ETH zürich

English style guide

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Corporate Communications

Contents

1   Introduction

These guidelines primarily aim to help non-native speakers writing in English. They consolidate recommendations on a) general writing style, b) English grammar, typography and mechanics, and c) professional correspondence in English. The guide draws on several authoritative sources; superscripted numbers placed throughout refer to a list of references at the end of the document for those who are interested. Please send questions, suggestions and other feedback to translation@hk.ethz.ch.

1.1   General notes on writing in English at ETH

ETH Zurich uses British English with "-yse"/"-ise" spellings (e.g. analyse, theorise), not "-yze"/"-ize". Consult the Cambridge Dictionary when necessary. Other hints and tips are available on the Oxford Dictionary website, including a look at differences between UK and US English when it comes to spelling and common expressions. The Oxford Dictionary also provides hyphenation information in every entry.

English prefers simple sentences. Active verbs also make for more effective writing: "ETH researchers have created a new molecule" rather than "A new molecule has been created by ETH researchers". Passive voice is sometimes unavoidable, but it should not be the norm in your writing.

Journalistic writing in English (with the exception of newspaper reporting) tends to employ a rather vibrant rhetorical style, even when dealing with scientific and technical topics. Reader interest is piqued and maintained through idioms and word choice, rhetorical questions and/or apparent paradox, and similarly lively stylistic devices. That said, given that English writing at ETH Zurich will often be addressing non-native speakers, the needs of this audience should also be taken into account. This would include sticking with idioms and expressions that are fairly widely known and not too regional, as well as adopting a slightly more reserved writing style than one might use for native speakers.

English-speaking audiences are generally far more sensitised to inclusive language regarding gender, disability, race and sexuality. This means that you cannot use the male singular pronoun to stand in for all people. Use plural constructions whenever possible, e.g. "Students should submit their applications tomorrow", or rephrase the sentence. If you must use the singular, "s/he" and "her/his" are somewhat awkward but still preferred over "he" and "his".[*] ETH Zurich's Office of Equal Opportunities provides some useful guidelines for non-sexist writing in German, some of which can be carried over into English.

When writing about disability, avoid defining people by a shared impairment: "blind people" or "disabled people", rather than "the blind" or "the disabled". Use positive language: "wheelchair users" instead of "confined to a wheelchair" or "wheelchair-bound" etc. You can consult the UK Office for Disability Issues' guidance on inclusive language or the British Council guide to promoting disability equality, which advises that "disabled people" is most common in the UK although some prefer "people with disabilities".

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[*] "Singular they" presents a slightly more adventurous alternative that continues to gain wider acceptance: for example, instead of "Everyone needs to know that **his or her** talents are valued regardless of **his or her** gender", write "Everyone needs to know that **their** talents are valued regardless of **their** gender."

1.2 When in doubt...

Check institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge Universities to get a sense of how things are done in the English-speaking world or to research academic and administrative terms that you cannot find in the ETH Rectorate online glossary. Please be aware that English-language material from continental universities, although it does provide a precedent in some sense, can nevertheless contain linguistic errors and "Denglish".

The ETH Corporate Communications website provides extensive information about the University's corporate design in German and English. In addition to providing information on typography and text formatting, this material also includes guidelines on graphic design and use of the ETH logo.

2 English grammar, typography and mechanics

2.1 ETH-specific and academic guidelines

The following section collects material from the rest of the style guide that specifically relates to academic language and ETH Zurich style conventions in English. You will therefore find this material repeated at various points throughout the guide according to its area of application (e.g. **Capitalisation**).

2.1.1 General ETH conventions in English

ETH Zurich uses British English. Use "-yse"/"-ise" spellings (e.g. analyse, theorise), not "-yze"/"-ize".[1,2,4] Consult the Cambridge Dictionary for reference when necessary. Other hints and tips are available on the Oxford Dictionary website, including a look at differences between UK and US English when it comes to spelling and common expressions. The Oxford Dictionary also provides hyphenation information in every entry.

"ETH Zurich" and "ETH" do not take an article, i.e. it is not "the ETH Zurich" or "the ETH".[4] This may seem counterintuitive (especially given that the University is called *die ETH Zürich* in German), but it fits a general trend of universities with similar names: MIT (not "the MIT", despite being "the Massachusetts Institute of Technology"), UCSF and the other nine University of California campuses, UCL (University College London), and LSE (the London School of Economics and Political Science). When the name functions as an adjective, however, "the" is necessary: "the ETH Zurich Department of Physics", "the ETH Zurich museum *focus*Terra", etc.

Capitalise "University" when it refers to ETH Zurich: "ETH Zurich is one of the leading international universities for technology and the natural sciences. The University has more than 18,500 students from over 110 countries."[1,2]

Official department names should be capitalised – "the Department of Architecture" – but not their descriptive forms ("the architecture department").[1]

Subjects and degree programme titles. Academic **subjects and fields** are generally not capitalised ("He took a chemistry course to broaden his horizons"), except when used as part of **official degree programme** titles: "a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry"[2] etc.

Autumn Semester (AS) and **Spring Semester (SS)** should be capitalised.[2,4]

2.1.2 Academic degree names

Bachelor's, Master's. Bachelor's and Master's (degree/course/programme/etc.) should always be capitalised and **almost always be possessive**.[4] The only time "Bachelor" or "Master" gets used without an apostrophe-s at the end is when giving full degree names like "Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy" or "Master of Science in Science, Technology and Policy" (all elements of full degree names should also be capitalised). Less formal degree names use the possessive form and normal capitalisation: "did his Bachelor's in philosophy", or "received a Master's degree in science, technology and policy".

Doctorate/doctoral. At the doctoral level, ETH Zurich awards "Doctor of Sciences" degrees (Dr. Sc. ETH Zurich) – not PhDs – and therefore reference to these programmes and degrees must be a variant of "doctorate", "doctoral" etc. written in lower case.[4] For example, there are no "PhD candidates" at the University, but rather "doctoral candidates". The degree itself is a "doctorate" or a "doctoral degree". It should not be called a "Doctor's degree" as this expression is very rare and usually confined to administrative guidelines at UK universities (in the US it seems mainly to apply to training programmes for medical doctors).

2.1.3 University-related job titles and professorships

Despite the fact that English tends to use very few capital letters, universities in the UK decisively favour capitalising university-related job titles and professorships (endowed chairs as well as "normal" professor titles). This applies when titles refer to specific individuals, regardless of whether the job title comes before or after the person's name.[1,2]

Thus you should write "ETH Zurich Vice President for Human Resources and Infrastructure Roman Boutellier", but also "Sarah Springman became the Rector of ETH Zurich in January 2015" and "Detlef Günther, Vice President for Research and Corporate Relations, is also Professor for Trace Element and Micro Analysis in the Department of Chemistry and Applied Bioscience."

When referring to multiple title holders or a professor/professors in general, do not use capital letters: "The ETH Executive Board includes three vice presidents" or "Prior to becoming the University's Rector, Springman had been a professor at ETH Zurich for more than 15 years."[1,2]

2.1.4 Honorifics for academics

Full professors should be called (only) "Professor Jane Doe" – not "Prof. Dr. Jane Doe" as they would be in German – even if they also hold a doctoral degree. Full professors are likewise generally not addressed as "Dr John Doe", as this is technically below their rank. Do not abbreviate "Professor",[3] even in addresses or image captions, unless absolutely necessary (and then with a full stop: Prof. Keller).

In the UK, **holders of doctoral degrees who have an academic rank lower than full professor** (lecturers, senior lecturers and readers, or – in the US system – associate professors, assistant professors, adjunct lecturers) are generally addressed as "Dr Jane Doe", not "Ms Jane Doe" or "Professor Jane Doe".

For all academics, whether addressed as Professor or Dr, ordinary courtesy titles like Mr, Ms and Mrs do not get added into the form of address.

2.2 Numbers

2.2.1 Words vs. numerals

Use words for numbers from one through ten; use numerals for anything greater than that.[1,2,3]

2.2.2 Special cases of numeral use

Units of measurement. Always use numerals with units of measurement,[1,3] whether the numbers are greater or less than ten. Put a space between the numeral and unit when it is written out; do not include a space when the unit is abbreviated:[1,2,3] 4 kilometres (4km), Light travels approximately 300 metres (300m) in 1 microsecond (1µs), etc.

If a **sentence starts with a number**, always spell it out[2,3] (one reason why it's best to avoid starting sentences with a year or a very large quantity): Seventy-six trombones led the big parade.

Use numerals for all numbers in sentences that contain **number ranges or several numbers, where some are less than ten and some are more than ten**:[1,2,3] There were 15 ducks and 1 goose sitting in the field. Suddenly 10 or 11 of the ducks got startled and took flight.

For **round numbers in the millions and higher**, use a numeral along with the word or abbreviation: 10 trillion cells make up the human body, more than 2 million seconds in the average month, etc.[1] Use the following abbreviations for these units: million = m, billion = bn, trillion = trn. **Note that in English, a billion (1,000,000,000) is the same number as a *Milliarde* in German. A *Billion* in German (1,000,000,000,000) is a trillion in English.**

2.2.3 Number-formatting conventions

Separating larger numbers. Numbers in the thousands and above are separated by commas (1,000), not apostrophes (1'000), in general texts. Some scientific texts and financial reporting use spaces as separators (1 000). This practice should not be taken over in journalistic or other non-technical texts.

Decimals (including those expressed in percent) take a full stop (17.3/99.9%), not a comma (17,3/99,9%).

Percentages. Write out "percent" as one word in running text (99.9 percent) whenever possible. Use the symbol without a space (99.9%) in tables and charts.

Ordinals. As with cardinal numbers, write out ordinals from one through ten (first, second, third etc.) and then use numerals (11th, 12th, 13th etc.).[1] The letters should **not** be superscript.[1] If it is necessary to use numerals with smaller numbers, make sure they are correct: 1st (11th, 21st, 31st), 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and so on.

2.2.4 Dates, times and currencies

Dates. Always place the date before the month (which should be spelled out) and include a four-digit year in running text: 30 November 2015.[1,2] If it's necessary to save space in tables and charts, write dates European-style (30.11.2015) not US-style (11/30/2015).[4] Using a zero before single digits improves readability and alignment in tables (09.05.2013).

Times. Always use the 12-hour clock in journalistic texts,[2] with a full stop separating hours and minutes where necessary, followed by "a.m." or "p.m.": 5.45 p.m., 9.05 a.m., 9 a.m. **Please note that 12 a.m. is midnight and 12 p.m. is noon.** In running text, using midnight/noon instead of 12 a.m./p.m. for these times can avoid confusion;[1] it may, however, be necessary to use numbers in programme schedules, tables, etc.

The 24-hour clock is often used in schedules and other texts relating to university operations. The proper format for these times is also a full stop separating hours and minutes, but no "a.m." or "p.m.": 17.45, 9.05, 9h, 9.00 etc.

Currencies. Always use numerals with currencies,[1,2] and either use symbols before the amount or spell out units following the amount: $100.00 or 100 dollars, €100.00 or 100 euros, etc. For currencies

like the Swiss franc that do not have an associated symbol, use the ISO code **before** the amount or put the units into words following the amount: CHF 2,000,000 or 2 million Swiss francs.

2.3 Capitalisation

English uses far fewer capital letters than German. Nevertheless, capital letters do have their place, especially in university job titles, academic and administrative terminology, and acronyms/initialisms. A few pointers:

2.3.1 University-related job titles and professorships

Despite the fact that English tends to use very few capital letters, universities in the UK decisively favour capitalising university-related job titles and professorships (endowed chairs as well as "normal" professor titles). This applies when titles refer to specific individuals, regardless of whether the job title comes before or after the person's name.[1,2]

Thus "ETH Zurich Vice President for Human Resources and Infrastructure Roman Boutellier", but also "Sarah Springman became the Rector of ETH Zurich in January 2015" and "Detlef Günther, Vice President for Research and Corporate Relations, is also Professor for Trace Element and Micro Analysis in the Department of Chemistry and Applied Bioscience."

When referring to multiple title holders or a professor/professors in general, do not use capital letters: "The ETH Executive Board includes three vice presidents" or "Prior to becoming the University's Rector, Springman had been a professor at ETH Zurich for more than 15 years."

2.3.2 Academic degree names

Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Bachelor's and Master's (degree/course/programme/etc.) should always be capitalised (and almost always be possessive). All elements of full degree names should be capitalised: "Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy" and "Master of Science in Science, Technology and Policy". Less formal degree names use the possessive form and subject in lower case: "did his Bachelor's in philosophy", "received a Master's degree in science, technology and policy".

Doctorates/doctoral degrees. At the doctoral level, ETH Zurich awards "Doctor of Sciences" degrees (Dr. Sc. ETH Zurich) – not PhDs – and therefore references to these programmes and degrees must be a variant of "doctorate", "doctoral" etc. and almost always written in lower case. For example, there are no "PhD candidates" at the University, but rather "doctoral candidates". The degree itself is a "doctorate" or a "doctoral degree". It should not be called a "Doctor's degree" as this expression is very rare and usually confined to administrative guidelines at UK universities (in the US it seems mainly to apply to training programmes for medical doctors).

2.3.3 Miscellaneous academic capitalisation

Capitalise "University" when it refers to ETH Zurich: "ETH Zurich is one of the leading international universities for technology and the natural sciences. The University has more than 18,500 students from over 110 countries."[1,2]

Subjects and degree programme titles. Academic s**ubjects and fields are** generally not capitalised ("He took a chemistry course to broaden his horizons"), except when used as part of official degree programme titles: "a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry"[2] etc.

Official department names should be capitalised – "the Department of Architecture" – but not their descriptive forms: "the architecture department".[1]

Autumn Semester (AS) and **Spring Semester (SS)** should be capitalised.[2,4]

2.3.4 Acronyms and initialisms

Use all caps for **acronyms** (abbreviations that are read as words: NATO, AIDS, etc.) and **initialisms** (abbreviations that are read as individual letters: ETH, EPFL, etc.).[1,3] When introducing one for the first time in a text, put it in parentheses after the full name: "the Energy Science Center (ESC)".[1,2,3] Note that ETH Zurich often uses German acronyms for English organisation names, e.g. "the Swiss Seismological Service (SED)".

Very generally speaking, **acronyms** (read as words) do not require "the" before them (e.g. EAWAG, NASA, UNICEF); for **initialisms** (read as letters), use the article (e.g. the BBC, the WHO, the FBI).[3] However, there are quite a few cases of initialisms that do **not** take the article: first and foremost for us, "ETH" – and other universities as well (MIT, UCSF, LSE and so on).

2.3.5 (Sub)headings, headlines and titles of works

(Sub)headings and headlines. Use sentence-style capitalisation, i.e. capitalise only the first word and any others that would normally be capitalised in running text:[1,2] What physics students can learn from philosophers; A rail expert for the Executive Board.

Titles of books, magazines, films etc. Capitalise the first word and all other words in the title except articles (a/an/the), prepositions (to/through/towards/since/with/etc.), and conjunctions (and/or/but/then because/etc.):[1] *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, ETH Zurich's *Globe* magazine.

2.4 Punctuation

2.4.1 Quotation marks ("...")

Always use double quotation marks:[4] "ETH is a shining beacon, steadily rising in stature across the rankings' first five years [...]". Note that **quotes inside of quotes** will therefore take single quotation marks to distinguish them:[4] "Rankings editor Phil Baty was quoted as saying that 'ETH is a shining beacon, steadily rising in stature across the rankings' first five years, thanks in part to its focused global outlook.'" Take care to avoid carrying over any non-English quotation marks (e.g. «Swiss-style *guillemets*» or „*Anführungszeichen*").

Punctuating quotations. Place commas and full stops inside quotation marks when they are part of a full sentence in a quotation or its connection to surrounding material. When quotation marks are used for an individual phrase, leave punctuation outside the quotation marks.[2] For example:

> Heinrich is convinced that we can resolve these challenges, and so he does not like the term "resource curse". "It's unnecessarily negative," he says.

Place question marks and exclamation marks according to whether they are actually part of the quoted material.[1] For example:

> He cried, "You did what?"
> Did you just say, "I'm out of here"?

2.4.2 Apostrophes (') and commas (,)

Apostrophes. Use an apostrophe with a noun to indicate possession (ETH Zurich's world-renowned research) and for contractions (He is going → He's going).[1,2] Mistakes often occur with "its" and "it's": "its" is a possessive pronoun so it doesn't need an apostrophe (The dog jealously guarded its food); "it's" is a contraction of "it is" (Today it's supposed to rain).[1] Apostrophes are **not** used to separate large numbers (1,000 **not** 1'000), nor are they used to make plurals (as seen at a Zurich restaurant: Indian Curry's).[1]

Commas are placed between clauses in sentences[2] and elsewhere as needed to indicate a natural pause/breath in the sentence. It seems that commas are becoming rather rare in English, especially in British English, which may not be such a good thing as they do provide readers with orientation when navigating long, complex sentences.

When joining two otherwise complete sentences, the comma must be followed by a coordinating conjunction: "and", "but", "or", "for", "nor", "yet", or "so". "And", "but" and "or" are the most common coordinating conjunctions and fairly self-explanatory. A few sample sentence structures for the others (from *Wikipedia*):

> They do not gamble or smoke, for they are ascetics. (for = reason why)
> They do not gamble, nor do they smoke. (nor = both options negative)
> They gamble, yet they don't smoke. (yet = contrast or exception)
> He gambled well last night, so he smoked a cigar to celebrate. (so = consequence)

Commas separate items in a list: "apples, bananas, persimmons and pears". UK English generally does not favour the mandatory use of Oxford commas (the last comma in a list right before "and"). Use a comma before the final "and" only when necessary to avoid confusion, as in this example from The Economist *Style Guide:*

> The doctor suggested an aspirin, half a grapefruit and a cup of broth. But he ordered scrambled eggs, whisky and soda, and a selection from the trolley.

When individual items in a list already contain commas, use semicolons to separate them: David Sedaris's current US book tour includes stops in Portland, Maine; Spokane, Washington; and San Francisco, California.

Commas separate numbers starting at 1,000. Note that scientific and financial publications often use spaces (1 000) rather than commas for this. Journalistic and general texts should not adopt this practice, however.

2.4.3 Full stops (.) and exclamation marks (!)

Full stops. Full stops end declarative sentences and separate decimals (17.3/99.9% etc.). They are also used to punctuate some – but by no means all – abbreviations.

Full stops in acronyms and abbreviations. The general rule in British English is to omit full stops from all acronyms/initialisms (ETH, BBC, UN, WHO etc.) and from any abbreviations that include the first and last letter of the full word. For example, the title of "Doctor" is abbreviated as "Dr" (not "Dr.", as in American English). Other common honorifics (all without full stop) include "Mr", "Mrs" and "Ms". ("Professor" does not get abbreviated.) Abbreviations using full stops include days of the week (Mon., Tue., Wed., Thur., Fri., Sat., Sun.), months (Jan., Feb., Mar., Apr., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec.) and various Latin-derived abbreviations (a.m./p.m., e.g., i.e., et al., etc.).

Exclamation marks. The exclamation mark is used rather rarely in English and should generally be reserved for true surprise or more forceful imperatives. In marketing and other creative texts, it can be used more freely.

2.4.4 Colons (:) and semicolons (;)

Colons. Colons join two parts of a sentence when one part defines or explains the other. The two parts can be of equal or unequal length/completeness: they can both be complete sentences, or one part can be as short as a single word. Some examples:

> Discontent is the want of self-reliance: it is infirmity of will. (Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance")
> Squiggly missed only one friend: Aardvark. (from Grammar Girl's article on semicolons)

Use colons to introduce bullet lists.[2] Do not place any punctuation at the end of individual lines of a bullet list. If the bullet list forms part of a complete sentence, introduce it in the preceding text with a colon and place a full stop at the end of the last bullet.

Throughout the course of the team-building workshop, participants will:
- assess the current strengths and weaknesses of their team dynamic
- analyse and formulate a team vision
- brainstorm ideas on how to get there
- design three immediately actionable strategies.

If the bullet list is simply a list of items, do not punctuate any of the bullets, just introduce the list with a colon. For example:

On rainy days, you are asked to bring:
- sturdy shoes
- waterproof clothing
- something warm to drink

Semicolons. Semicolons are something of a hybrid between commas and full stops. They are used to join sentences, but each sentence must be complete and otherwise able to stand on its own.[1,2] The semicolon usually implies that the sentences are more closely related than if they were separated by a full stop, but unlike with commas, you can also use a semicolon without a coordinating conjunction (see **Commas**):

For truly foreign words, consider whether there is an equally good English alternative; if there is, use it.

Semicolons can thus be used to add variety to sentence structure in a text by combining two short, perhaps choppy sentences into a more elegant length.

Use semicolons to separate items in a list if one or more items have a comma in them:[2] David Sedaris's current US book tour includes stops in Portland, Maine; Spokane, Washington; and San Francisco, California.

2.4.5 Dashes (–), hyphens (-) and minus signs (−)

En-dashes (the shorter dashes) are used as the "to" in date and number ranges, e.g. pp. 157–65.[2] The ETH Corporate Design also uses en-dashes as bullets in creating lists, followed by an em-space. The longer **em-dash** is not used in the corporate design.

Hyphens are used to join multi-word adjectives that come **before** their nouns:[1] ETH provides students with a first-rate education (but: An ETH education is first rate.). Do not hyphenate adverbs that end in "-ly" when they are used with adjectives: a hotly debated issue, **not** a hotly-debated issue.[1,2]

The minus sign looks very similar to an en-dash, but it is a unique character used to express negative quantities (Word shortcut: Ctrl + Alt + -). In particular, hyphens should never be used in place of a minus sign.

2.4.6 Umlauts and foreign words with accents (diacritics)

Umlauts. Use accepted English equivalents whenever possible, e.g. Zurich (not Zürich) but leave umlauts when a **street or place name** has no English equivalent (Rämistrasse, not Raemistrasse). For **surnames**, check the person's preference whenever possible; if this is impossible, leave the umlaut.

Foreign words with accents/diacritical marks. If a foreign word has been naturalised into English without its original accents, leave them away (e.g. *à propos* → apropos). As many foreign words have been naturalised into English **with** their native accents (café, vis-à-vis, raison d'être), it is best to check the dictionary to be sure. For truly foreign words, consider whether there is an equally good

English alternative; if there is, use it. Sometimes a word must indeed be written in a foreign language, for example during a lengthy and detailed discussion of a concept that does not exist in English, such as *Gymnasium*. Then put the word in italics.

2.5 Formatting titles of works

Capitalise the first word and all other words in the title except articles (a/an/the), prepositions (to/through/towards/since/with etc.), and conjunctions (and/or/but/then/because etc.).[1]

Books, magazines, films, radio and TV programmes, albums, sculptures, ballets, operas, ship names in italics:[1,2] Thomas Kuhn's groundbreaking book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, ETH Zurich's *Globe* magazine, Rossini's classic comic opera *The Barber of Seville*, the Viking ship *Vasa*.

Any such titles that appear within other major titles are then written in normal type: The Economist *Style Guide* (when written in running text: *The Economist*). See also **Capitalisation**.

Articles, book chapters, poems, songs in quotation marks: "Normal Science as Puzzle-solving", "Black Holes Ain't So Black", etc. See also **Capitalisation**.

3 Professional correspondence in English

Correspondence and other writing often take a more casual tone in the English-speaking world than their German counterparts do. Even in professional environments, correspondents quickly move from "Dear Professor X" to "Hi Rachel" when beginning their emails, and once an exchange has gone back and forth a few times within a short period, it's not unusual to get rid of salutations and closings altogether while continuing a specific discussion. It's common to exchange pleasantries or make jokes (or engage in idle chit-chat, depending on your point of view).

That said, the majority of people using English at international institutions like ETH Zurich are probably not native speakers, so it's best to take your cues from the person you're dealing with regarding things like first names and the level of formality.

3.1 Salutations and closings

English-speakers typically only use a person's highest academic title when addressing or writing about them. This means that those holding the title of **full professor** should be called (only) "Professor Jane Doe" – not "Prof. Dr. Jane Doe" as they would be in German – even if they also hold a doctoral degree.[4] Full professors are likewise generally not addressed as "Dr John Doe", as this is technically below their rank. Do not abbreviate "Professor",[3] even in letter addresses or image captions, unless absolutely necessary (and then with a full stop: Prof. Keller).

In the UK, holders of doctoral degrees who have an academic rank lower than full professor (lecturers, senior lecturers and readers, or – in the US system – associate professors, assistant professors, adjunct lecturers) are generally addressed as "Dr Jane Doe", not "Ms Jane Doe" or "Professor Jane Doe". In the US, almost all academic teaching staff are called "Professor".

For all academics, whether addressed as Professor or Dr, ordinary courtesy titles like Mr, Ms and Mrs do not get added into the form of address.

3.2 Email vs. letters

Much of the advice available on professional correspondence concerns actual written letters, as letters have a very long history and therefore more broadly accepted conventions. By its nature email is far more ephemeral and informal, and thus the "rules of etiquette" function more as guidelines or descriptions of current practice. For example, "Best regards" is used very often to close formal business emails even though "Yours sincerely" is the traditional closing of a formal business letter – as Adrian Wallwork puts it in *English Correspondence for Academic Correspondence and Socializing*, "If in doubt how to end your email, use *Best regards*". Light-hearted expert discussions about email etiquette such as this one from *Forbes* magazine or this on businessinsider.com show the general lack of consensus.

Nevertheless, the chart on the following page shows a few options for letters that should also serve you well when writing emails.

Type of letter	Salutation	Closing	Remarks
Formal **Known recipient**	Dear Professor Springman,	Yours sincerely, Sincerely,	Used writing to an academic or business contact for the first time.
Formal **Unknown recipient**	Dear Sir or Madam,	Yours faithfully,	This is used for initial contact with an "unknown recipient" in the sense that **you do not know the name of the person** you are writing to, **not that you have never met the person before.** Make every effort to find out the identity of the recipient.
Formal **Known recipients**	Dear Professor Springman and Dr Curry, Dear Colleagues,	Yours sincerely, Sincerely,	Repeating "Dear" for each recipient is generally not done in English. Avoid "Dear Sirs" in favour of "Dear Sir or Madam".
Formal **Unknown recipients**	Dear Sir or Madam,	Yours faithfully,	This is used when writing to multiple "unknown recipients" (probably a rare occurrence anyway) in the sense that **you do not know the names of the people** you are writing to, **not that you have never met the people before.** Make every effort to find out the identities of the recipients.
Less formal **Single recipient**	Dear Sarah, Hello Sarah,	Best regards, Kind regards, Best,	Salutations and closings can be used together as you wish.
Less formal **Multiple recipients**	Dear all, Hello everyone,	Best regards, Kind regards, Best,	Repeating "Dear" for each recipient is generally not done in English. Salutations and closings can be used together as you wish.

4   The cheat sheet

Topic	English: yes	English: no	Notes
1.1 GENERAL NOTES			
Inclusive language: disability	disabled people/people with disabilities blind/visually impaired people wheelchair user person (living) with cancer	the disabled the blind wheelchair-bound/confined cancer victim	See the UK Office for Disability Issues' guidance on inclusive language and the British Council guide to promoting disability equality for more information.
Inclusive language: gender	Students who fail to appear at their final exams will have to repeat the course. If a student fails to appear at her/his final exam, s/he will have to repeat the course.	If a student fails to appear at his final exam, he will have to repeat the course.	Do not use "he" to stand in for all people. Try using plural constructions (as in the first example here) or rewrite the sentence.
2.1 ETH-SPECIFIC AND ACADEMIC GUIDELINES			
British English using "s" spellings	paralyse analyse orthopaedic centre labelling (double l)	paralyze analyze orthopedic center (except when part of proper name) labeling (single l)	Check the Cambridge Dictionary in cases of uncertainty. Oxford also has good resources explaining the differences between UK and US English in spelling and common expressions.
No article with ETH, except when used as adjective	ETH Zurich was established in 1855. the ETH Zurich Department of Physics	The ETH Zurich was established in 1855. ETH Zurich Department of Physics	Compare: MIT (not "the MIT"), UC and its campuses (e.g. UC San Francisco/UCSF), UCL (University College London), LSE (London School of Economics)
Capitalise "University" when it refers to ETH Zurich	The University has more than 18,500 students from over 110 countries.	The university has more than 18,500 students from over 110 countries.	

Topic	English: yes	English: no	Notes
Department names	Department of Physics physics department	department of physics Physics Department Physics department	Only the official name of the department should be capitalised.
Semesters	Autumn Semester Spring Semester	autumn semester/spring semester Autumn semester/Spring semester	
Subjects and degree programme titles	a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry He took a chemistry course to broaden his horizons.	a Bachelor of Science in chemistry He took a Chemistry course to broaden his horizons.	Capitalise subjects and fields only when used as part of official degree programme titles.
Bachelor's, Master's, doctorate/doctoral	Bachelor's degree/course/programme Master's degree/course/programme doctorate (descriptive name of degree), doctoral course/programme/candidate	bachelor's master's Doctorate or Doctoral	Bachelor/Master is incorrect in English except as part of an official degree title, e.g. "Bachelor of Science in Chemistry" (but "Bachelor's in chemistry"). ETH does not award PhDs, so "doctorate" and variants must be used.
University-related job titles	Detlef Günther, Vice President for Research and Corporate Relations, is also Professor for Trace Element and Micro Analysis. Sarah Springman became the Rector of ETH Zurich in January 2015.	Detlef Günther, vice president for research and corporate relations, is also Professor for trace element and micro analysis. Sarah Springman became the rector of ETH Zurich in January 2015.	Capitalise university-related job titles and professorships when they refer to specific individuals.
Honorifics for academics	Professor Jane Doe (full professor) Dr Faye Curry (non-professor university teacher with doctorate)	Prof. Dr. Jane Doe/Prof. Jane Doe Professor Faye Curry	This reflects UK usage. In the US, university teaching staff are almost universally addressed as "Professor". Do not abbreviate Professor, and do not combine Mr/Ms/Mrs with Dr or Professor.
2.2 NUMBERS			Write out numbers one through ten.

Topic	English: yes	English: no	Notes
Units of measurement	4 kilometres/4km Light travels approximately 300 metres/300m in 1 microsecond/1μs	four kilometres/4 km Light travels approximately three hundred metres in 1 μs	Use numerals with units, including a space when written out but not with the abbreviation.
Numbers above and below ten in same sentence	There were 15 ducks and 1 goose sitting in the field.	There were 15 ducks and one goose sitting in the field.	Use numerals for all numbers in the sentence.
Round numbers in millions and higher	2 million or 2m 10 trillion or 10trn	two million or 2 m 10,000,000,000,000 or 10 trn	Abbreviations for these units: million = m, billion = bn, trillion = trn. Put a space before the unit when written out but not with the abbreviation.
Separating large numbers	1,000 31,000,000	1'000 31'000'000	Some scientific publications and financial reporting separate large numbers with spaces (1 000). Use commas in journalistic and general texts.
Decimals	17.3	17,3	
Percentages	99.9 percent 99.9%	99.9 per cent 99.9 %	Write out "percent" as one word in running text whenever possible. Use the symbol without a space in tables and charts.
Ordinals	first, second, third etc. up to tenth 11th, 12th, 13th	1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc. – unless space is really an issue 11th, 12th, 13th	Make sure letters in ordinals are correct: 1st (11th, 21st, 31st), 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and so on
Ranges	18–25 9.15–10.30 a.m.	18-25 9.15—10.30 a.m.	Separate with an en-dash, not a hyphen (and not an em-dash, which is even longer).
Dates	30 November 2015 30.11.15 (use European format: dd.mm.yy) 09.05.15 (add 0s for alignment in tables)	30th November 2015 November the 30th 2015 November 30, 2015 11/30/15 (this is US format: mm/dd/yy) 9.5.15 (more difficult to align in tables)	Always put day first (just the numeral), spell out months and use a four-digit year in running text.

Topic	English: yes	English: no	Notes
Times **12-hour** **(preferred format)**	5.45 p.m. 9.05 a.m. 9 a.m.	17.45 9:05 9h	Separate hours and minutes with full stops. **Note that 12 a.m. is midnight and 12 p.m. is noon.**
Times **24-hour**	17.45 9.05 9h	17:45 17.45 p.m. 9:05 9 o'clock	**Journalistic texts should always use the 12-hour clock.** Separate hours and minutes with full stops.
Currencies	$100.00 or 100 dollars €100.00 or 100 euros CHF 2,000,000 or 2 million Swiss francs	one hundred dollars EUR 100 Sfr. 2 million 2,000,000 CHF	For currencies like the Swiss franc that do not have an associated symbol, use the ISO code **before** the amount or put the units into words following the amount
<u>**CAPITALISATION**</u>			Use lowercase whenever possible.
University-related job titles	Detlef Günther, Vice President for Research and Corporate Relations, is also Professor for Trace Element and Micro Analysis. Sarah Springman became the Rector of ETH Zurich in January 2015	Detlef Günther, vice president for research and corporate relations, is also Professor for trace element and micro analysis. Sarah Springman became the rector of ETH Zurich in January 2015	Capitalise university-related job titles and professorships when they refer to specific individuals
Academic degree names	Bachelor's degree/course/programme Master's degree/course/programme doctorate (descriptive name of degree), doctoral course/programme/candidate	bachelor's master's Doctorate or Doctoral	Bachelor/Master is incorrect in English except as part of an official degree title, e.g. "Bachelor of Science in Chemistry" (but "Bachelor's in chemistry"). ETH does not award PhDs, so "doctorate" and variants must be used.
Capitalise "University" when it refers to ETH Zurich	The University has more than 18,500 students from over 110 countries.	The university has more than 18,500 students from over 110 countries.	

Topic	English: yes	English: no	Notes
Subjects and degree programme titles	a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry He took a chemistry course to broaden his horizons.	a Bachelor of Science in chemistry He took a Chemistry course to broaden his horizons.	Capitalise subjects and fields only when used as part of official degree programme titles
Department names	Department of Physics physics department	department of physics Physics Department Physics department	Only the official name of the department should be capitalised.
Semesters	Autumn Semester Spring Semester	autumn semester/spring semester Autumn semester/Spring semester	
Acronyms and initialisms	ETH EAWAG AIDS	Eth Eawag Aids	Put acronyms and initialisms in all caps.
(Sub)headings and headlines	What physics students can learn from philosophers A rail expert for the Executive Board	What Physics Students Can Learn from Philosophers *A rail expert for the Executive Board*	Sentence-style capitalisation: first word and any words that would be capitalised in a normal sentence. No italics, no quotation marks.
Titles of books, magazines, films, etc.	*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* ETH Zurich's *Globe* magazine	The structure of scientific revolutions ETH Zurich's "Globe" magazine	Put in italics and capitalise the first word of the title and then all words except articles (a/an/the), prepositions and conjunctions.
PUNCTUATION			
Quotation marks	"Double quotation marks", "and 'quotes within quotes'"	«Guillemets» „Anführungszeichen"	Use double quotation marks in all cases. (Single marks for quotes within quotes.)
Punctuating quotations	He cried, "You did what?" Did you just say, "I'm out of here"? Heinrich does not like the term "resource curse". "It's unnecessarily negative," he says.	He cried, "You did what"? Did you just say, "I'm out of here?" Heinrich does not like the term "resource curse." "It's unnecessarily negative", he says.	Question marks and exclamation marks go with the actual question/exclamation. Commas and full stops go outside the quotation marks when quoting a phrase and inside when quoting a full sentence.

Topic	English: yes	English: no	Notes
Apostrophes	ETH Zurich's (possessive) He said he's going. (contraction: he is)	ETH Zurichs He said hes going.	Note that the possessive of "it" is "its" (without apostrophe). "It's" means "it is". **Not** used to separate numbers (1,000 not 1'000) or create plurals (curries, not curry's).
Commas	They do not gamble or smoke, for they are ascetics. (example sentence from *Wikipedia*)	They do not gamble or smoke, they are ascetics.	A comma cannot connect two complete sentences without "and", "or", "for" or similar connecting words.
	The doctor suggested an aspirin, half a grapefruit and a cup of broth. But he ordered scrambled eggs, whisky and soda, and a selection from the trolley.	But he ordered scrambled eggs, whisky and soda and a selection from the trolley.	Use a comma before the final item in a list if leaving it away will create confusion (example from The Economist *Style Guide*).
	1,000	1'000 1 000	Commas separate numbers starting at 1,000. Scientific and financial publications often use spaces rather than commas for this, but journalistic and general texts should not adopt this practice.
Full stops	99.9%	99,9%	Full stops separate decimals (also in currencies).
	WHO Dr Prof.	W.H.O. Dr. Prof	Do not use full stops in acronyms/initialisms (e.g. WHO). Abbreviations that contain both the first and last letter of the word don't need a full stop (Dr). Others do (Prof.).
Exclamation marks	"Pleased to meet you," she said. "Hey!" he shouted.	"Pleased to meet you!" she said. "Hey," he shouted.	Used sparingly in English except in marketing and other creative texts.
Colons	Discontent is the want of self-reliance: it is infirmity of will.	Discontent is the want of self-reliance, it is infirmity of will.	Colons join two parts of a sentence when one part defines or explains the other.

Topic	English: yes	English: no	Notes
Punctuating bullet lists	Throughout the course of the team-building workshop, participants will: • assess the current strengths and weaknesses of their team dynamic • etc.	Throughout the course of the team-building workshop, participants will • assess the current strengths and weaknesses of their team dynamic; • etc.	Use a colon to introduce a bullet list. Do not put any punctuation at the end of individual items. The last bullet gets a period if the list forms part of a complete sentence; if it's just a list of items, do not use end punctuation.
Semicolons	For truly foreign words, consider whether there is an equally good English alternative; if there is, use it.	For truly foreign words; consider whether there is an equally good English alternative.	Semicolons are used to join sentences, but each sentence must be complete and otherwise able to stand on its own.
	David Sedaris's current US book tour includes stops in Portland, Maine; Spokane, Washington; etc.	David Sedaris's current US book tour includes stops in Portland, Maine, Spokane, Washington, etc.	Semicolons separate list items that already have commas.
Dashes	See pp. 157–65	See pp. 157-65	Used as the "to" in date and number ranges
Hyphens	ETH provides students with a first-rate education.	ETH provides students with a first rate education	Used to join multi-word adjectives that come before their nouns
Minus signs	It was –10 degrees overnight.	-10	Negative quantities take a dedicated "minus sign" symbol, not a hyphen or a dash (Word shortcut: Ctrl + Alt + -).
Umlauts and foreign words with accents (diacritical marks)	Zurich Rämistrasse café *Gymnasium*	Zürich Raemistrasse cafe gymnasium/Gymnasium	Leave umlauts when there is no accepted English equivalent of the name. Leave accents on naturalised foreign words according to how they are written in an English dictionary. Put truly foreign words in italics.
FORMATTING TITLES OF WORKS			

Topic	English: yes	English: no	Notes
Books, magazines, films etc.	*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* ETH Zurich's *Globe* magazine	"The structure of scientific revolutions" ETH Zurich's "Globe" magazine	Put in italics and capitalise the first word of the title and then all words except articles (a/an/the), prepositions and conjunctions.
Articles, book chapters, songs etc.	"Normal Science as Puzzle-solving" "Black Holes Ain't So Black"	"Normal science as puzzle-solving" *Black Holes Ain't So Black*	Use normal type and put in quotation marks. Capitalise the first word of the title and then all words except articles (a/an/the), prepositions and conjunctions.
<u>**PROFESSIONAL CORRESPONDENCE**</u>			See chart at the end of <u>Chapter 3</u> for a quick guide to professional correspondence in English.

5 "False friends" and tricky translations

GERMAN	ENGLISH, RIGHT AND WRONG; WITH GERMAN EQUIVALENTS FOR ENGLISH "FALSE FRIENDS"
aktuell	current ≠ actual (tatsächlich)
Amok/Amokläufer	attacker, school/campus shooter ≠ amok "Amok" does not exist in English in this sense. To "run amok" can indicate violence, but usually of an angry mob.
eventuell	possibly, potentially ≠ eventually (irgendwann, schliesslich)
Billion	trillion (1,000,000,000,000) ≠ billion (Milliarde: 1,000,000,000)
bis	until, by Hop up and down **until** I say stop. Applications must be received **by** Friday, 13 November. These are two separate meanings that each require the correct word.
Engagement/engagiert	commitment/committed, involvement/involved, dedication/dedicated ≠ engagement/engaged (Verlobung, besetzt [toilet, telephone line])
familiär	(relating to) family ≠ familiar (vertraut, bekannt)
Fotoshooting	photo shoot ≠ photo shooting A "shooting" in English almost always involves a gun, although you will see "photo-shooting tips" and similar uses as part of an adjective.
Fraktion	faction, political party or group ≠ fraction (Bruchteil)

ggf.	possibly, if necessary/applicable/appropriate
	no equivalent abbreviation in English
Gymnasium	secondary school (UK), high school (US)
	≠ gymnasium (Turnhalle)
Handy	mobile (phone) (UK), cell (phone) (US)
	≠ handy (praktisch)
Hochschule	college/university (tertiary level institution)
	≠ high school (secondary level = Gymnasium)
Know-How	expertise, skills
	≠ know-how
	This is a subtle distinction. In English, "know-how" has a much more practical bent and is generally used to describe hands-on skills and practical knowledge rather than technical expertise.
Kompetenz, kompetent	expertise, excellence (or institutional authority); (highly) skilled, expert
	≠ competence, competent
	Although "competence" or "competency" can take on different shades of meaning in different contexts, in ordinary English it is essentially a mistranslation of *Kompetenz*. To be "competent" in English is nothing special and often suggests there is nothing better to be said about your skills. The use of the word in a more positive sense crops up most frequently in IT and business operations settings (as "centres of competence"). It is nevertheless widespread and understood/accepted in continental Europe, including in name of the Swiss National Centres of Competence in Research (NCCRs).
	A Google search for "centre of competence" restricted to UK university websites (21,100 hits) yields far more references to continental European organisations (especially the Swiss NCCRs) than links to similarly named UK institutions. Searching the same websites for "centre of excellence" (108,000 hits) takes you directly to the homepages of UK academic and research organisations like the British Heart Foundation Cambridge Centre of Excellence at the University of Cambridge and University College London's Academic Centre of Excellence for Cyber Security Research.
konsequent	consistent, consistently
	≠ consequent, consequently (folglich, deswegen)

Kontroller (Beruf), kontrollieren	management accountant; to check, monitor, verify ≠ control except in specific settings This concept can be difficult to pin down, but generally speaking, "control" in English suggests having the power to dictate the actions of others (Stephanie Shellabear, *False Friends in Business English*, p. 53). You will therefore find many cases where "control" is incorrect: e.g. things like "Kontrolle des Handgepäcks", which the Swiss Federal Chancellery translates as "hand baggage check", or "Kontrolle der Stimmberechtigung" ("verification of eligibility to vote"). In financial contexts, you will most often see references to "financial control" in the ordinary sense of financial management and keeping expenditures under control – not "controlling" in the sense of checking whether regulations are adhered to etc. The UK equivalents to ETH Zurich's "Finance & Controlling" unit are most often called the "Finance Division", "Finance Department" or "Finance Office". "Finance and Controlling" comes up most frequently in connection with accounting software from SAP (a German company).
Milliarde (see also Billion)	billion (1,000,000,000) A German *Billion* is an English trillion (1,000,000,000,000)
Mobbing, mobben	bullying, harassment; to bully or harass ≠ mobbing, to mob Workplace **harassment** can damage morale. Many schoolchildren have to contend with **bullying** at some point during their education. Any angry **mob** threw rocks at police. Elvis was **mobbed** by hordes of lovestruck teenagers. (surrounded by an aggressive or excited crowd)
Oldtimer	antique/classic/veteran car ≠ old timer (alte Hase)
Personal	personnel/staff ≠ personal (persönlich, privat)
Physiker	physicist ≠ physician (Arzt/Ärztin)
Preis	price (the cost of something), prize (an award for achievement) These are two separate meanings that each require the correct word.

Prof. Dr.	Professor "Prof. Dr." does not exist in English. Use only a person's highest title ("Professor" for full professors, "Dr" for professors of lower rank who hold doctorates) and do not abbreviate "Professor".
Public Viewing	a viewing (opportunity to see the deceased before a funeral) that is open to public ≠ public event to watch football etc.
Publikum	audience ≠ public (Öffentlichkeit)
Rezept	recipe (cooking instructions), prescription (from the doctor) ≠ receipt (Quittung) "Recipe" and "prescription" are two separate meanings that each require the correct word.
seit	since, for Lino Guzzella has been the President of ETH Zurich **since** January 2015. He had been in office **for** just over ten months at the time of writing. **Hint:** Using "since" when you should use "for" – e.g. "I've lived in Zurich since 10 years" – is a common error. Use "since" when referring to a specific point in the past (since last year, since 1995, since I can remember etc.) and "for" when saying how long something has been happening (for a week, for 10 years, for all eternity).
sensibel	sensitive ≠ sensible (vernünftig, sinnvoll)
sogenannte	known as (or just leave it out) ≠ so-called "So-called" in English almost always implies that the description is false or misleading.
zirka	approximately, around ≠ circa/ca. in most contexts "Circa" is almost exclusively used with dates in English, e.g. "Socrates (born ca 470 BCE)", and is usually abbreviated ("c" or "ca"). For other numbers, use "approximately" or "around" to indicate that they are not precise.
z.B.	e.g. (abbreviation of Latin *exempli gratia*, meaning "example given")

Annex

Notes and sources

For those interested in how the recommendations in this style guide compare with those of similar universities in the UK and other authoritative sources, the endnote reference marks in the guide indicate agreement with the following sources:

1 University of Oxford Style Guide (https://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/media_wysiwyg/University of Oxford Style Guide.pdf).

2 University of Cambridge Editorial Style Guide (https://www.cam.ac.uk/brand-resources/guidelines/-editorial-style-guide).

3 The Economist *Style Guide*, 10th edition. Profile Books (2013). Also available online at http://www.economist.com/styleguide/.

4 ETH Rectorate Style Guide (https://www.ethz.ch/services/de/lehre/glossar.html). Contact person: Katherine Hahn (katherine.hahn@let.ethz.ch).

Additional resources

English for Academic Correspondence and Socializing (2011). Adrian Wallwork. Springer Verlag.

False Friends in Business English (2011). Stephanie Shellabear. Haufe-Lexware.

"Scientific English as a Foreign Language" (2007). Nancy A. Burnham and Frederick L. Hutson. http://users.wpi.edu/~nab/sci_eng/ScientificEnglish.pdf (accessed 22 November 2015). Also available in S:\HK\Projekte\Translation and Terminology\!HK resources.

TERMDAT. Search engine for the Swiss Federal Chancellery's terminology database (German, French, Italian, Romansh, English). https://www.termdat.bk.admin.ch/Search/Search.

Wörterbuch des Hochschulwesens: deutsch-englisch (2009; updated second edition). Garrett Quinlivan. RAABE Fachverlag für Wissenschaftsinformation. Available as a PDF in S:\HK\Projekte\Translation and Terminology\!HK resources.

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