*safe*food style guide 2017

Why a *safe*food style guide?

The ***safe*food** style guide ensures consistency in written documents. This is important because

- **safe*food**'s audience needs to know what to expect.
- **safe*food** is a professional body that needs to be credible and consistent in the way it writes.
- It is **safe*food**'s responsibility to communicate information clearly in an understandable way.

*safe*food's target audience

safe*food recognises that 80 per cent of its audience are consumers and 20 per cent are professionals, so **safe*food** is writing for different audiences. You need to

- Identify your audience. This will dictate the tone and content of what you write.
- Focus content on what is relevant to the audience.
- Use language the audience will relate to.

The *safe*food tone of voice

safe*food's tone of voice aims to make its values come to life and convey important information in a convincing way that sounds natural. Our tone of voice is created through

- Using plain English language that is easy to understand.
- Writing concise text that is direct and to the point.
- Not being overly formal. The tone should be conversational, particularly if writing for the consumer.
- Be cognisant of our brand attributes – trust worthy, knowledgeable, practical, relevant, approachable, and innovative.

*safe*food puts the facts first

Consumers and professionals lead busy lives and will move on quickly if they can't find the information they want, so you need to

- Hook readers immediately.
- Put key messages in the first paragraph.
- Give information in descending order of importance.

Use UK spelling and punctuation (British English)

- The preferred UK spelling of -ise, not –ize, should be used – for example, "organisation" is spelled with an "s" – except when the word is part of an official identity, such as the World Health Organization.
- Refer to Collins English Dictionary* for clarification on spellings, and hyphenation of prefixes (non-, sub-, multi- and so on). *Oxford English Dictionary uses -ize

Use double quotes ("") first, and single quotes within the double quotes if necessary. Example: "That means 'healthy', does it?" said John. You can also use double quotes to emphasise or pick out words or phrases.
- Leave a single space after full stop at the end of a sentence for print.

- Do not use the "Oxford comma" (also called the "serial comma") before "and" to separate the last of several items in a sentence. Example: Apples, milk, oranges and a newspaper (correct). Apples, milk, oranges, and a newspaper (incorrect).

Use plain English

"Plain English" is a way of writing information clearly so the audience can understand and act on it immediately. It's not about oversimplifying, or cutting out important facts.

- Use the "active voice" – "I did that", rather than "That was done by me" "Put the milk in after the butter" rather than "the milk should be put in after the butter".
- Use simple language. Explain any necessary technical terms, either in a glossary; within the text using "such as", "that is", examples and so on; or using "footnotes" (see "Reference to sources and supplementary material").
- Eliminate industry-based jargon, common sayings and expressions, and all Latin and foreign language terms unless they are unavoidable, such as "et al." and "per cent". Use "through" or "by" instead of "via".
- Don't use more words than you need. Surplus adjective or adverbs (descriptive terms) can make the meaning less clear.
- Keep sentences to between15 and 20 words where possible; a paragraph should contain at least two sentences.
- Don't write big words to impress when smaller ones would do the job.

Formal expression	Possible alternatives
request	ask
acquire	buy, get
inform	tell
assist	help
additional	more, extra
apparent	clear
enable	allow
in advance	before
initiate	begin
ascertain	find out, make sure

Document formats

Use a format with the lowest word count possible.

- Leaflets can be one- or two-sided A5.
- Research reports should include an executive summary no longer than two pages.
- Booklets should be as slim as possible. Would a leaflet suffice?
- Infographics should keep text to a minimum. Let the graphics do the work.

Abbreviations and contractions

- Common abbreviations such as Mr, Mrs and Dr do not require a full stop. Once the abbreviation starts and finishes with the first and last letter, the correct abbreviation has been made.
- Do not use abbreviated Latin terms such as "i.e.", "e.g." and "etc.". Use "that is", "for example" and "and so on" instead.
- Keep contractions such as "won't" and "don't" to a minimum, while maintaining a conversational tone for consumers. Never use contractions in scientific reports.
- st, nd, rd and th, should not be used to abbreviate words. Write "first", not "1st".

Abbreviation	Word(s)
Dr	Doctor
ed.	editor
eds	editors
Ltd	Limited
Mr	Mister or Master
Mrs	Missus or Mistress
no.	number
St	Saint
St	Street

Acronyms and initialisation

"Acronyms" are words in common use formed from the initials or first syllables of other words, such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). "Initialisation" uses the first letter of words but does not form a new word, for example "HSE" for the Health Service Executive.

- The first time initials are used they must be explained in full. Example, "The Food Safety Authority of ireland (FSAI) provides new food businesses …".
- Use full-size capitals with no full stops or spaces between initials.
- Don't use initials to begin a sentence or paragraph. Write the words in full, for example "Hepatatitis A virus is a cause of …", not "HAV is a cause of …".
- Use "the" where appropriate: the UK, the ROI; but just NI or GB.

Acronym or initialisation	Expanded term
GB	Great Britain
IOI	the island of Ireland
laser	[leave as laser]
NI	Northern Ireland
radar	[leave as radar]
ROI	the Republic of Ireland
UK	the United Kingdom
WHO	the World Health Organization

Ampersand (&)

Don't use an ampersand unless it has become part of a company's trademark, for example "Procter & Gamble".

Brackets (parentheses)

- Do not use a comma immediately before opening brackets.
- Use round brackets first, then square brackets if necessary. Example: "… (as reported by the Food Safety Authority [FSA] in Ireland)".

Capitalisation

Too many capital letters tend to upset the eye as it scans across a page, so they should be used sparingly. When deciding whether a word requires a capital letter or not, remember: proper nouns take capital letters, common nouns do not. A "proper noun" is the name of a person or place, for example the planet Earth. A "common noun" is the name of a thing, for example earth or soil.

Capitalise:

- The first letter in a sentence.
- The start of direct, or quoted, speech (for example: He said, "Eat your greens.").
- The pronoun "I".
- Titles of people and organisations (for example, President of the United States, Mrs Jones, Uncle Sam and so on).
- People's first and last names.
- Geographical place names, including countries, areas (for example, North Dublin), rivers (the River Liffey), mountains (Eagle Mountain), cities and towns.
- Languages and nationalities (French, Scottish and so on).
- Administrative bodies, for example Dublin County Council or An Bord Bainne.
- The days, weeks and months of the year – but not the seasons (spring, summer).
- Religious and other festivals, for example Easter, Ramadan, Diwali and so on.
- Legal documents (for example, EC Regulation No. 1234.
- Bills and Acts of Parliament (for example, the Water Services Act 2014).
- Books, journals, magazines, reports and articles (as well as plays and films) take "title case" capitals in text: the first and last words, and all the important words take a capital letter. These should also be italicised, for example *New Scientist*, or *New England Journal of Medicine.*

Exclamation marks (!)

Do not use exclamation marks. Use appropriate words to express surprise or humour. There is an exception for this rule on social media.

Geographical terms

Avoid	Preferred terms
(When referring to the ROI) 26 counties Free State Southern Ireland the South	the Republic of Ireland
(When referring to NI) Ulster North of Ireland 6 counties the North	Northern Ireland
the Government of the Republic	the Irish Government or the Government of Ireland
the Northern Irish Government	the Northern Ireland Assembly
the British Isles	the UK and Ireland
All-Ireland	the island of Ireland
the UK (if referring only to England, Scotland and Wales)	Great Britain

Headings

"Headings" means the title of any **safe**food publication, its sections, subsections, tables, figures, captions and any other named elements.

- Headings should be in sentence case, and do not take a full stop.
- Capitalise the first letter and essential capitals (such as proper nouns) only, for example "Foodborne viruses on the island of Ireland".
- Do not use a colon (:) in headings. Create a new a subheading for the second clause.

Internet-specific terms

Capitalise "Internet" (there is only one, therefore "Internet" is a proper noun). Other preferred spellings and capitalisation of internet-specific terms are

Drop-down menu
e-mail
extranet
Home Page
intranet
the Net
online
web page
website.

Lists

Key information, step–by–step instructions and so on should be highlighted as **bullet point** lists. Information should be presented in a relevant order, such as the most important facts first, by date or arranged alphabetically.

- Initial capital for all entries in a list.
- There are no full stops used until the end of the list unless one or more of the entries are complete sentences, in which case a full stop ends all items in the list.
- There are no semi-colons or other marks used to separate the entries in bullet or numbered lists.
- Introduce a list with a colon only if there is no introductory word or phrase (shown here in square brackets) at the end of the sentence.

Examples: John went to the shop [to]
Buy apples, oranges, milk and bread
Collect his newspaper.

Or,   John went to the shop [to buy]

- Apples
- Milk
- Oranges (in alphabetical order).

Lists can also be included within text. These are called "run-on" lists, and should also be given in a relevant order (if there is one). As an example, John went to the shop to buy groceries: apples, bread, milk and oranges (in alphabetical order).

Money

- Refer to currency, such as euro and sterling, in words in the first instance. Then the relevant symbol can be used: € for euro, £ for sterling, US$ for American dollars.
- Write "million" in full. Example: €4 million, not €4 m.
- "Euro" and "cent" do not need a plural "s" even when used in the plural sense. Examples: several million euro were set aside; they cost five cent each.

Numbers (values) in text

All numbers are to be written as numerals – 1, 2, 3 and so on – except when the number is at the start of a sentence or paragraph, in which case write the number in words in full. Example: Twelve people applied for the post; 3 were interviewed.

Percentages

Percentages should be written using numerals with the per cent sign (5%)

- There is no space between the value and the per cent sign.
- Ranges should be given as, for example, 15% to 20% (not 15 to 20%).

Reference to sources and supplementary material

*safe*food's chosen reference style is Vancouver produced in endnote when referring to another author's work within your text, and in source lines and captions for tables and graphics. This means sources of information are noted in the text, and then listed in full at the end of the chapter or publication.

- At the end of the sentence, for a single-author text, put the author's last name followed by a comma and the year of publication in parentheses. Example: … (Cuthbert, 2001). For two authors, include both last names. … (Fino and Kniel, 2008). For more than three authors, put the first author's last name followed by "et al.". … (Ettayebi et al., 2016). Multiple sources are listed as, for example: … (Cuthbert, 2001; Fino and Kniel, 2008; Ettayebi et al., 2016a, b, 2017).
- You could also write, for example, "Cuthbert (2001) notes that …", or "Ettayebi et al. (2106a) note that …", at the start of or within a sentence.

"Footnotes" should be used sparingly, to explain technical terms (if a glossary has not been used) or to refer to extra information that the reader could access about a particular topic.

- Place a number (start with 1) in a smaller font at the end of the sentence, and add the explanatory note to the bottom of the page, also in a small font.
- The note should be no longer than two sentences of small text – keep it as simple as possible.

*safe*food

*safe*food is always written in lowercase even at the start of a sentence or paragraph. *safe* is italicised, and both **safe** and **food** are in bold. *safe*food is referred to as singular and neutral.

Example: *safe*food is introducing a Nutrition Calculator to its website.

This style should be used in all official documents and correspondence with Government departments and the North South Ministerial Council.

However, it is sometimes acceptable, when indicating a sense of community, to use the plural when referring to the organisation. (This would be mostly used in internal documents and consumer pieces.)

Example: We're offering a range of new low-salt recipes at *safe*food.

safefood initiatives and other frequently used names

Eat, taste and grow
eatright.eu (lower case, even at the start of a sentence or paragraph)
Knowledge Network
lablinks (always lower case)
MediaWise
safefood *for life* (always lower case)
Safetrak
What's on a label?

Scientific names

The standard system for scientific names in biology is in Latin. Scientific names are in two parts: first the genus name, which always takes a capital letter, then the species name, which is never capitalised (even if derived from a person's name or place name).

- Give scientific names in full in the first instance; then an abbreviated version of the name may be used. Example: "*Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) is a genus of …."
- Put scientific names in italics.
- Family classifications, such as Enterobacteriaceae, take a capital but are in regular type, not italics.
- Varieties are added by writing "var." in regular type, then the variety in italics. The variety name takes a capital only if it is derived from a person's name or place name.
- Cultivars are added by writing "cv.", then the cultivar name, both in regular type. The cultivar name always takes a capital.

Time and date

- Write times in this format: 8 a.m., 9.49 a.m., and 5.43 p.m.
- Write dates in this format: 1 January, 2017.
- There is no apostrophe needed when writing, for example, "in the 1990s".
- Centuries are spelled out in full, for example "in the fifteenth century".
- It is acceptable to begin a sentence or paragraph with a year that is written in numerals. Example: 2016 saw a rise in employment.

Units of measurement

- There should be a space between the value and unit. Example: 5 cm.
- Full stops should not be used to abbreviate units of measurement, such as kg, km, cm and so on.
- In texts with few references to units of measurement, both value and unit should be written in words. Example: sixteen kilograms.
- In scientific reporting, or in a text where units of measurement are frequently referred to, use only numerals with abbreviated units. Example: 6 kg.

Finally, **review and edit your content**. Ask a colleague to read and review your work, as you may have missed something.