

How to write great content

Use this guide to help you make decisions when writing or adapting content for the web. Then, complete our [Writing for the web e-learning \(staff only\)](#) to hone your skills.

People read online and printed material differently.

They usually scan online pages looking for information and expect to find it quickly without having to wade through blocks of dense text.

This makes the writing style and structure of online information very important. It has a big impact on the usability and credibility of your information.

Here are 7 tips that will significantly improve the usefulness of your content.

1. Focus on the audience

The most effective writing targets the specific needs of the audience.

- Consider who your audience is and what they want to know.
- Have a clear purpose in mind for each page.
- Don't include every piece of information on the subject you are writing about - only include information that is central to the topic.

2. Say it simply

Plain English improves readability and comprehension. Avoid jargon - department terms you might use every day may not be understood by a general audience.

- Stick to one idea per paragraph.
- Aim for a maximum of around 20 words per sentence.
- Limit acronyms and always write them out in full in the first instance on every web page.
- Use half the word count (or less) than conventional writing.
- Opt for the simpler, shorter word - 'use' not 'utilise'.

3. Get to the point

The first sentence and subheadings help your readers decide if they'll read on.

- Summarise the page in one short sentence.
- Answer the 'who', 'what', 'when', 'where', 'why' and 'how' first.
- Include extra details at the end if you need to.
- Link to other pages with background information.

4. Break text up

Break up the text on a page into easily readable chunks to help the audience scan the content and digest the detail. Use subheadings and bulleted lists to help the process.

- Identify the most important points you want to make. You don't need to cover the topic from all angles - just include the key information.

- Start each section with the most important information.
- Use the shortest word, phrase or sentence you can. Limit your paragraphs to two or three sentences.
- Remember less is more.

5. Show the way

Lists and subheadings help users absorb information. We refer to these elements as 'signposts' to help the reader find their way.

- Use clear and unambiguous subheadings. Don't try to be clever or humorous.
- Make sure your subheadings follow a logical hierarchy to help orient the audience. Your first heading after your introductory text should always be H2, followed by H3, H4 and so on, as needed.
- Use bulleted lists to further break up the page and help your audience scan the information.
- Limit list items to between five and seven.

6. Keep verbs active

Active voice helps your text sound more positive. Use it wherever you can.

- Aim for active voice at least 80% of the time.
- An active sentence follows the format 'A does B'. Passive sentences sound more like 'B is done (by A)'. For example:
 - Active: The director raised this issue with the Minister.
 - Passive: The issue has been raised with the Minister.
- Watch for 'hidden verbs' that express the action in a noun. For example:
 - Active: The Premier agreed to meet the delegation.
 - Hidden: The Premier agreed to hold a meeting with the delegation.

7. Cut down on capital letters

Online, capital letters make content harder to read. Help your audience by using them sparingly. Find out more details and examples in the [Content style guide](#).

- Reserve capitals for proper nouns, which identify a particular person or a unique entity.
- Use capital letters for official titles of people, organisations, programs and publications.
- Use lower case for abbreviated or generic forms, including 'the department'.
- Use sentence case for headings. This means the first letter is upper case but the rest of the heading is lower case, except for proper nouns.

Improve your writing

For more tips to improve your content, see the following:

- [how to audit your content](#)
- [Content style guide](#)
- [Writing for search](#).

Category:

- [Communication and engagement](#)

Topics:

- [Campaigns](#)

- Writing

Business Unit:

- Communication and Engagement

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