

Providing
best practice
reporting
guidance for
road collisions.

Road Collision Reporting Guidelines

Use in blue light communications

The Road Collision Reporting Guidelines were published in 2021 to help media and professional bodies reflect accurately the harm taking place on the roads. The Guidelines have the support of the National Police Chiefs Council and the National Fire Chiefs Council, as well as RoadPeace, among others. These are a quick guide to using the Guidelines in your workplace.

Of the ten Guidelines, available in full from www.rc-rg.com, three are particularly relevant to emergency services.

Guideline 2. Avoid the word 'accident' which is not neutral. Use of the word 'accident' is rare in emergency services, but our analysis shows it still occurs.

Guideline 3. If you're talking about the actions of a driver, mention a driver, not just their vehicle.

Guideline 10. Provide context, such as collision trends in the area over time, or the contribution of a type of collision in road casualties.

No Accidents

RoadPeace's #CrashNotAccident campaign highlights the importance of avoiding the word accident, as it incorrectly presupposes nothing could be done to prevent a crash. The charity says the term 'exemplifies society's tolerance of road danger'. More information on their campaign, and resources, can be found at <https://www.roadpeace.org/working-for-change/crash-not-accident/>

If you're talking about a driver, say a driver

Descriptions of road collisions, particularly those involving pedestrians or cyclists, tend to be unbalanced: describing a victim first, and the person behind the wheel of a vehicle later, and sometimes not at all¹.

A typical example describes "a collision between a grey Mercedes and a 11-year-old girl", or "a serious collision involving a cyclist and a 4x4" - where only the vulnerable road users are described at the scene – or simply 'a two-vehicle collision'. Research shows that **disappearing a driver in this way**, albeit unconsciously, **focuses audience attention, and blame, towards those injured in a collision by as much as 30%²**.

Tip: For clarity it is possible, early on in an article, to add the word '**driver**', '**rider**', or describe a vehicle '**being driven**'. I.e. 'the **driver of** a grey Mercedes hit a man in his 50s', (language commonly used if a cyclist hits a pedestrian) or 'a Mercedes **was driven** into a man'. A serious collision involved a 4x4 **driver** and a cyclist (as two human actors, rather than one person and one vehicle). A collision occurred between two vehicles **being driven** on the southbound carriageway...; a Seat Leon **driver** failed to stop; a serious collision saw a **driver crash** off the road.

Adding Context

Research shows adding context to a story can help reduce victim blaming and promote better understanding of wider patterns and trends, like road design².

Collision data by local authority or police force area is available from [GOV.UK](#).

The suggested filters, below, will give you the number of people killed and injured within selected years by force, type of road user and their age, road type (urban/rural) and speed limit.

You could perform this analysis once for the most recent year and share it on any collision news/updates, as well as on operations/initiatives reports, or select specific data for different collision types **from this [GOV.UK page](#).**

- **Choose casualties**

suggest: killed, seriously injured, slightly injured

- **Choose year(s) (the most recent year will work for many stories)**

suggest: GB, Countries, Regions/ parliamentary constituencies/ police force(s)/ or local authority(ies)

- **Choose up to four additional elements**

suggest: Road user, Casualty age, Urban/Rural (OR Road class if area predominantly rural/urban), Speed limit

- **Confirm and create report**

Other elements:

- Reports could also include a general warning about weather conditions, where relevant, the importance of vehicle maintenance, driving to the conditions, etc., while being mindful not to pre-empt any investigation
- News outlets also commonly link to similar stories; highlighting that the incident isn't isolated can help audiences understand potential patterns

In practice

The below examples have been taken from police press releases.

Instead of	Say	Reason
Avoid accidents		
The accident took place between North Road and Castle Place	The collision /crash/incident took place between North Road and Castle Place	Helps the audience understand collisions are potentially preventable
If you're talking about a driver, say a driver		
Police are appealing for witnesses after a blue Seat Ibiza collided with a tree today. The driver – a teenage boy – was taken to hospital.	Police are appealing for witnesses after a Seat Ibiza, being driven by a teenage boy, collided with a tree. The driver – a teenage boy – boy driver was taken to hospital.	Tells the audience straight away the vehicle was being driven when the crash occurred. The rest of the article was amended to avoid repetition
A 26-year-old man was arrested this morning following an incident of dangerous driving. Police reportedly requested that the vehicles stopped, which	A 26-year-old man was arrested this morning following an incident of dangerous driving. Police reportedly requested that the drivers stopped, which	As the driver was mentioned in the first paragraph of the original story, just a one-word change is fine here.

they allegedly failed to do....	they allegedly failed to do...	
If you're talking about a driver, don't focus on vulnerable road users		
<p>Police are appealing for witnesses after a pedestrian was seriously injured in a collision on Sunday.</p> <p>The driver of the car involved in the collision... was arrested in connection with the incident and has been bailed pending further inquiries.</p>	<p>A car driver has been arrested after a pedestrian was seriously injured in a collision in Ipswich on Sunday - and police are appealing for witnesses.</p> <p>The driver has since been bailed pending further inquiries.</p>	<p>Alters focus of piece to the driver, rather than the injured pedestrian. Research shows focusing on a pedestrian increases audience blame on the pedestrian.</p>
<p>A man has been killed after a car ploughed into pedestrians in South London</p>	<p>A man has been killed after a driver crashed a car into pedestrians in South London</p>	<p>Alters focus from the victim, and mentions the driver. This framing is common in cycling collision reports - cyclist 'hits' or 'ploughs into' pedestrian³</p>
Add context (see also template and detail below)		
<p>No context to story</p>	<p>This is the third fatal collision on [police force/local authority] roads in the past year.</p>	<p>Adds specific collision data relating to the current or previous year(s) to help the</p>

	<p>OR</p> <p>In [year], [number] people were killed on [police force/local authority] roads, and [number] seriously injured</p>	<p>audience better understand collisions occur as part of trends that can be tackled.</p> <p>A daily average toll is another way to display the information</p>
<p>No context to story</p>	<p>[Percentage] of collisions take place on rural roads, despite their carrying [percentage] of traffic</p>	<p>Adds road collision statistics. This can be done for driver age, time of year (when clocks go back), or weather</p> <p>Research shows common events seem less important if presented in isolation. Collision trends help audiences see a need for broader, systematic changes and reduce victim blaming</p>

Figure 1: suggested wording alterations for common news story structures

Suggested press release templates

Suggested template 1 (for police):

We received a call at [time, date] reporting a collision involving [drivers of vehicle make] or [vehicle make being driven] and

a [driver of vehicle/vehicle make being driven/pedestrian/object] in [insert specific location]. Officers attended the scene. [injury details, age, gender].
[Details of road closures]

This is the [number] collision on [force/service] roads this year **and/or** last year [number] of people were killed or seriously injured on [force/service] roads.

Suggested template 2 (for fire/ambulance):

At [insert time] on [insert date], [insert force or service] attended a road traffic collision at [insert specific location].

Our team extricated the driver of the [model of car/vehicle] using [rescue tools, provided first aid, and secured the scene for the police investigation].

We urge all drivers to [insert safety advice relevant to the incident, e.g., "exercise caution during these adverse weather conditions and adhere to speed limits"]

¹Alex Macmillan, Alex Roberts, James Woodcock, Rachel Aldred, Anna Goodman, Trends in local newspaper reporting of London cyclist fatalities 1992-2012: the role of the media in shaping the systems dynamics of cycling, Accident Analysis & Prevention, Volume 86, 2016:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0001457515300981>.

²Tara Goddard, Kelcie Ralph, Calvin G. Thigpen, Evan Iacobucci (2019). Does news coverage of traffic crashes affect perceived blame and preferred solutions? Evidence from an experiment. Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590198219300727?via%3Dihub>

³Fevyer, D., & Aldred, R. (2022). Rogue drivers, typical cyclists, and tragic pedestrians: a Critical Discourse Analysis of media reporting of fatal road traffic collisions. Mobilities, 17(6), 759–779.

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