A quick guide to writing
Our writing style

Write simply
Think about what you want to say, then say it as simply as possible.
Whether you are a manager, author, editor, or proofreader, this guide helps you to follow the 4Cs: be consistent, clear, concise, and comprehensive.

- Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- Long paragraphs, like long sentences, can confuse.
Remember that good English is simple English.

Our audience influences our style
ITC written communications target trade and investment support institutions, businesses and business organizations, and policymakers.

Our style should be simple for several reasons. The majority of our readers are not native English speakers. What’s more, part of our audience is the business community. Crisp, businesslike writing is part of the ITC image, and enhances our credibility as the United Nations partner for the business sector in developing countries.

Whether our readers are young professionals starting an export business, trainers, busy policymakers or trade and investment support institutions, they seek hands-on advice and informed, concise analysis about trade trends.

The writing style therefore should be accessible rather than academic. Language should be plain and concise. Avoid acronyms and jargon; define unfamiliar terms the first time they appear.

Write to fit your layout
Adapt your writing style and length to the ITC layout templates at your disposal. A one page fact sheet, a marketing brochure, a project proposal, a book, a press release, a letter… each has its own visual style.

Very often, texts that are not well positioned or simply too long could be avoided by first checking the templates available on our intranet pages under: Communications/Services or Templates.
Quick editing checklist

Please always use this short checklist to ensure that your document does not include basic errors.

✓ International Trade Centre – not International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO – and Centre is spelled with re not er.

✓ Centre du commerce international (French), Centro de Comercio Internacional (Spanish)

✓ ITC – not the ITC. The acronym ITC stays the same in all languages.

✓ British spelling – except words ending in -ize (exception: analyse, catalyse, paralyse).

✓ Organization and organized is spelled with a z, not s.


✓ SMEs – small and medium-sized enterprises – not small and medium enterprises.

✓ LDCs – least developed countries (in lower case).

✓ TISIs – trade and investment support institutions (in lower case; has replaced TSI).

✓ Remember: Just because acronyms are capitalized, it doesn’t mean that the phrase is when spelled out. See LDCs, TISIs, SMEs etc. above.

✓ $ – Do not use US$ if it is US dollars (in all three languages). There is no space between $ and figure: $10.

✓ Use the symbol %, not the phrase ‘per cent’ (two words, not one; percentage is one word).

✓ Titles, subtitles, box titles – first letter upper case, subsequent lower case (exception proper nouns and words that normally take upper case).

✓ Charts and figures, annexes – give them all titles and give source if applicable.

✓ Websites – check all links to ensure they work.

✓ Country names – as part of the United Nations, we must use official names. Countries sometimes complain officially when this is not the case. See a list in the back. ITC does make exceptions, for instance with Chinese Taipei (UN: Taiwan, Province of China).

✓ Do not use clichés: at the end of the day, at this moment in time, at the present time, fit for purpose, in the field of, going forward and period of time.

✓ Do not overuse these phrases: basically, downplay, flagship, giant (as in ‘the telecoms giant’), massive, and notably.

Quick formatting checklist

✓ Spacing – do a ‘search and replace’ for double spaces and double dashes. Check whether the double dash is a typo, or whether it should be converted into an en dash (–).

✓ Font – ITC’s preferred font style is Arial. Make sure that font styles and sizes are consistent (in body content it is size 10, captions, footnotes should be size 8).

✓ Paragraphs – Cut long paragraphs. Short paragraphs are easier to read.

✓ Figure/Table/Graph/Chart/Chapter: Capitalize these terms in the running text

✓ Note should precede Source in tables and figures, and both words should always be in boldfaced italics.

✓ Numbers in running text – English: 10,000.00 French: 10 000,00 Spanish: 10.000,00

✓ Numbers in tables in all languages: 10 00