

Duo Vertaalburo Style Guide



For translators and editors working in the English language for Duo vertaalburo

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General English style

Spelling and terminology

- We use Oxford English (OED) spelling - also known as British z spelling - and the [Oxford comma](#) unless otherwise specified in client instructions.
- For clients who request translations into US English we refer you to our American style guide for more detailed instructions.
- We understand that all English-speaking countries have their own specific vocabularies and are often surprised at the variations that we come across. For consistency we use UK terminology for all clients who request British z or s-spelling and US terminology for clients who request US-spelling.
- Always keep in mind the target audience of the translation.
- <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/> is a great source for double-checking the origin of words that may cause some doubt. We have learned that it is wise to question everything!

Prefixes

- Avoid using hyphens with prefixes wherever possible. Words like 'coordination' and 'precondition' should be written as one word. When in doubt, have a look at Oxford (see link above)!
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Professional and personal titles

- Many titles not known or in use in English-speaking countries may be omitted, such as 'drs.', 'ing.', and 'ir.'. **Do not** replace them with English equivalents such as BA or MA! Example: 'Mevrouw drs. I. van den Berg' should be translated as 'Ms I. van den Berg,' not 'Ms I. van den Berg MSc.'
- The lawyer's title 'mr.' should be written out in full (*meester*) and italicized. Again, **do not** replace it with an English equivalent such as LL.M. or LL.B.!
- 'Prof.' and 'dr.' (English: Prof and Dr) should be used, but not together as often seen in Dutch and German texts. As a rule, the first (the highest ranking) title should be used and the other omitted, e.g. Prof Brian Cox.
- Note that in British English, if the last letter of a contraction is the same as the last letter of the whole word, no full stop is used ('Mr'). This is in contrast with US English, which does use a full stop (period): 'Mr.'
- Of course, titles are important and if the context asks for it (such as in sworn translations) they may be included.

What to italicize and what to place between quotation marks

Always italicize:

- Book titles
- Names of newspapers, magazines, and journals
- Names of paintings, sculptures, ships, and exhibitions
- Names of films, TV programmes, and series
- Foreign words (e.g. *schadenfreude*, *glasnost*, etc.). However, if the source text italicizes an English word, do not italicize the word in the English translation. After all, it is already English!

The following should be placed between single quotation marks:

- Journal articles, newspaper articles, magazine articles
- Names of episodes of TV series

Punctuation

The Oxford comma

In running text, if three or more items/phrases are joined by 'and' or 'or,' place a comma before the conjunction. This is known as the 'Oxford comma' as it is standard practice in 'Oxford English'.

Example: I like apples, bananas, and pears. I don't like oranges, plantains, or pineapple.

Example: Hear no evil, see no evil, and speak no evil.

The exception to this is when there is a compound item in which the parts are themselves joined by a conjunction. But even in this case, there should be a comma before the conjunction joining the main items.

Example: My favourite dinners are pizza, roast chicken, and fish and chips.

Note: The abbreviation 'etc.' at the end of a list should also be preceded by a comma.

Quotation marks

We use single quotation marks as the default option, and only use double quotation marks for quotes-within-quotes. Single quotation marks are also used for words that are seen as 'unusual'. In US English, however, double quotation marks are standard in all cases, with single quotations being reserved for quotes-within-quotes. To give an example:

UK: 'I love "quotation marks"'

US: "I love 'quotation marks'"

In many languages (including Dutch), full stops and commas are placed *after* closing quotation marks. Do not transfer this into the English translation! Commas and semicolons should always be placed *within* the quotation marks (the exception here is contracts and certain other legal texts). The same is true for full stops, unless the quotation marks are being used for emphasis or to set off an 'unusual' word or phrase.

Example (incorrect): 'Welcome to my villa', he said.

Example (correct): 'Welcome to my villa,' he said.

Example (incorrect): He said, 'Welcome to my villa'.

Example (correct): He said, 'Welcome to my villa.'

Example (correct): It was just a tiny bungalow, but he called it a 'villa'.

Example (also correct): He got offended when we called it a 'tiny bungalow'.

In US English, however, commas *and* full stops are always placed within quotation marks.

In Dutch and other languages, quotes are often introduced with just the name of the person speaking, followed by a colon. This is non-standard in English and is to be avoided! It's very easy to add 'says/said,' 'points out,' 'according to,' etc., or to turn the sentence around.

Example (incorrect): Dr Smith: 'The results are surprising.'

Example (correct): Dr Smith said, 'The results are surprising.'

Example (also correct): 'The results are surprising,' explained Dr Smith.

Bullet points

While there are no hard-and-fast rules about the punctuation to use with bullet points, we follow the guidelines given by Oxford. <http://oxforddictionaries.com/words/bullet-points>

1. The text introducing the list of bullet points should end with a colon.

2. If the text that follows the bullet point is not a proper sentence, it doesn't need to begin with a capital letter and it shouldn't end with a full stop, for example:

Tonight's agenda includes:

- annual review of capital gains issues
- outstanding inheritance tax issues

3. If the text following the bullet point IS a complete sentence, it should begin with a capital letter. A full stop at the end is technically required but is not absolutely essential:

The agenda for tonight is as follows:

- We will conduct an annual review of capital gains issues.
- The senior tax manager will talk about outstanding inheritance tax issues.

4. Be consistent and maintain the same style throughout the text.

Dutch and German parentheses

Avoid the use of 'Dutch-style' parentheses! In other words, while texts in Dutch, German, etc. may use brackets to indicate variations on the same word, this should not be transferred into the English translation.

Example (incorrect): This should not be transferred into the (English) translation.

Example (correct): This should not be transferred into the English translation or translation into another language.

Example (also correct): This should not be transferred into translations, whether in English or in any other language.

It may be tempting to adopt the convenience of the Dutch style, but be creative and write in English what is actually meant rather than leaving it to the reader to interpret.

Addresses and salutations

Addresses

The addresses of companies based in the Netherlands should be presented in the following way:

'Postbus'

- Should be left in the original language

'Den Haag,' 'Praha,' etc.

- Should be left in the original language when used at the top of a letter or on the envelope, but translated if used in the general text (The Hague, Prague)

'Nederland,' etc.

- Should be translated into the target language (The Netherlands) (note that the article 'the' is capitalized in addresses, whereas it is not capitalized in running text)

'T.a.v.' or the equivalent attention line should be translated as follows:

- For the attention of or Attention or Attn. Mr C.O. Pytrust

Betreft: uw vraag

- Re: your question

Salutations and signing off

If the letter begins with the person's name, it should end with 'yours sincerely.'

Dear Mr Smith / Dear Jim,
Yours sincerely,

If the person's name is not used, end with 'yours faithfully.'

Dear Sir or Madam / Dear Sirs,
Yours faithfully,

If the letter is less formal, end with 'kind regards'.

Note: In many cases in Dutch and other languages, the title 'mevrouw' or 'Frau' does not indicate whether or not a woman is married, or whether or not the surname(s) used are her married or maiden name. In nearly all cases, it is best to address her as 'Ms'. However, if a married couple is clearly being referred to (and they have the same surname), use 'Mrs'.

Numbers, dates, and measurements

Numbers

Numbers up to and including twenty should be written as words in running text. For numbers above twenty, it depends on the context whether to use figures or words. It is, however, important to be consistent within a sentence and within a document if at all possible. In lists and tables, figures are preferable. Decimals should also be written as figures. Avoid combining number words with other figures.

Time formats

We use the 12-hour clock. Please write times as follows: 1:00 PM; 10:00 AM; 12:00 noon, 9:30 PM, 8:45 AM, etc.

Dates

Dates should preferably be written out in full to avoid confusion as to which numbers are the day, month, or year. For British English, the order is: day month year with no commas, e.g. 25 June 2012. In US English, the order is month day, year, e.g. June 25, 2012, with a comma after the day, and generally an additional comma after the year. If a day of the week is added, the British system uses no comma while the American system does use commas, e.g.: Monday 25 June 2012 (UK) / Monday, June 25, 2012 (US). Do not use st, nd, rd, or th in dates.

Currency

If currency symbols are used (such as \$, £, €), do not leave a space between the symbol and the amount, e.g. €5.00, not € 5.00. The symbol should come before the amount, not after it, as is sometimes the case in other languages. If the currency symbol is not or cannot be used, use the internationally recognized three-letter abbreviation before the figure: USD, GBP, EUR.

Don't forget to change any dots into commas and vice versa, and if a dash is used in the original text after the dot, change it to two zeros. If the extra zeros are unnecessary (e.g. in a running text), leave out the dot and any dash or zeros after it.

Example: not EUR 340.000,- but EUR 340,000.00 (or simply EUR 340,000)

If the currency name needs to be used in full, remember to distinguish plurals, e.g. a million euros, not a million euro. The same applies to dollars, pounds/pounds sterling, etc. Likewise, 'euro' should never be capitalized.

Percentages and measurements

We place a space between numbers and abbreviated units of measurement, e.g.: 1 cm, 2 m, 3 kg, 4 °C.

Example (incorrect): 3 pounds

Example (correct): three pounds

Example (also correct): £3.00

Example (incorrect) twenty-five %

Example (correct): 25%

Example (also correct): twenty-five per cent

Tonnes and hectares

Note the difference between a ton and a tonne (and a 'metric ton'). A 'ton' (also known as a long ton) in the UK is 2,240 pounds, i.e. 1016 kg. In the USA, it is 2000 pounds, i.e. 907 kg (and is also known as a short ton). What is generally meant, however, is 1000 kg, which is a tonne or a metric ton. You should therefore use tonne.

Note also that in running text, 'hectare' should generally be written out in full. The abbreviation 'ha' is acceptable in tables, lists, etc.

Subscript and superscript

Also ensure that you subscript and superscript the numbers as often seen in scientific and mathematical formulas and expressions.

E.g. CO₂, m², etc.

Miscellaneous

Names of bodies, societies, and institutes

Names of bodies that exist in other countries but have a different name should be translated.

E.g. Kamer van Koophandel Zuid-Limburg => South Limburg Chamber of Commerce, NAVO => NATO, OESO => OECD etc.

If there is no official translation of the body in English (for example, if it exists only in Dutch, German, etc.), as a general rule you should retain the foreign name, *in italics*, and add a translation in brackets afterwards if necessary, e.g.: *Vogelbescherming Nederland* (Dutch bird protection society)

Acronyms

The first time an acronym is used in the text, we recommend first writing the full name in the original language with the official acronym and the English translation, in brackets. After this first explanation, the acronym can then be used without the explanation in the rest of the translation.

Note that if an official English translation exists, it should be capitalized; otherwise it should not.

Example: The *Wet ruimtelijke ordening* (Wro, Spatial Planning Act) applies in this case.

Example: The *Wet tegemoetkoming chronisch zieken en gehandicapten* (Wtcg, Dutch chronic illness and disability allowances act) will be abolished as of 2014.

Place names and names of people

Check whether non-English place names and names of people have official English names or spellings, e.g. Aken/Aachen, Luik/Liège, Sint-Petersburg/Saint Petersburg, President Poetin/Putin, Gorbatsjov/Gorbachev, Tsjajkovski/Tchaikovsky, Maas/Meuse, Euregio Maas-Rijn/Euregio Meuse-Rhine, etc.

'Engeland' is frequently used in Dutch texts without actually referring specifically to England – many people are not aware of the difference between England, Great Britain, and the UK. Generally speaking, always translate this as 'the UK' in order to avoid excluding Scotland, Wales,

or Northern Ireland, unless it is clear that the writer does indeed mean England. The same applies to 'English' (as a nationality). 'Our British colleagues' is a safer bet than 'our English colleagues' unless it is clear that a distinction is being made with any Scottish, Welsh, or Northern Irish colleagues.

Gender

While many Dutch texts still frequently use the male pronoun as standard, it is better to try and avoid this in the English translation. While he/she, his/her are a solution, this often makes for awkward reading. It is grammatically acceptable to use gender-neutral plural pronouns.

Example: If your child is thinking about a gap year, they can get good advice from this website.

Example: A researcher has to be completely objective in their findings.

Frequently seen errors

- persons => people (except in some legal texts)
- percent => per cent (two words in British English, although one word is correct in US English; percentage is always one word, however)
- colofon => publisher's imprint (NOT colophon)
- street names in running texts should not have articles ('the'). For instance, not 'the Stokstraat' but 'Stokstraat'
- ca. => approx. (NOT circa, unless it refers to a year, e.g.: circa 1450)
- dd => dated (or sometimes 'of,' for instance: 'your letter of 24 January...')
- the Dutch 'subsidie' is in almost all cases 'grant' in English, not 'subsidy'. A grant is a lump sum paid towards covering the costs of something; a subsidy is paid to help reduce prices when selling goods or services (e.g. subsidized meals in the company canteen)
- if possible, write 'number' rather than abbreviating it to 'No.' Never use 'Nr.' or 'No'.
- Dutch writes out acronyms in lower case letters ('fte', 'hbo'), whereas the standard style in English is to write these in uppercase ('FTE', 'HBO').
- in UK English, the first word following a colon should not be capitalized.