Checklist for numbers

NALA
National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisineacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

This checklist offers a quick way for you to review how well you are presenting numbers. It is a list of questions organised under four headings:

For each document you write, use the checklist to help you present numbers in a way that is easy for readers to understand. Not all questions will apply to every document you write. Your aim is to be able to answer 'yes' as much as possible to the questions that do apply.

Checking assumptions

	Yes	No
1 Are you clear about the meaning of the numbers you are presenting?	☐	☐
2 Are you clear about what your audience needs to understand?	☐	☐
3 Have you considered the barriers to your audience understanding your message? (Examples of barriers include numeracy and literacy difficulties, stressful situations and poor sight.)	☐	☐

Following conventions and being consistent

	Yes	No
4 Have you been consistent in the way you have written:		
• units of measure (for example, weights and quantities)?	☐	☐
• time (12 hour clock or 24-hour clock)?	☐	☐
• percentages, decimals and fractions?	☐	☐
• examples to explain concepts?	☐	☐
• language?	☐	☐
5 When writing about decimal numbers, especially money, have you used the same units? For example, write €3.50 and €0.63, rather than €3.50 and 63c.	☐	☐
6 Have you used plain words to describe the behaviour of numbers? For example, instead of writing incremental growth, write gradual increase or write incremental growth followed by a simple explanation of what that means.	☐	☐
7 Have you used plain words to describe specialist terms? Examples of specialist financial terms include APR and so on. When you use these terms, always explain what they mean.	☐	☐

Numbers	**Yes**	**No**
8 Where possible, have you written numbers one to nine in words and used digits for 10 upwards?	☐	☐
9 Where a sentence starts with a number, have you written the number in words?	☐	☐
10 If it's a double-digit number over 20, have you inserted a hyphen?	☐	☐

(For example, Thirty-one.)

	Yes	**No**
11 If writing digits, have you grouped them in threes from the right (hundreds, tens and units), inserting a comma (or sometimes a space) to separate each group?	☐	☐

Examples

- Four digit numbers: 2,345

- Five or more digits: 20,999   200,400   2,345,567

- More than 20 people ...

- Ten countries share fifth place in the list of popular destinations.

- Thirty-three places have recorded ...

Phone numbers	**Yes**	**No**
12 Have you written the area code in brackets before the local number?	☐	☐
13 If the local number contains more than five digits, have you divided the digits into groups of two or three and left a space between them?	☐	☐
14 Have you divided the digits in freephone or LoCall numbers according to how easy it is to remember them?	☐	☐
15 Have you used +353 if writing an international number?	☐	☐

Examples

(01) 704 3000

LoCall 1890 20 20 65

LoCall 1890 690 690

+353 1 998 776 5544

+353 21 415 3697

Sort Codes		
16 Have you written these in three pairs? Some people write sort codes with hyphens separating the pairs.	☐	☐

For example: 83 24 05 or 83-24-05

Measures and quantities   Yes   No

17 Have you left a full space between a digit and the symbol if the   ☐   ☐
symbol is a letter?

Examples

45 g, not 45g

2 m, not 2m

18 Have you made sure you did not leave a space between a digit and a   ☐   ☐
symbol where the symbol is not a letter?

Example

32oC, not 32o C or 32 oc

19 Have you ensured there is no full stop after a symbol, except when   ☐   ☐
the symbol occurs at the end of a sentence?

Example

The vehicle, which weighted 2 t, crashed into the wall at 80 km/h.

The distance from Cork to Dublin is about 250 km.

20 Have you ensured that you have not made plurals out of symbols?   ☐   ☐

Example

1 g, 45 g (not 45 gs)

21 Have you used standard English spelling for length?   ☐   ☐

Example

metre, not meter

22 Have you used American English for weight?   ☐   ☐

Example

gram, not gramme (for example kilogram)

Percentages

23 When writing about percentages, have you used the percentage   ☐   ☐
symbol (%)?

24 Have you written percentages with digits?   ☐   ☐

For example, 20%.

25 Have you replaced 'rounded' percentages with a fraction?   ☐   ☐

Example

You will get 60% of your payment in year 1.

Almost two-thirds (64%) of applicants were successful.

People are fairly content at work – 50% of respondents say they do

not plan to change jobs in the next six months.

Keeping format and layout clear

	Yes	No
26 Have you used an appropriate format for presenting your numbers?	☐	☐
For example, written text, a table or pie chart.		
27 Have you used white space to increase readability	☐	☐
28 Have you used 1.5 line spacing where possible?	☐	☐
29 Are columns and rows ordered by size (largest to smallest)?	☐	☐
30 Are the numbers rounded off to the appropriate number of significant figures or decimal places?	☐	☐
31 Are the numbers compared by columns and not rows?	☐	☐
32 Have you avoided unfamiliar abbreviations?	☐	☐
33 Have you used a 12 point sans serif font such as Arial or Calibri?	☐	☐
34 Is your layout simple? (No grid lines or "chart junk")	☐	☐
35 Have you aligned numbers and column headings to the right?	☐	☐
36 Have you kept tables or graphs on the same page?	☐	☐
37 Have you avoided underlying, italics and unnecessary capitals?	☐	☐
38 Have you used bold for emphasis?	☐	☐
39 Is the text readable?	☐	☐
40 Are all labels clear?	☐	☐
41 If using axes, is the scale clear?	☐	☐
42 Do your tables, charts and graphs use information headings?	☐	☐

Keeping the integrity of numbers

	Yes	No
43 Has your presentation of numbers kept their meaning?	☐	☐
44 Have you done your best to present the numbers in a fair way?	☐	☐
45 Have you used clear examples to explain the meaning of numbers?	☐	☐
46 Have you presented your numbers using an appropriate degree of accuracy for your audience?	☐	☐
47 Have you communicated risk or likelihood using clear examples?	☐	☐
48 Have you tested how user-friendly your information is?	☐	☐
49 Have you put a clear link to your sources?	☐	☐
50 Have you been upfront about the age of your sources?	☐	☐