

ELIXIR Style Guide

[Abbreviations and acronyms](#)

[Capitalisation](#)

[Commas](#)

[Currencies](#)

[Dates and time](#)

[ELIXIR-specific terms](#)

[Ellipsis](#)

[Grammar points](#)

[Headings](#)

[Italicisation and quotation marks for titles](#)

[Lists](#)

[Names](#)

[Numbers and units](#)

[Speech](#)

[Spelling](#)

[Specific spellings](#)

[Style](#)

[Writing for the web](#)

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The ELIXIR Style Guide provides a set of standards for writing, formatting and branding to ensure consistency across all ELIXIR communications. It covers language use, formatting rules, brand identity and style preferences to maintain clarity and professionalism in ELIXIR-related content.

As any text representing ELIXIR contributes to its public presence, it's essential to maintain a clear and consistent style. This guide is intended for members of the ELIXIR Hub and Nodes who create ELIXIR content, outlining the standards for all ELIXIR-branded text, including webpages, printed documents and online reports.

In general, we follow the European Commission's [Europa Web Guide](#). As a reference guide for spelling and linguistic convention, use the [English Style Guide: A handbook for authors and translators in the European Commission](#). For grammar and spelling, check [Collins English Dictionary](#).

ELIXIR members should consider these guidelines when posting social media content, while also bearing in mind word count limitations and the more informal style requirements, e.g. for punctuation. The following Annexes of the ELIXIR Communications Strategy may be useful: [Social media guidelines for ELIXIR consortium members](#) and [Social media guidelines for account managers](#).

Abbreviations and acronyms

- Write abbreviations, acronyms and contractions in full at first mention if used more than once, e.g. European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL). If only used once, there is no need to give the abbreviation or acronym
- Don't use full stops or spaces in uppercase abbreviations, e.g. Mrs FM Barker, not Mrs F. M. Barker
- Don't use a full stop in contractions, e.g. Mr not Mr., Dr not Dr.
- Write pdf in lowercase
- Avoid using ELIXIR-specific acronyms (HoN, TrCG, etc.) on public websites and documents
- See a list of [common abbreviations and acronyms](#) on the ELIXIR website

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Capitalisation

- Titles (e.g. of books) and subtitles aren't capitalised after the first word
- In body text, no capital letter after a colon
- Follow standard conventions for capitalisation, unless using an ELIXIR-specific term (defined below), e.g. open science not Open Science, research infrastructure not Research Infrastructure, life science not Life Science
- Job titles: use initial capitals, e.g. Digital Content Editor

Commas

- No Oxford commas, i.e. don't use a comma after the penultimate item in a list of three or more items:
 - Yes – Ben went to buy rolls, milk and cheese
 - No – Ben went to buy rolls, milk, and cheese

Currencies

- For pounds, euros and dollars, use symbols, i.e. £500,000, €150 or \$60. For most other currencies (e.g. yen, rand) write out the full name, e.g. 100,000 yen

Dates and time

- Our style for the general date format is: 21 July 2016 (day month year; no commas)
- Date ranges: 21 July–6 August, 6–10 August, etc. (note: always use en dashes for date ranges)
- In the 21st century, but 21st-century boy; fourth century BC
- Use figures for decades: the 1960s, the swinging 60s
- For file naming or other tabular formats, use YYYY-MM-DD
- Use 24-hour clock rather than 12-hour clock (14:10 not 2:10pm)
- For a time period, use 16–16:30, rather than 16:00–16:30 (note en dashes)
- Times should be in CET, except for in-person meetings where the local time zone should be used

ELIXIR-specific terms

- ELIXIR: always capitalised, the only exception is the ELIXIR logo

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- Use ELIXIR to refer to the organisation as a whole, which should be sufficient in most contexts. Refer to the ELIXIR consortium when a clear distinction is needed between ELIXIR as a collective entity and its individual components – the ELIXIR Hub or Nodes. Avoid using the term ELIXIR Europe
- ELIXIR-STEERS: always capitalised and hyphenated with ELIXIR
- ELIXIR Node, ELIXIR Platform, ELIXIR Hub: Node, Platform and Hub are capitalised
- ELIXIR Communities: for ELIXIR Community names, use sentence case, i.e. Marine Metagenomics, Human Data, Rare Diseases
- ELIXIR member states (except when used in EU documents, where Member States is the accepted use)
- ELIXIR members or ELIXIR consortium members (where referring to people who are part of ELIXIR)
- ELIXIR Board
- ELIXIR Technical Coordinator Group
- ELIXIR Training Coordinator Group
- ELIXIR Node Coordinator Group
- Community Co-lead
- Heads of Node (Node in singular, Heads in plural when referring to all Heads of Node). Similarly, Heads of Node Committee
- Always write out country names in full when referring to Node countries (avoid using country codes, with the exception of the UK), e.g. ELIXIR Portugal
- No dash between ELIXIR and the country: ELIXIR Germany not ELIXIR-Germany

Ellipsis

- An ellipsis (...) has spaces before and after it, and is always three dots

Grammar points

- Use the symbol % instead of the words per cent with digits. If numbers are written out then use per cent
- If possible, avoid using passive speech, i.e. not The dog was killed by a wolf, rather The wolf killed the dog
- Avoid using exclamation marks unless absolutely necessary

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Headings

- Only capitalise the first word of a headline, e.g. New drug discovered
- Make headlines as informative as possible, e.g. Two vacancies at ELIXIR Hub rather than Two job vacancies
- Keep them as short and informative as possible. Try to include an active verb

Italicisation and quotation marks for titles

- We don't put articles in quotation marks online, just include an inline link
- Journal titles are italicised
- *et al* is italicised with no full stop after

Lists

- For a list of short items, introduce with a colon, start each bullet point with a capital and don't use punctuation at the end of each bullet point:
 - Item 1
 - Item 2
- For a list of longer items following an incomplete introductory sentence (e.g. a sentence ending in a colon), each item ends with a semicolon and the final item ends with a full stop. Don't capitalise the first letter of each item, e.g. This is the first part of a sentence that includes:
 - a longer item 1;
 - a longer item 2;
 - a longer item 3.
- For a list following a heading or a complete sentence (with a full stop), each item begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop, e.g. This a complete sentence.
 - This is item 1 of the list.
 - This is item 2 of the list.
 - This is item 3 of the list.

Names

- Titles, e.g. Dr, are not included in agendas, ELIXIR website articles or news releases

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Numbers and units

- Numbers are spelled out up to ten and then given as digits
- Four digits, no comma (1000); five digits, add comma (10,000)

Speech

- Use single quotation marks: 'I'm going to Brussels,' she said
- If a full sentence is used in speech, then it should start with a capital letter

Spelling

- UK spelling is preferred, but trade names and names of corporate bodies or firms should be left unchanged, e.g. Barcelona Supercomputing Center or CSC – Center for Science
- No -t for past tense: learned not learnt
- -ised rather than -ized endings: synthesised, globalisation
- No -st in while: while not whilst; among not amongst
- Single rather than double -s-: Focused not focussed
- Use words together where possible: worksheet not work sheet, dataset not data set, checklist not check list, keyword not key word
- English rather than Latin plurals: formulas not formulae

Specific spellings

- US not USA
- OK not okay
- interdisciplinary not inter-disciplinary
- work-life balance
- wellbeing
- master's
- policymaker not policy maker
- web, webpage, website
- problem solving, but problem-solving skills
- use case not use-case

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- email: capital E only when it starts a sentence or when mentioned in an address block. Write email addresses in lowercase, e.g. fred.bloggs@elixir-europe.org rather than Fred.Bloggs@elixir-europe.org
- program is for computer programs; programme is for conference programmes
- training: training is an uncountable noun and cannot have a plural, e.g. training courses and training materials, but not trainings. Also learning not learnings

Style

- Avoid using words too broadly, e.g. revolutionary (for minor updates), seamless (for work in progress), breakthrough (for limited progress).
- No ampersands
- Dashes should be en dashes rather than em dashes or hyphens, i.e. not They felt a little afraid - something was lurking; rather They felt a little afraid – something was lurking. This applies with date ranges, too
- Simplify urls so they don't include the initial https:// and end slash, so use elixir-europe.org instead of <https://elixir-europe.org/>

Writing for the web

Web content in general requires a direct, clear writing style. A well-structured and concise web article allows readers to scan it – to look for and pick out individual keywords while skipping over large parts of the text not immediately relevant to their goals.

Scannable text

- Is structured into short segments, labelled by meaningful headings and sub-headings
- Contains highlighted keywords (e.g. links)
- Uses bullet points
- Gets straight to the point without long introductions or welcome messages
- Uses the inverted pyramid style, where the most important information – e.g. the conclusion and main objectives – is placed at the beginning, followed by supporting information and background
- Is significantly shorter than a text for a print publication

The art of clarity

- Avoid longer words or phrases where shorter ones would do (start vs commence)
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short
- Prefer active to passive sentences. Instead of Two new Implementations studies are being launched by ELIXIR, say ELIXIR is launching two new Implementations studies
- Use simple English. Remember that people from all over the world read the website, and English may be their second or third language
- Check the readability of your text with online tools like at online-utility.org and read-able.com
- Proofread. Read the whole thing back to yourself; ask colleagues to read your writing

See the NIH Clear Communication guidelines for practical tips to make your writing easier to understand and more effective: nih.gov/clearcommunication

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Other practical tips for web content

- Links should be descriptive. Instead of Click [here](#) to visit the ELIXIR website, use Visit [the ELIXIR website](#)
- Keywords (words or phrases describing the content) placed in the headings and in the first few paragraphs help search engines better index your page
- Pages with messages such as Under construction or More information coming soon may discourage visitors from coming back. New content shouldn't be published until complete
- Justified text and centred headings make online reading more difficult
- Links to other content (both within and outside the portal) in formats other than an internet page (e.g. pdf files, videos, sound files) should be labelled accordingly