initiatives are designed to do or are intended to do. They do not aim at doing.

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Instead</b>
African-Caribbean	Not Afro-Caribbean, same for African-Colombians.
al-Qaeda	Not al-Qaida.
America/American	These terms could apply to North, South or Central America, and encapsulate many nations. If you are referring to the United States, be specific: not Americans but US citizens, the US government, US policy.
among	Not amongst.
Approximately/an estimated	Avoid. Use around, about or roughly instead.
Arab	Both a noun and an adjective. Arabic usually refers to the language.
as previously mentioned	This can almost always be deleted, along with the sentence that it introduces.
assist	Try to avoid overusing. Consider “help” too.
as well as	Avoid. Use “and”.
(the) authorities	Try to be more specific. Do you mean the regional assembly? The local council? The armed forces? The government?
basically	This word is unnecessary, basically.
both	Unnecessary in most phrases that contain “and”. “Both men and women” says no more than “men and women”, takes longer and can be ambiguous.
but not limited to	Do not use. It is implicit in “including”, which tells the reader that the list that follows is incomplete.
capital	Try to avoid using this overused term. Instead of “IDPs’ socioeconomic capital”, use “IDPs’ assets”.
civil society	Avoid overuse. Try to be more specific as the term can cover a wide range of different players, including NGOs, public initiatives, volunteers and students.
clusters	Clusters are lower case. Remember too that terms such as CCCM and WASH may not be universally understood. As with all acronyms, they should be written out in full at first mention.
compared with	Not to.
compounded	Avoid. Consider “made worse”, “aggravated” or “complicated” instead.

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Instead</b>
Congo	Never refer to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) or the Republic of Congo as simply “the Congo”.
consult	Not “consult with”.
context	Avoid. The humanitarian sector loves a context, but most often the word is superfluous or can be got around with something more concise or meaningful: “In the context of Mali” = “in Mali” “In emergency contexts” = “in emergencies” Historical context = background Never use “in the context of” as a synonym for “as a result of” or “by”: They were displaced in the context of communal violence ❌
continual	Continual refers to things that happen repeatedly but not constantly. Continuous indicates an unbroken sequence.
controversial	Overused, typically to show that the writer disapproves of something. Like “famous” and other adjectives indicating opinion, it can and should be removed.
convince/persuade	Having convinced someone of the facts, you might persuade them to do something.
cooperate, cooperation, cooperative	No hyphen. See Grammar & Formatting > hyphens
Côte d’Ivoire	Not Ivory Coast.
coup	Avoid. Use military takeover instead.
currently	“Now” is preferable, if needed at all.
defuse	Render harmless. To diffuse is to spread about.
developing countries	Not “the third world”.
disabled	Use “people with disabilities”, not “disabled people”. Do not use the acronym PWD.
disfranchise	No. Use disenfranchise.
displaced people	Avoid referring to them as “the displaced”.
disaster	Not “natural disaster”, ever. Natural hazards combined with insufficient preparedness and/or a lack of capacity to respond result in disasters. As such, we should refer to “disasters brought on by natural hazards” or “by human activity” and displacement “associated with” or “triggered by” disasters. Avoid “natural hazard-induced disasters” and “disaster-induced displacement”. Apart from anything else, “induce” is normally what a doctor does to a birth when a baby is overdue. See also Grammar & Formatting > hyphens and British English.

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Instead</b>
due to	US usage, so avoid. Use “because of” or “as a result of” instead.
durable solutions	Durable solutions are pursued and achieved, not searched for and reached. Avoid offer, provide or give durable solutions. Use help bring about, support IDPs’ pursuit of, facilitate, create preconditions for ... These terms are more realistic and, importantly, they credit IDPs with agency over their situation. See also (re)settlement
effect/affect	See affect
elderly	Avoid. Use “older people”
en route	Not “on route”.
ensure	Much overused. Alternatives include make certain, make sure and guarantee. Different from insure against risk, and assure someone you will help.
etc	Don’t use. It suggests you’ve run out of ideas.
European Union	See Grammar & Formatting > acronyms
Extremist (group)	Avoid. Use non-state armed group instead.
facilitate	Avoid overuse. Consider “help” or “make easier”
farther, further	Farther and farthest are the comparative and superlative of “far” as in distance - farther away, the farthest point north. Further and furthest are the comparative and superlative of “far” as in degree - further discussion, the candidate furthest to the left.
feedback	The plural is feedback, not feedbacks.
female-headed households	Not women-headed households.
fewer/less	Fewer means smaller in number: fewer IDPs. Less means smaller in quantity: less displacement.
forum	The plural is forums, not fora - incorrect Latin, but correct modern usage.
forced displacement	All forced displacement is not internal, but all the displacement IDMC reports on is forced. We use internal displacement, with the implicit assumption that we are talking about forced internal displacement. Only use forced displacement if you are referring to both internal and cross-border.

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Instead</b>
gender-based violence	Use GBV in line with NRC policy, despite the fact that UNHCR uses SGBV. The term SGBV can be confusing as many think it applies only to sexual violence, when in fact there are many other forms GBV. Examples include domestic, emotional, physical and socioeconomic violence. Try to be as specific as possible. If you are talking about sexual violence, say so.
Geneva Conventions	Note the plural. There are four treaties, last revised and ratified in 1949, which with three more recently adopted protocols set out international standards for the humanitarian treatment of prisoners of war and civilians caught up in war.
going forward	No. Just no.
governorate	Administrative division used in Middle Eastern countries formerly part of the British empire. For countries formerly under French rule the term tends to be “prefecture” except in Lebanon, where it is “qada” or jurisdiction. Syria is divided into governorates.
Guiding Principles	Use the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement on first mention, and thereafter the Guiding Principles. Not the UN Guiding Principles or UN GP.
Gulf, the	Do not use either the Persian or Arabian Gulf as it will cause offence. Use simply “the Gulf”.
hazard or risk	Scientists use hazard to mean a potential for harm, and risk to mean the actual probability of harm occurring. The distinction is worth bearing in mind.
healthcare	One word.
Hezbollah	Not Hizbullah
Houthi movement	No. In line with NRC style, we use Ansar Allah. “Ansar Allah, also known as the Houthi movement” on first reference and thereafter just Ansar Allah, including as an adjective: An Ansar Allah attack, Ansar Allah forces etc.
human rights	You exercise or fulfil your rights, rather than enjoy them.
i.e.	Avoid. If you really feel the need to use it, do so with full stops, i.e. like this.
impact	Use as a noun, but never as a verb.
indigenous people	Not “tribals”.
inquiry	Not “enquiry”.

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Instead</b>
internally displaced people	Not internally displaced persons.
intifada	Literally means “the shake off” and refers to the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation between 1987 and 1993. It should not be capitalised, unless starting a sentence. Nor should it be italicised as it is in common English use.
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), not Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or Islamic State (IS).
Islam	Never refer to Muslims as Mohammedans. The holy book of Islam is the Qur’an. The prophet is Muhammad. Sharia law, without italics, and with a lower case “s” unless starting a sentence. See also Grammar & formatting > non-English terms
it is important to note	Avoid. Presumably we consider everything we report as important, and using this phrase too much devalues its meaning. There might be an argument, exceptionally, to say “it’s particularly important to note”, but most often it can simply be deleted.
“in the field”	Be specific, in which country/region?
jihad	Be aware that in Arabic it means first and foremost “effort”, but it is commonly used to mean “holy war”.
Kosovo	The adjective is Kosovan, not Kosovar.
looking ahead	Do not use. The content and grammar of the sentence(s) that follow make it abundantly clear this is what we’re doing.
malnutrition	There are several categories of malnutrition. Try whenever possible to be specific: chronic malnutrition, acute malnutrition.
major	A major case of overuse. Use only sparingly, and consider “main”, “significant”, “leading” and “primary” as alternatives.
massive	Massively overused. Avoid.
meet	Not “meet with”
more adequately	Avoid. Use “better”
multiple	US usage, so avoid. Use “various” instead, or be more specific: “a few”, “several” or “many”.



<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Instead</b>
Nakba	Means “the catastrophe” and should always be capitalised. It refers to the events that led to the birth of Israel, namely the 1947 to 1949 war between Israel and its Arab opponents.
nation	Do not use to refer to a country or state, and beware of attributing the actions of a government or military force to a national population. Do not say: “The Israelis killed 400 children during the intifada” but “the Israeli army killed ... “
national authorities	Use “government” if you are referring to the executive, and “national authorities” only if you want to include parliament and the judiciary.
natural hazards	Events or conditions, such as earthquakes and storms, that originate in the natural environment and may pose a severe or extreme threat to people and assets in exposed areas.
negatively impact	No. There are many alternatives: harm, hamper, hinder, interfere with, impede, obstruct and damage, to name but a few.
negatively affect	See above entry
Ninewa	Ninewa is an Iraqi governorate. Nineveh is the Biblical name of part of this region. They do not entirely overlap or represent the same thing.
OCHA	The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Not UNOCHA or UN OCHA.
ongoing	One word.
operationalise	Avoid. Use “implement” or “put into effect/practice/operation”.
over	Avoid. Use “more than”.
Palestine	Use to describe the occupied territories of the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. You can also refer to these areas as ‘occupied Palestine’ in text, but we recognise the name of these territories as Palestine. If referring to the whole area, including Israel before 1948, use “historic Palestine” or “mandate Palestine”.
Palestinian National Authority	Use PA on second reference. The N is dropped in the acronym.
people	Not “persons”.
physical security and psychological wellbeing	Not threats to “physical and moral integrity”.
programme	Not “program”.

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Instead</b>
protection gap	Do not use on its own. Be specific as to the protection that is lacking, or what it would provide.
rebels	Never use. Always use non-state armed group.
recent, recently	They soon will not be. Avoid. If the date is relevant, use it.
referendum	The plural is referendums
regime	Never use. Use “government” or “the authorities”.
rehabilitate	Avoid. Rebuild or reconstruct homes, recover or re-establish livelihoods and reintegrate former child soldiers. Rehabilitate criminals.
remain	<p>There is nothing wrong as such with “remain”, but we overuse it, sometimes to the extent that it becomes repetitive. Most often “is/are” or “was/were” will suffice, and the addition of “still” makes a good alternative if you are trying to emphasise that something has been happening for a long time.</p> <p>The conflict has disrupted education and healthcare across the country, but urban areas remain better served. ❌</p> <p>The conflict has disrupted education and healthcare across the country, but urban areas are better served. ✅</p> <p>As of the end of the year, thousands of people remained displaced. ❌</p> <p>As of the end of the year, thousands of people were still displaced. ✅</p>
reported/reportedly	<p>When a source is cited in a footnote, to say “xxx has reportedly happened” makes it sound as if we are doubting the veracity of the source. If that’s so, then of course insert the word, but it’s normally not the case.</p> <p>If you feel the need to qualify, then an alternative formula might be “Local media reported that ...”, “The UN reported that ...” but most often “xxx has happened” is enough.</p> <p>If you are writing about an allegation, used alleged/allegedly.</p>
resolutions	Lower case. UN Security Council resolution no. 1234.
returns	Unless your report covers both IDPs and refugees, it is safe to assume that by “returnees” we mean returning IDPs.
root cause	No. Just “cause”.
said	Normally preferable to added, commented, declared, pointed out, recounted, explained, shared, recalled, reported and the many other alternatives.
Secretary-General	Hyphen. See Grammar & Formatting > hyphens

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Instead</b>
seasons	Do not use phrases such as “last summer” and “autumn 2021” as time references. They mean different things in different parts of the world, and in the tropics they mean nothing at all. Use early 2021, mid-2021 or late 2021 instead, or simply give a month or range of months. It’s fine to use the seasons ... to describe the seasons. It gets very cold in winter in Afghanistan, for example.
sectors	Always lower case: protection sector.
see/saw	Neither geographical entities nor time references have eyes. Sudan saw an escalation in conflict in 2019. ✘ Sudan’s conflict/Conflict in Sudan escalated in 2019. ✔ December saw thousands of people return. ✘ Thousands of people returned in December. ✔
(re)settlement	Avoid this term. Use return, settlement elsewhere in the country or local integration as the three options for durable solutions.
settler	Use only in reference to Israeli Jews living in settlements across the 1967 Green Line, i.e. in occupied Palestine. See also Writing tips & etiquette > neutral language.
SGBV	Use GBV. See also gender-based violence.
sharia	Refers to Islamic moral code and religious law. Lower case and no italics.
Shiism, Sunnism	The two main branches of Islam. A member is a “Shia” or “Shias” (pl) and “Sunni” or “Sunnis” (pl). The adjectives are “Shia” and “Sunni”.
should have	Not should of. The same is true of could have and would have.
some	Try to avoid. Use “around” or “about” instead, though occasional use is acceptable to avoid repetition. Never use any of these terms, or “a total of” to avoid starting a sentence with a number. Write the number out in full instead. Some 95,000 people were displaced. ✘ Ninety-five thousand people were displaced. ✔
Special Rapporteur	Cecilia Jimenez-Damary’s full and formal title is the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons. Otherwise, she is the special rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs, and on further reference simply the special rapporteur or Jimenez-Damary.
stakeholders	Not “relevant stakeholders”. Why would you be writing about irrelevant ones?
support for	Not “support to”.

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Instead</b>
survival sex	Survival sex differs from prostitution as it does not necessarily involve the exchange of money. If you are describing sex in exchange for money use “prostitution”. If you are referring to sex in exchange for non-financial means of survival such as food or shelter, use “survival sex”.
targeted, targeting	no double “t”.
taskforce	One word.
terrorism/terrorists	Never use. Defining terrorism is highly subjective. One person’s terrorist may be another person’s freedom fighter, and former “terrorists” hold elected office in many parts of the world. Always use non-state armed group instead. The phrase “war on terror” should always appear in quotes, whether used by us or (more likely) quoting someone else.
that v which	As a rule of thumb, if the sentence does not need the clause that the word in question is connecting, use which. If it does, use that. For example: The time machine, which looked like a telephone box, concerned Bill and Ted. The time machine that looked like a telephone box concerned Bill and Ted. In the first sentence (thanks to the use of which), the time machine concerned Bill and Ted. It also happened to look like a telephone box. In the second sentence (which uses the restrictive clause), Bill and Ted are concerned with a specific time machine that looks like a telephone booth.
think tank	Two words, no hyphen.
time expressions	Try to avoid using phrases like “last year”, “next month”, “last September”, “for the last few years” or “recently” as IDMC publications may continue to be read well after their publication.
Timor-Leste	Not East Timor.
treaties and conventions	See capitals, Grammar & formatting > policies and bills
trainings	No. Training is an uncountable noun, and as such has no plural (even if the term is widely misused in the humanitarian community). If necessary use “training sessions”, “training workshops”, “training courses” or simply “training”.
tribe	Avoid. Use “ethnic group”.
UN	No need to spell out United Nations, even at the first mention.
UNHCR	UNHCR refers to itself as the UN Refugee Agency. This is how we should refer to it too. First reference should be “the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)” and afterwards just UNHCR (no “the”).

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Instead</b>
UNDRR	Acronym for UN office for disaster risk reduction.
until	Not “up until”.
upcoming	Avoid. Use “forthcoming”.
uptick	US usage, so avoid. Use “increase” or “rise”. Take care with “spike” as it is only a spike if followed by a decline.
US	Use US for the United States, not USA. No need to write it out, even at first mention. See also America, Grammar & Formatting > acronyms
use	Use instead of utilise/utilisation.
very	Usually very redundant.
victims	Avoid. Refer instead to “survivors”.
wars	Use upper case for historical wars. See Grammar & Formatting > capitals .
wellbeing	One word.
West Bank barrier	Always use “barrier” when referred to in its totality, because in places it is a steel and barbed-wire fence and in others an eight-metre-high concrete wall. If referring to a particular section of it, then calling it a fence or wall may be appropriate. It can also be described as a separation barrier/fence/wall or security barrier/fence/wall.
which or that?	See that (vs which).
while	Not whilst.

# Grammar & formatting

Avoid	Instead
abbreviations	Do not use short verb forms such as isn't, can't and don't, and avoid using abbreviations such as ie, eg and etc. Short verb forms are only ok in blog posts, particularly when written in the first person. Do not abbreviate months.
acronyms	<p>With the exception of the UN, US and EU, write out all acronyms in full on first mention in the main body text, even if they have occurred previously as a reference: The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) ...</p> <p>On further mention use the acronym without "the": The IDMC is the world's leading authority on internal displacement. ❌ IDMC is the world's leading authority on internal displacement. ✅</p> <p>The only exceptions to the rule are the US, the EU, the UN and non-state armed groups – the FARC, the LRA etc.</p> <p>UNHCR on first mention is the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).</p> <p>Take care using acronyms as adjectives, and if you do, think about how it would read if it were written out in full. Avoid using IDP as an adjective. An IDP family, an "internally displaced person family", is clearly nonsense. IDP figures, "internally displaced person figures", and an IDP policy, an "internally displaced person policy", are almost as bad.</p> <p>Other organisations use IDP this way widely, and there may be occasions when you feel the need to use it too, but try to keep them to a minimum. There are normally simple workarounds: The government's policy on IDPs ... The government policy on internal displacement ... Hundreds of internally displaced families ...</p> <p>Also avoid terms such as "conflict IDPs" and "conflict-induced IDPs" for the same reason. Again, there are normally simple workarounds: The camp was hosting 20,000 people internally displaced by conflict. ✅</p> <p>As a general rule, try not to overuse acronyms. Alternatives include "the organisation/agency/group" or simply "it". There is no need to give the acronym for something that is only mentioned once in a report.</p>
between 15 and 20	Not "between 15 to 20" or "between 15-20".
brackets	In general, avoid brackets and hyphens. Use commas instead.
British English	<p>IDMC uses British English, so: Labour, neighbour, centre, programme, analyse, organisation. This excludes organisations who spell their names in American English, such as the International Organization for Migration.</p> <p>There are many spelling differences between British and American English:</p>

Avoid	Instead
	<p><a href="http://www.spellzone.com/pages/british-american.cfm">http://www.spellzone.com/pages/british-american.cfm</a>  A significant number of different terms, some of them mutually unintelligible:  <a href="http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/words/british-and-american-terms">http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/words/british-and-american-terms</a>  And few relatively minor grammar differences:  <a href="http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/grammar-reference/british-english-and-american-english">http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/grammar-reference/british-english-and-american-english</a>  There are just two exceptions to the use of British English.  We use the US spelling of focused and targeted because they have all but become British usage too.  The American fondness for compound adjectives, and for making verbs out of nouns and adjectives should be avoided as much as possible:</p> <p>The conflict-plagued region of Darfur is also severely drought-affected. ✗  The Darfur region, which has been (or is) plagued by conflict, is also suffering a severe drought. ✓  Conflict-induced displacement ✗  Displacement triggered by/associated with conflict ✓  Disaster-induced displacement ✗  Displacement triggered by/associated with disasters ✓  The protection cluster met to decide how to operationalise its new policy. ✗  The protection cluster met to decide how to put its new policy into operation/use/practice. ✓</p> <p>See also, non-English terms and compound adjectives</p>
bullet points	<p>Bullet points can be short phrases, single sentences or paragraphs. If a bullet introduces a complete grammatical sentence then begin with a capital letter and end it with a full stop. If not, start with lower case and do not use a full stop.</p> <p>Do not use semi-colons whether they follow complete sentences or not.  Here are some examples:  IDMC urges the government to:  issue all IDPs with documentation  ensure all returns are voluntary  provide support to host families</p> <p>IDMC research has shown the following:  The majority of IDPs have received no assistance.  Displaced women are highly vulnerable to GBV.  There is an urgent need to provide supplementary feeding for vulnerable children.</p>

Avoid	Instead
<p>capitals (or upper case)</p>	<p>The main title of a report should be title case: A Dire Situation: Internal Displacement in South Sudan. All other subtitles, chapter, section and sub-section headings should be sentence case (only an initial capital letter) and references in the main text to sections, figures, diagrams and graphs (see section 3 below, figure 6 above) should be lower case.</p> <p><b>Job descriptions:</b> lower case: prime minister, US secretary of state, chief rabbi, editor of the Guardian, UN secretary general.</p> <p><b>Job titles:</b> upper case, President Joe Biden, but in general try to use job descriptions instead: the US president, Joe Biden, and then Biden on subsequent mention; Pope Francis, and subsequently the pope. The comma between the job title and the name tells us that there is only one of them. So, the former British prime minister Tony Blair (there are many former British prime ministers) but the French president, Emmanuel Macron (there is only French president in office at any one time).</p> <p><b>Titles and subtitles:</b> Use title case for the main title of a report, and sentence case for all other subtitles. Put a capital letter after a colon, lower case after a semicolon.</p> <p><b>Geographical areas and features:</b> the proper noun upper case, the generic part lower: Rakhine state, Tolima department, Andalusia province, river Thames, Sydney harbour, Monterey peninsula, Bondi beach.</p> <p><b>Geographical indicators:</b> lower case, north, southern, south-east, north-western (note the hyphens). The only exceptions are when such indicators are the formal names of provinces, states or region, such as Northern province in Sri Lanka (note the lower case “p” in province).</p> <p><b>Ministries and departments of state:</b> lower case: the US state department, the Russian foreign ministry, unless writing out their formal title – the US Department of State.</p> <p><b>Acts of parliament:</b> upper case when writing out their full name - the 2012 Prevention, Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons and Affected Communities <b>Act – but lower case when paraphrasing:</b> the 2012 internal displacement act. The latter is infinitely preferable.</p> <p><b>Bills and policies:</b> always lower case, even when written out in full (see below)</p> <p><b>Treaties and conventions:</b> always upper case when naming, but subsequently “the convention”, not “the Convention”.</p> <p><b>Commissions, committees, reports and inquiries: always lower case:</b> the national land commission, the Malinda inquiry report.</p> <p><b>Universities:</b> institution upper case, departments lower case: Sheffield University department of medieval and modern history, University of Queensland school of journalism.</p> <p><b>Historical wars and conflicts:</b> Use upper case: Second World War, Six-Day War</p> <p><b>Clusters:</b> lower case</p>
<p>citations</p>	<p>See endnotes.</p>



Avoid	Instead
compound adjectives	<p>There are some instances when hyphenated adjectives may be appropriate. As a rule of thumb, they should <i>only</i> be used if the sense is changed without them:</p> <p><u>“Small appliance industry”</u>: a small industry producing appliances</p> <p><u>“Small-appliance industry”</u>: an industry producing small appliances</p> <p>For more information on when it is appropriate to use a compound adjective or modifier, see <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_compound#Hyphenated_compound_modifiers">here</a>:  <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_compound#Hyphenated_compound_modifiers">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_compound#Hyphenated_compound_modifiers</a>            See also British English.</p>
conjunctions	<p>Never begin a sentence with “but”, “however” or “and”. Use them only to conjoin two phrases of the same sentence.</p> <p>The army launched an offensive to restore security. However, the effect was the opposite. ✘</p> <p>The army launched an offensive to restore security. The effect, however, was the opposite. ✔</p> <p>The army launched an offensive to restore security, but the effect was the opposite. ✔</p>
currencies	<p>IDMC uses the US dollar as its standard currency for reporting, expressed using the dollar symbol – \$ not US\$ - before the number and with no space:</p> <p>The project cost \$4.5 million.</p> <p>Make sure it is clear from the start that we are talking about the US dollar (not Australian, for example), then proceed with \$.</p> <p>If you quote other currencies, put the symbol or letters first or write them out after the numeral: 5,000 Pakistani rupees. Either way, give the US dollar equivalent in brackets afterwards:</p> <p>The EU donated €6.4 million (\$9 million) to the relief effort.</p>
dashes	<p>Avoid sentences – such as this one – that dash about all over the place – and instead use commas; semicolons also have their uses.</p>
dates	<p>Always write out, including the month in full, using the following format:</p> <p>11 November 2017 (note the absence of commas).</p> <p>The 21<sup>st</sup> century, the 1960s.</p> <p>English prefers time references at the end of sentences and phrases rather than the beginning. They read more naturally that way, the text looks cleaner on the page and the key information comes earlier in the sentence. Compare:</p> <p>In September, clashes erupted in India, displacing 5,000 people. ✘</p> <p>Clashes erupted in India in September, displacing 5,000 people. ✔</p> <p>As of the end of 2017, there were more than a million IDPs in the country. ✘</p> <p>There were more than a million IDPs in the country as of the end of 2017. ✔</p>
ellipses	<p>Ellipses indicate the intentional omission of a word, sentence or whole section from a text or quote without altering its original meaning. They consist of a space, three full stops, and another space. Do not use brackets, and never start or end a quote with an ellipsis.</p>

Avoid	Instead
	<p>The UN is an international organisation founded in 1945 and is committed to promoting peace and security.</p> <p>The UN ... is committed to promoting peace and security.</p>
endnotes	<p>IDMC uses endnotes in all publications. For practical reasons, however, use footnotes while drafting and these will be converted to endnotes in the final layout. Place footnote references at the end of a sentence, after all punctuation. If a sentence contains more than one reference, put both/all of them in one footnote at the end of the sentence, separated by a semicolon. Never put footnotes in the middle of a sentence, even after a comma.</p> <p>Footnotes negate the need to cite a source in the main text. Never use “ ... according to XXX” in the main text if you’re providing a footnote.</p> <p>Do not “dump” text which is not quite relevant enough for the main body of a report in footnotes. Either include it in the main text, or create a footnote that reads: For more information on xxxxx, see ...</p> <p>Use the following format for all endnotes except books, including academic journals: Organisation/publication, <a href="#">“title”</a> (hyperlinked if possible), date, page number (if applicable)</p> <p><u>For books:</u> <a href="#">Author, title</a> (hyperlinked if possible), date, page number</p> <p>Always give the specific date when it is available: 15 February 2021. In the absence of a specific date, give the month and year, and in the absence of a month just give the year.</p> <p>For articles from news agencies such as the Associated Press and Reuters, source the agency, even if you’re linking to an agency report published in a newspaper or elsewhere.</p> <p>Do not use italics, or the Latin terms <i>op cit</i> or <i>idem</i>. Always write each endnote out in full as above, with just one exception. If your endnote refers to same source as the one immediately preceding it, then use <i>Ibid</i> (note the italics) either as is, or if necessary with a new page number: <i>Ibid</i>, p.5</p> <p>Cite email correspondence, focus groups and the like as follows: Email correspondence with UNHCR Juba, 21 March 2020 Focus group discussion, Bangui, 4 April 2021</p>
fact v possibility	<p>If you want to make a statement of fact or express a general truth, don’t use “can”.</p> <p>Use the present simple: Displacement causes economic losses.</p> <p>The many uses of English modal verbs, including “can” and “may”, are complicated and confusing, but for the purposes of our reports think of them as expressing degrees of possibility.</p> <p>“Displacement can cause economic losses” conveys strong possibility, but not certainty. It might be more naturally expressed as “displacement often causes economic losses”.</p> <p>“Displacement may cause economic losses” is less certain.</p>

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Instead</b>
figures	<p>Spell out from one to ten. Numerals from 11 to 999,999, using Anglo-Saxon separators: 1,500 miles, 25,000 people. Then, a million (not one million) two to ten million (but 3.2 million) and then 11 million, 25 billion.</p> <p>This does not include references to sections, figures, diagrams and so on in the main text (see section 2.2, figure 3 above).</p> <p>If you start a sentence with a number, write it out in words whatever its value: Sixty-five people died in the attack. Twenty-six thousand were displaced.</p> <p>This is infinitely preferable to: A total of 65 people ...</p> <p>See qualifiers for figures.</p>
fractions	<p>In the main text, these should be written out in words, and hyphenated if the first figure is more than one: a third, two-thirds, three-quarters. Figures - <math>\frac{3}{4}</math> - are acceptable in tables.</p>
headers	<p>Please categorise headers accordingly using styles and formatting. This becomes particularly helpful in the layout phase, to avoid rearranging sections of the report.</p>
hyperlinks	<p>Use in all HTML content (blogs, emails). When stating something ask yourself if anyone, however unreasonably, might find it potentially controversial, unproven or provocative. To ensure impartiality and to show the opinion is not just yours or IDMC's, add hyperlinks to authoritative sources – such as documents from UN agencies, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group and The New Humanitarian – rather than simply make an assertion in our own name. This may not always be possible, but on the vast majority of occasions it should be.</p>
hyphens	<p>Use one word whenever possible. “ceasefire” not “cease-fire”, “overused” rather than “over-used” and “counterinsurgency” rather than “counter-insurgency”.</p> <p>As a general rule, use hyphens in adjectives that carry a qualifying prefix only where there is a repeated letter, such as over-registered, under-represented and re-established.</p> <p>See also compound adjectives.</p>
italics	<p>Use italics only for non-English words and phrases, poetry and scientific names.</p> <p>See also non-English terms and endnotes.</p>
intensifiers	<p>As well as “very”, avoid using words like dramatically, extreme, desperate as they are not only redundant but excessive.</p>
lower case	<p>See capitals.</p>
numbers	<p>See figures.</p>

Avoid	Instead
non-English terms	<p>If there are competing spellings of place names, choose the version used by Reuters. Only rarely should you need to use non-English terms. If you do, put the term in italics, followed either by a comma and a definition in English:</p> <p>The typhoon affected 18 barangays, the lowest administrative tier of government in the Philippines, and displaced more than 10,000 people.</p> <p>Rido, or clan violence, is one of the main causes of displacement in Mindanao. Sometimes, it can be more elegant to express the same thing the other way around: Clan violence, known locally as rido, is one of the main causes of displacement in Mindanao.</p> <p><u>Do not use a foreign word where a suitable English equivalent exists, and beware that English is a keen adopter of non-English terms - intifada, coup, jungle, guru and pyjamas are but a tiny few. These should not be italicised. If in doubt, check by inserting your term here.</u></p> <p>Arabic names: where a particular spelling is widely used, we should retain it. For names for which we have no established style, use Reuters' style.</p> <p>For non-English groups and organisations, on first mention use the full English translation, followed by "known by its XXX acronym YYY" in brackets:</p> <p>The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (known by the Spanish acronym FARC) ...</p> <p>If you feel a translation is important, put the full non-English name in italics and the acronym in brackets: The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (<i>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC</i>) ... In either case, use only the acronym on future mentions.</p> <p>There's no need to translate non-English references in endnotes.</p> <p>For non-roman script languages, write out the sources in roman script and indicate the original language at the end of the reference:</p> <p>Asahi Shimbun, Great East Japan earthquake: 15,890 people dead, 2,589 people missing (Japanese) See also British English.</p>
one in six, one in ten	Treat these as plural: One in three residents of Lebanon are refugees.
parentheses	See brackets.

Avoid	Instead
paragraphs	<p>A paragraph that stretches to three-quarters of page is an immediate turn-off to the reader, and can almost always be broken up. Try to keep them as short as possible.</p> <p>You can do this by using a paragraph break when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>you start a new topic</li> <li>you start a new theme or sub-theme within the same topic</li> <li>you move to a new time</li> <li>you move to a new place</li> <li>a new person begins to speak</li> <li>you want to produce a dramatic effect</li> </ul>
percentages	<p>Use “per cent” not “percent” or “%”. The only exceptions are in graphs and tables, blog posts, social media and press releases, where we use %.</p>
policies and bills	<p>You may feel it necessary to write the names of policies and bills out in full on first mention: the national policy for the sustainable development of northern Kenya and other arid lands 2012, for example. Later mentions, however, might be “the 2012 sustainable development policy for northern Kenya”, or if it’s in the same paragraph or section, simply “the 2012 policy”, “the policy” or even “it”.</p> <p>In reports that have endnotes, there’s arguably no need to write the policy name out in full at all. First mention can be “the 2012 sustainable development policy for northern Kenya”, with the full name and any other details in an accompanying endnote. That’s what they are there for, and it helps to keep the main text clean and easy to read.</p> <p>Note, policies and bills should be lowercase and not italicised.</p> <p>See also capitals.</p>
qualifiers for figures	<p><b>At least:</b> Use when you want to communicate “at a minimum”. Using “at least” implies that the figure is likely to be conservative, but there is no hard evidence for a higher estimate.</p> <p><b>As many as:</b> This indicates a maximum. There were as many as 10,000 IDPs in the camp.</p> <p><b>More than:</b> Use this rather than “over” for countable nouns, including IDPs and internal displacements.</p> <p><b>About:</b> Use when referring to rounded figures. If you find it’s too vague and you lean more toward using “approximately” then feel free to do so, but unless the justification is strong don’t be surprised if it’s edited out. To avoid repetition, consider alternatives such as “nearly”, “almost”, “roughly” and “around”.</p> <p>See also vocabulary &gt; approximately</p>

Avoid	Instead
quotations	<p>Direct quotes from a publication or person should be contained within double quotation marks. If you introduce the source first, then use a colon before opening the quote:</p> <p>The minister said: “The Human Rights Watch allegations are blatant lies.”</p> <p>If the quote is a full sentence, or number of sentences, the full stop falls within the quotation marks, as above. If it is an incomplete sentence or short phrase, the full stop falls outside the quotation marks:</p> <p>The minister said that the Human Rights Watch allegations were “blatant lies”. The same is true of commas if you introduce the source after the quote: “The Human Rights Watch allegations are blatant lies,” the minister said. The Human Rights Watch allegations are “blatant lies”, the minister said.</p> <p>If a quote is more than three lines long, it should be indented but without quotation marks.</p> <p>Note, quotations are not italicised. The only exception is for design effects such as pull quotes, but these will be formatted at the layout stage.</p>
ranges	<p>Try to avoid dashes or hyphens for ranges.</p> <p>Each tent costs \$20-\$30. ❌</p> <p>Each tent costs between \$20 and \$30. ✔️</p> <p>The government abandoned the 2010-2015 development plan. ❌</p> <p>The government abandoned the development plan for 2010 to 2015. ✔️</p>
references	See endnotes.
repetition	<p>There may be occasions when a degree of repetition is necessary to preserve clarity. Most often, however, it can be avoided and doing so makes a text tighter, clearer, more concise and easier to read.</p> <p>There is no need, for example, to use the word “internal” every time you mention displacement. Our organisation’s name makes it clear from the outset what we are talking about, titles often do too, as do summaries. As such, it should in most cases be enough to refer to “internal displacement” at first mention in each section, and then to “displacement” thereafter. Avoid using the full term twice in the same paragraph.</p> <p>Try also to avoid repeating the same information in different sections of your report, apart of course from the summary. If you feel it is absolutely necessary, try at least to express it in different language.</p> <p>Endnotes negate the need to cite a source in the main text. Never use “ ... according to XXX” in the main text if you’re providing a footnote.</p>

Avoid	Instead
	<p>Avoid repeating the month, year format unless it is needed for clarity:  As of October 2012, there were 5,000 IDPs. By the end of December 2012, the number had risen to 10,000. ✘  As of October 2012, there were 5,000 IDPs. By the end of December, the number had risen to 10,000. ✔</p> <p>It can be taken as given that you mean December of the same year unless you state otherwise. If you are still concerned about clarity, however, think about a work-around:  As of October 2012, there were 5,000 IDPs. Three months later, the number had risen to 10,000. ✔</p> <p>One final point. Don't forget that pronouns, particularly "it" and "they", are very useful in helping to avoid repetition:  The new national policy incorporates the Guiding Principles. The policy is a comprehensive instrument. ✘  The new national policy incorporates the Guiding Principles. It is a comprehensive instrument. ✔  The new national policy, which incorporates the Guiding Principles, is a comprehensive instrument. ✔</p>
semicolon	<p>Try to avoid semicolons as much as possible. Most often a full stop or a comma does the job you need. Semicolons can, however, be useful sometimes to break up lists that involved long phrases that contain commas themselves:  The government has been unable to absorb hundreds of thousands of returnees, whether IDPs and refugees; to establish the legitimacy of the state; to protect marginalised populations, including IDPs; to provide equitable public services and economic opportunities, both in rural and urban areas; to lead a genuine process of reconciliation; and to maintain social cohesion between ethnic groups.</p>
serial comma	<p>Do not use. Also known as the Oxford comma or the Harvard comma, this is a comma before the final "and" in lists.  "Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark" ✔  "Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark" ✘</p>
single quotes	<p>The only use of single quote marks is for a quote within a quote.</p>
singular or plural?	<p>Data is singular. It is collected and analysed, but often there is not enough of it.</p> <p>Populations are plural:  The majority of the population live in poverty.  Only a minority of the population have access to credit.</p>

Avoid	Instead
	<p>Percentages and fractions depend on whether the nouns they are attached to are singular or plural:</p> <p>Eighty per cent of IDPs lost all their possessions.  Three-quarters of those affected have no shelter.  Fifty per cent of the land has been flooded.  Two-thirds of the water supply has been polluted.</p> <p>Non-state armed groups (NSAGs) are singular:</p> <p>The LRA have recruited child soldiers. ❌  The LRA has recruited child soldiers. ✅  The FARC were accused of grave human rights violations. ❌  The FARC was accused of grave human rights violations. ✅</p>
spaces	Use single spaces, never double spaces, between sentences.
tense (choice of)	<p>Most if not all the verbs you use will be in the past simple or present perfect tenses. The past simple is used to describe completed actions in the past, often but not always at a specific time:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Several thousand people <u>fled their homes in Somalia in March 2002.</u></li> <li>2. They lived in displacement camps for more than ten years.</li> </ol> <p>Contrast this with the meaning conveyed by the present perfect, which works as a bridge between the past and present:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Several thousand people <u>have fled their homes in Somalia since March 2002.</u></li> <li>4. <u>They have lived in displacement camps for more than ten years.</u></li> </ol> <p>In sentence 1 all the fleeing took place in March 2002, while in sentence 3 it began in March 2002 and continues today. The IDPs in sentence 2 are no longer living in displacement camps, but those in sentence 4 are.</p> <p>By the time whatever you write is read, all time references will be in the past, so there should be little or no need to use present tenses. If, at the time of writing, IDPs are unable to return because the army is occupying their land, express this as follows: IDPs were unable to return as of January 2022 because the army was occupying their land.</p> <p>The only time you might need a present tense is to set a current scene:  There are more than four million IDPs in Syria, making the country's displacement crisis the world's worst ...</p> <p>There is much, much more that could be said about tenses. You can look beyond the basics here. <a href="http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/english-grammar/verbs/">http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/english-grammar/verbs/</a></p>
units of measurement	<p>IDMC uses the metric system. Write all terms out in full in UK English: metres, kilometres, grammes, kilogrammes, tonnes, hectares.</p> <p>As with currencies, if you need to quote an imperial or other local measurement, provide a metric equivalent in brackets afterwards.</p>



<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Instead</b>
upper case	See capitals.
URLs	Long URLs (links) to source documents in endnotes are cumbersome and look ugly. Please hyperlink the title of the source as much as possible. See endnotes.

# Writing tips & etiquette

<b>Regarding</b>	<b>Consider</b>
acknowledgements	If you have a list of people to thank in an acknowledgement, make sure their surnames are in alphabetical order to avoid offending anyone.
conclusion	Never introduce new facts in a conclusion.
summaries	<p>Some principles to bear in mind:</p> <p>Summaries should be standalone texts that make sense in their own right. They do not have footnotes and citations.</p> <p>Do not write them before you have finished drafting the whole document, otherwise you are unlikely to be able to summarise properly.</p> <p>If they conclude with recommendations these should summarise rather than replicate those in the main document.</p> <p>They should not be too long. One page as a rule, two pages for a longer report. Anything longer is unlikely to be read.</p>
logic	<p>Check that your text makes clear sense. “The plight of the country’s IDPs has not been reliably assessed by local and international stakeholders because of a lack of access to the country” is poor style because it implies that local stakeholders do not have access to the country. It also contains a passive verb and repeats the word “country”.</p> <p>Alternatives might be:</p> <p>Access restrictions mean that neither international nor local organisations have been able to reliably assess the plight of the country’s IDPs.</p> <p>A lack of access to areas affected by the conflict has made it impossible to conduct a reliable assessment of the plight of the country’s IDPs.</p> <p>Access restrictions have made it impossible to conduct a reliable assessment of the plight of the country’s IDPs.</p> <p>Or if you feel the need to be more specific:</p> <p>Local organisations have been unable to conduct a reliable assessment of the plight of Syria’s IDPs because of a lack of access to areas affected by the conflict. International organisations have no access to the country at all.</p> <p>You can find some more examples here. <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/~rseiler/basicstn.htm">www.ucalgary.ca/~rseiler/basicstn.htm</a></p>
neutral language	Be aware of using language that may cause offence. Words such as “settler” or “immigrant” are cases in point. Try to be specific by naming the groups you are referring to. See also Vocabulary > terrorism/terrorist, settler, actor, rebels, extremist.

<b>Regarding</b>	<b>Consider</b>
plagiarism	<p>This is drawing any idea or any language from someone else without adequately crediting that source. It does not matter whether the source is a published author, a student, a website without clear authorship, a website that sells academic papers or any other person. Taking credit for anyone else's work is unacceptable, whether intentionally or by accident.</p> <p>The ease with which you can find information online means that when you use such sources, you need to be extra vigilant about keeping track of where you get information and ideas, and about giving proper credit to the authors of the sources you use. If you cut and paste from an electronic document into your notes and forget to clearly label it, or if you draw information from a series of websites without careful recording, you may end up taking credit for ideas that are not yours, whether you mean to or not.</p> <p>While it may seem obvious that copying someone else's words verbatim and submitting them in a paper with your name on is plagiarism, other types of plagiarism may be less familiar. These more subtle forms are actually more common, and you should make sure you understand all of them, and how to avoid them by conducting your research and writing carefully and responsibly.</p> <p>IDMC has a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism. You can find more information here. <a href="http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&amp;tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup106849">http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&amp;tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup106849</a>.</p>
recommendations	<p>In reports, use direct commands to give recommendations.</p> <p>Use the following format:</p> <p>To the government:</p> <p>or</p> <p>The government should:</p> <p>provide incentives for landlords to register tenants who are displaced</p> <p>ensure local authorities register the residence of IDPs without discrimination</p>
sentences	<p>Avoid the construction of overly long sentences, which in any context, academic or otherwise, make your meaning less clear and understanding less immediate, while placing a challenge on the reader in terms of their ability and will to get to the end of them, and may ultimately mean, if you go on for four or five lines at a time, that they switch off and lose interest and eventually go and read something less contorted and more easily accessible.</p> <p>Alternatively:</p> <p>Avoid overly long sentences. No matter your audience, they will only serve to alienate readers. They may ultimately mean that you lose their attention.</p> <p>An exaggeration to prove a point.</p>

<b>Regarding</b>	<b>Consider</b>
verbs	Use active rather than passive verbs whenever possible. They convey meaning more directly: A group of IDPs was evicted by the security forces. ✘ The security forces evicted a group of IDPs. ✔

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**Every day, people flee conflict and disasters and become displaced inside their own countries. IDMC provides data and analysis and supports partners to identify and implement solutions to internal displacement.**

**Join us as we work to make real and lasting change for internally displaced people in the decade ahead.**



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