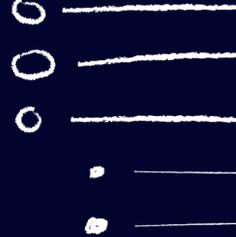


# Your *bullet-proof* guide to bulleted & numbered lists

Scratching your head every time you need to include bulleted or numbered lists in your documents?



## WHY use lists?

To draw attention to important information

To improve your reader's ability to scan information easily

To communicate information efficiently

To invite a break in the document flow

## WHEN to use lists?

You need to highlight a range of ideas, options, features or benefits

The entire list is worthy of attention

The items can be conveyed concisely

Listing the points in the body text would be cumbersome

## HOW to use lists

### Colons and capitals

Always introduce your list with a colon (:) – and start each point with a capital to make your list easier to read and scan.

#### Original

Before you write a blog post make sure you have;

- a clear brief
- the inhouse style guide
- no distractions

#### Improved

Before you write a blog post make sure you have:

- A clear brief
- The inhouse style guide
- No distractions

### Grammatical flow and logic

Your list items must make grammatical sense with the stem (or leading) sentence – and start with the same word type (e.g. a verb, a noun).

#### Original

When you use correct grammar, you will:

- Gain your reader's trust
- Communicate your ideas more clearly
- You have good attention-to-detail

#### Improved

When you use correct grammar, you will:

- Gain your reader's trust
- Communicate your ideas more clearly
- Demonstrate you have good attention-to-detail

### A consistent structure and length

Be consistent with the type of sentence you use for each point. Choose either complete sentences, partial sentences or questions – and stick with it.

Also try to make each list item similar in length.

#### Original

When proofing your document, ask yourself:

- Do you have a clear heading hierarchy?
- A consistent bullet structure
- Have I run the spell check?
- Has someone like Ruth from Accounts, who was an English teacher back in the 1980s, run their eagle eyes over it just to be sure I have absolutely no mistakes whatsoever?

#### Improved

When proofing your document, ask yourself:

- Do I have a clear heading hierarchy?
- Is my bullet structure consistent?
- Have I run the spell check?
- Who can proof my document?

### No punctuation at the end of short list items

If your list items are single words or short phrases, you don't need punctuation at the end of each list item. Nor do you need to place 'and' on the second last point.

NOTE: You can place a full stop at the end of the final list item. This is optional.

#### Original

Many writers believe semicolons are:

- Outdated;
- Redundant; and
- Pointless

#### Improved

Many writers believe semicolons are:

- Outdated
- Redundant
- Pointless

### Numbers versus bullets

Only use numbered lists when the list items represent a step-by-step process – or when your sentence stem specifies the number of items to follow (e.g. 'We have three key recommendations:').

#### Original

The writing process consists of the following four stages:

- Planning
- Drafting
- Editing
- Proofing

#### Improved

The writing process consists of the following four stages:

1. Planning
2. Drafting
3. Editing
4. Proofing

### Clear formatting for long list items

Additional text formatting for long list items will go a long way to getting your key messages across clearly and efficiently.

#### Original

When your list items are long, be sure to:

- Indent the text on subsequent lines if an item runs over one line
- Add a space between each list item to help the reader scan
- Avoid sublists (or lists within lists) where possible – but if you must use one, choose a different symbol for the list and space it out clearly:
  - Like this
  - And this
  - And this
- Bold the first word or phrase (and add a colon) to make the key idea of that list item clear and easy to scan

#### Improved

When your list items are long, use these techniques:

- **Indenting:** Indent the text on subsequent lines if an item runs over one line.
- **Spacing:** Add a space between each list item to help the reader scan.
- **Avoiding sublists:** Avoid lists within lists where possible – but if you must use one, choose a different symbol for the list and space it out clearly:
  - Like this
  - And this
  - And this
- **Bolding key ideas:** Bold the first word or phrase (and place it at the beginning of each item followed by a colon) to make the key idea easy to scan.

Looking to improve the clarity and precision of your business writing further?

[Learn more](#) about our business writing workshops.

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