Style Guide

Introduction

Compass is a political home for all who want to build a good society – more equal, sustainable and democratic – and who believe that how we practise politics today must reflect our vision of that good society. This means that all our publications, blogs, articles, and social media must be accessible to all, respectful, and engaging.

Before writing, please answer the following three questions:
1. What do you want to say?
2. Who is the main audience?
3. What is the desired outcome/legacy?

Main points to keep in mind when writing:
- The main audience is the Compass membership and supporters of Compass.
- Other audiences may include the general public, press, policy makers, politicians, campaigners and activists.
- All our publications should be accessible to the average school leaver.
- Always be respectful, inclusive, open and accessible.
- Keep jargon to a minimum and explain all terms clearly, e.g., "neoliberalism – the ideology and practice of market fundamentalism".
- Try write as little as possible and be concise – less is more.
- Use stories and examples to explain. These change minds and make us think.
- Get into the habit of copyediting your work after you've written it with the above in mind.

Technical Style

Endnotes
We would prefer to limit reference where possible. If they are necessary, then we use Endnotes not Footnotes. We use the following format:

✓ 1. Goss S. (2014), Open Tribe, Laurence and Wishart Limited

English (UK) Spelling
Please use English (UK) spelling.

Gender
Use neutral nouns: avoid the use of man if not specifically referring to men – for manpower use workforce. Use inclusive pronouns 'he or she', or rephrase the sentence:

✗ Any observer of changes in publishing technology will perceive that **he** has need of…
✓ Observers of… will perceive that **they** have…

Beware of referring to people with stereotypical pronouns of any kind. ('the doctor treated his patient'; 'the secretary tidied her desk'). Social classes and age groups should also not be stereotyped.

Templates
All Compass publications will be published in standard templates according to the nature of the publication e.g. report or blog.

Top Ten Writing Problems to Avoid

Usually, the people we want to understand us most are also the busiest and the least engaged in what we're talking about. We've got to make our writing quick and easy to take in, and not boring or confusing or people just stop reading. This checklist will help you root out the most common problems we come across in Compass.

1.   Things left unsaid

It's your job to make sense of numbers, not your readers. If you're using examples or statistics to back up a point, don't forget to make the point in the first place.

2.   Jargon overdose

Get rid of any jargon that can be replaced by words that everyone knows. If you can't find a replacement, take pains to define exactly what it means in clear and simple language:

✗   Metropolitan regions with high levels of active transport infrastructure

✔   Cities with good cycling and walking paths

3.   Abstract language

When you read you subconsciously paint pictures in your head. Concrete, specific language and down-to-earth examples are easier to understand and digest than abstract concepts:

✗   Let's invest in tuber production

✔   Let's invest in potatoes and parsnips

4.   Passive tense overload

In the passive tense, the main subject (*italicised*) of a sentence is acted upon. The active voice is shorter and punchier because the subject does something. Use the active tense in most of your writing:

✗   A plan of action is being determined by the *board of trustees*..."

✔   The *board of trustees* are determining a plan of action"

5.   Overcomplicated words and phrases

Avoid long, academic words and phrases – they just slow down your reader and make it harder to understand:

✗   Utilise; facilitate; there is a reasonable expectation that...; endeavour.

6.   Fake nouns

A nominalisation is a noun that has been formed from a verb. For example 'reduction' from 'reduce'. Nominalisations sap the action out of your writing and make it longer:

✗   We undertook an investigation of the potatoes

✔   We investigated the potatoes

7.   Hedging horror

If you write something in a report, people already know it's your findings, and your position. No need to remind them with hedgy words and phrases like 'we suggest':

✗   We suggest that the Government could be underestimating the importance of potato wellbeing.

✔   The Government is underestimating the importance of potato wellbeing.

8.   Semi-colon shame

If your work contains semi colons please read this immediately http://theoatmeal.com/comics/semicolon

9.   Enormous sentences

As a rule of thumb, if your sentence runs over three lines then split it up or no one's going to understand it.

10. Overdoing the quotation marks

Compass 'authors' often use too many 'quotation marks' to 'distance' themselves from 'controversial' concepts, and show they 'understand' them.