



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 20, 2018

University to Lecturers: Don't Use "Do," "Don't," or Uppercase Words in Instructions

Instructors at a British university have been told not to use the words "do" and "don't" and not to write words in all capital letters because doing so could frighten students into not completing assignments.

According to the [Daily Express](#), a recent "enhancing student understanding, engagement and achievement" memo to staff members at the Leeds Trinity University School of Journalism instructed them to "write in a helpful, warm tone, avoiding officious language and negative instructions."

Words consisting entirely of uppercase letters may emphasize "the difficulty or high-stakes nature of the task" and thus are to be avoided, the memo said. Lecturers were also cautioned against "the overuse of 'do,' and, especially, 'DON'T.'"

"Despite our best attempts to explain assessment tasks, any lack of clarity can generate anxiety and even discourage students from attempting the assessment at all," reads the missive, which was sent by course leaders. Therefore, staff are asked to be "explicit about any inexplicitness" in their assignment instructions.

When students are uncertain of what they are to do, "they often talk to each other and any misconceptions or misunderstandings quickly spread throughout the group (usually aided and abetted by Facebook)," explained the leaders. "This can lead to further confusion and students may even then decide that the assessment is too difficult and not attempt it."

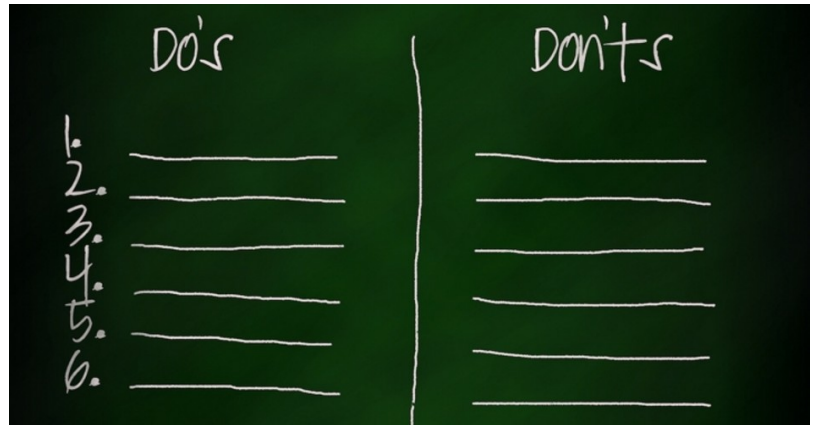
In short, university students studying journalism, a profession that requires its practitioners to work with relatively little direction under tight deadlines, are now such snowflakes that the slightest bit of ambiguity or negativity in a school assignment may cause them to shut down in fear.

At least that is what university administrators seem to believe. In a statement defending the memo, vice chancellor Margaret House argued that the instructions were based on "national best practice teaching guidelines," among them "not to write in all capital letters."

"We're proud to offer a personal and inclusive university experience that gives every student the support to realize their potential," she said.

In a [tweet](#) accompanying the statement, the university denied banning all-uppercase words. "But," noted Australia's [news.com.au](#), "many social media users pointed out there was little difference between 'banning' words and capital letters and asking staff not to use them."

It's possible that students agree with the policy. After all, students at the University of Manchester recently voted to ban clapping and cheering at some events. "It was argued that the loud noise of





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traditional clapping and whooping pose an issue to students with anxiety or sensory issues. BSL (British Sign Language) clapping — or, jazz hands — would be a more inclusive form of expression,” reported the university’s [student newspaper](#). (At the same meeting, the student senate also considered motions funding “QTIPOC (Queer, Trans, and Intersex People of Color) inclusion and advocacy” and making “Islamophobia Awareness Month, Black History Month, LGBT history Month and Global Week Compulsory Campaigns.”) Fragile students at North American universities, meanwhile, have [shouted down](#), [assaulted](#), and [threatened with death](#) speakers who challenged their insular views.

At least some of those charged with teaching these students, however, disagree with the memo. One lecturer told the *Daily Express* that he uses capital letters to emphasize certain points in his instructions so that students do not overlook them.

“We have some excellent students but it’s a constant battle against a system that wants to treat them like little kids,” he said. “We are not doing our students any favors with this kind of nonsense.”

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