Government of Canada   Gouvernement du Canada

Canada.ca design

Canada.ca Content Style Guide

These are the rules to create web content that can be easily found, understood and used. They are based on writing principles and techniques that help make web content clear and adapted to the needs of all people. Use it with the Canada.ca Specifications when you're designing and organizing web content.

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Recent updates

Most recent updates to the guide:

- We have updated underline section 2.0 Communicate clearly with plain language to better align with the plain language standard developed through the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). This update was done in collaboration with plain language experts and communications professionals from across the Government of Canada.

Update history (this list begins with changes on May 25, 2023).

Purpose

This guide establishes the rules you must use to develop and edit English web content that will be published on a Government of Canada website. The rules are different from practices adapted to print to support principles related to accessibility, readability and usability.

The purpose of these rules is to make web content easy to find, easy to understand and easy to use for everyone, including people who have physical or cognitive disabilities.

The techniques described in this guide complement the rules set out in *Writing Tips Plus*, a searchable tool that deals with difficult points of English grammar and punctuation, as well as other English writing conventions. If there are conflicts between this guide, *Writing Tips Plus* or any other resource, this guide takes priority for content published online.

As web and language trends evolve, we'll update this guide to meet the changing needs of our audiences.

Use of the style guide

All departments and other portions of the federal public administration subject to the *Directive on the Management of Communications* must use the Canada.ca Style Guide. These organizations must follow this style guide's requirements for all public-facing websites and digital services, regardless of the technology, domain name or publishing platform used. This requirement is referenced in Appendix D: Mandatory Procedures for Social Media and Web Communications in the *Directive on the Management of Communications*.

Out-of-scope situations

Institutions that fall outside of the *Directive on the Management of Communications* do not have to follow this style guide. However, all institutions are encouraged to use it for both their internal and external web products. Following this guide's rules and techniques will make it easier for everyone to find, understand and use the government's digital content.

Related policies, standards and procedures

Content must comply with:

- templates, content components, character limits and other requirements as described in the *Canada.ca Specifications*
- requirements set out in the related legislated and policy instruments, including:
  - *Policy on Communications and Federal Identity*
  - *Directive on the Management of Communications*
  - *Standard on Web Accessibility*
  - *Standard on Web Interoperability*
  - *Standard on Optimizing Websites and Applications for Mobile Devices*

- *[Guidance on Publishing in the Government of Canada](#)*
- *[Procedures for Publishing](#)*
- *[Official Languages Act](#)*

1.0 Writing principles for web content

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The rules in this guide reflect how people read and use web content.

1.1 Help people complete tasks

Most people come to a government website to complete a task and expect us to provide information that will help them. Tasks can be:

- transactional (submit a form or download a report)
- informational (find out how to collect a benefit or find a phone number)

People trying to complete a task online usually don't read word by word. They scan quickly for words and links related to what they want to do.

Government of Canada web content must be:

- **intuitive**: give people who have no previous knowledge of the topic or process just enough information to complete a task on their own
- **comprehensive**: give the appropriate details to specialists who have more knowledge of a topic or process
- **targeted**: present the most important information first, in a way that is tailored to the needs of the audience, instead of giving all the options and leaving people to figure out which ones apply to them
- **consistent**: use a standardized approach so that people can scan content quickly and easily with a sense of confidence and trust

1.2 Consider the needs of the audience

When planning web content, consider people's needs. Make sure that the content is accessible, clear and adapted to the widest audience.

Writing for accessibility

Making content accessible means a wide range of people can use it, including people with physical and cognitive disabilities (for example, reading disorders, attention deficit disorders, memory disorders).

To make your content accessible, consider how assistive technologies work and how some writing practices may impact people's ability to read or understand text. Remember to also refer to the _Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0_.

Writing for inclusivity

Make gender-inclusive writing your standard practice.

For more guidance on inclusive writing, see the Language Portal of Canada's guidelines and resources:

- Inclusive writing for English (only in English)

- <u>Écriture inclusive – Lignes directrices et ressources</u>, du Bureau de la <u>traduction</u> (only in French)

Writing for readability

Readability is the ease with which a person can read and understand a text. Readable content means better task completion and higher client satisfaction.

To make your content readable, consider your audience's reading level and literacy needs. Not everyone reads at the same level or understands content in the same way. Even when content is presented clearly and simply, people who have low literacy levels and other difficulties can find it hard to understand text.

According to Statistics Canada (2012) and Canadian literacy organizations, almost 50% of Canadians have literacy challenges. Research shows that people with literacy challenges:

- spend a lot of time trying to understand words that contain more than two syllables
- read word by word and slowly move their eyes across each line of text
- skip over large amounts of information when it contains many multi-syllable words, uncommon terms and long sentences

Techniques for improving and measuring readability are in the <u>section on plain language</u>.

Writing for specialized audiences

Sometimes, your content targets people who have in-depth knowledge of a subject.

When writing for a specialized audience, you can use terms they're familiar with, even if those terms aren't familiar to a general audience. Include a summary in plain language for:

- people who aren't familiar with the subject
- specialists who might be scanning the content to decide whether it's relevant to their task

Consider all screen sizes

People will view your content on different sizes of screens. Phone and tablet screens display less content than desktop and laptop screens. Readers who use small screens:

- have to go through more steps to access the same amount of information
- rely on their short-term memory to recall information that isn't visible on the screen

1.3 Provide equivalent content in both official languages

⚠ Official languages requirements

According to the _Official Languages Act_, you must publish communications and provide services to the public in both official languages.

Government content must:

- be professionally translated
- reflect Canadian writing conventions in English and French
- include fully bilingual images, multimedia files and transcripts, or contain equivalent information in both official languages

Persons responsible for official languages

The person responsible for official languages in your institution can help answer questions about your obligations and about exceptions.

Your communications team can help determine whether it's appropriate to communicate with audiences in other languages, in addition to Canada's official languages.

2.0 Communicate clearly with plain language

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  - Identify keywords your audience is using to find your content
- 2.6 Use short sentences and paragraphs
- 2.7 Explain references to legislation
- 2.8 Additional resources on plain language and clear communication

The duty to be clear: Plain language requirement

The use of plain language is a requirement of the _Directive on the Management of Communications_.

Plain language is a writing approach to communicate what your audience needs to know. With plain language, the wording, structure and design are so clear your intended audience can easily:

- **find** what they need
- **understand** what they find
- **use** the information [1]

Plain language makes critical information more accessible and easy to read. It doesn't oversimplify or strip meaning from content. Instead, plain language content is clear, concise, and designed to save the intended audience time and effort.

Plain language benefits everyone, including people who are managing these situations:

- stress, divided attention, time pressures or multiple tasks
- low reading and writing skills
- cognitive, learning or motor disabilities
- an unfamiliar topic or language

Writing plainly and clearly offers several key benefits. These include:

- showing respect for people's time by making content easy to scan and understand
- allowing people who are reading on a phone or other small screen to see essential information first
- increasing the chances people will find and understand the information they need to easily complete their task

2.1 Getting started with plain language: writing for readability

Content that's easy to read and understand uses the right vocabulary and shares the right information for the audience. It's clear and concise, and the flow is easy to follow. A great way to get started is to write as if you're speaking directly to your audience.

Try these techniques to make your text as easy to read and understand as possible.

Style

- **Write like you talk**: Write as if speaking directly to your audience. Use the first-person or second-person pronouns (I, we, us, you) instead of the third person (he, she, they).
  - See section 3, tone
- **Active voice**: Use the active voice and positive form.
- **Remove jargon**: Replace technical jargon and complex language with wording your audience will easily understand.
  - See section 2.5, avoid jargon and similar language

Structure

- **Identify audience needs**: Organize, write and design your content to meet the needs of your intended audience.
- **Use clear headings and subheadings**: Separate content into clear sections to help your audience scan and easily find what they need.
- **Use lists**: Organize key tasks with numbers or bullets.
  - See section 5.2, use lists to help people scan
- **Remove visual and cognitive blockers**: Remove anything that prevents your audience from easily seeing, understanding or using the information they need.

- **Move or remove unnecessary details**: Don't include details that people don't need to complete their task.

Simplify and review

- **Trim content**: Shorten words, sentences and paragraphs.
- **Simplify**: Replace secondary references to a program with "program" rather than using its full name or abbreviation.
- **Review for clarity**: Ask colleagues who aren't familiar with the subject to review the text for clarity and logic.
- **Read aloud**: Read the text out loud, or use a screen reader, to identify what can be clearer and more concise.
- **Test your content**: Work with your web team to set up usability testing for your content.

Don't rely on readability tools

Readability tools are based on algorithms that measure things like word length. These tools cannot tell you if your audience will find your content easy to understand and use.

Readability tools can be a helpful first step to identify some areas that need work, such as:

- overly long sentences
- passive voice
- unnecessary words
- acronyms

They can also suggest simpler alternatives and give you a rough sense of the complexity of a text. But you shouldn't use these tools to evaluate readability accurately. However, you can use them to help demonstrate why text should be simplified or shortened.

See how this rule applies in French:

- <u>2.1 Introduction au langage clair : rédiger pour faciliter la lecture</u>

⤴ Share writing for readability

2.2 Start with the most important information

Be direct. People scan web pages. They won't read every word. As their eyes move down the page they pay less attention to content that is irrelevant to completing their task. Design the text to help people see what they need easily.

Structure your page to guide your audience to the information they need to complete their task.

Get started with the inverted pyramid

Use the **inverted pyramid** writing technique to organize your content:
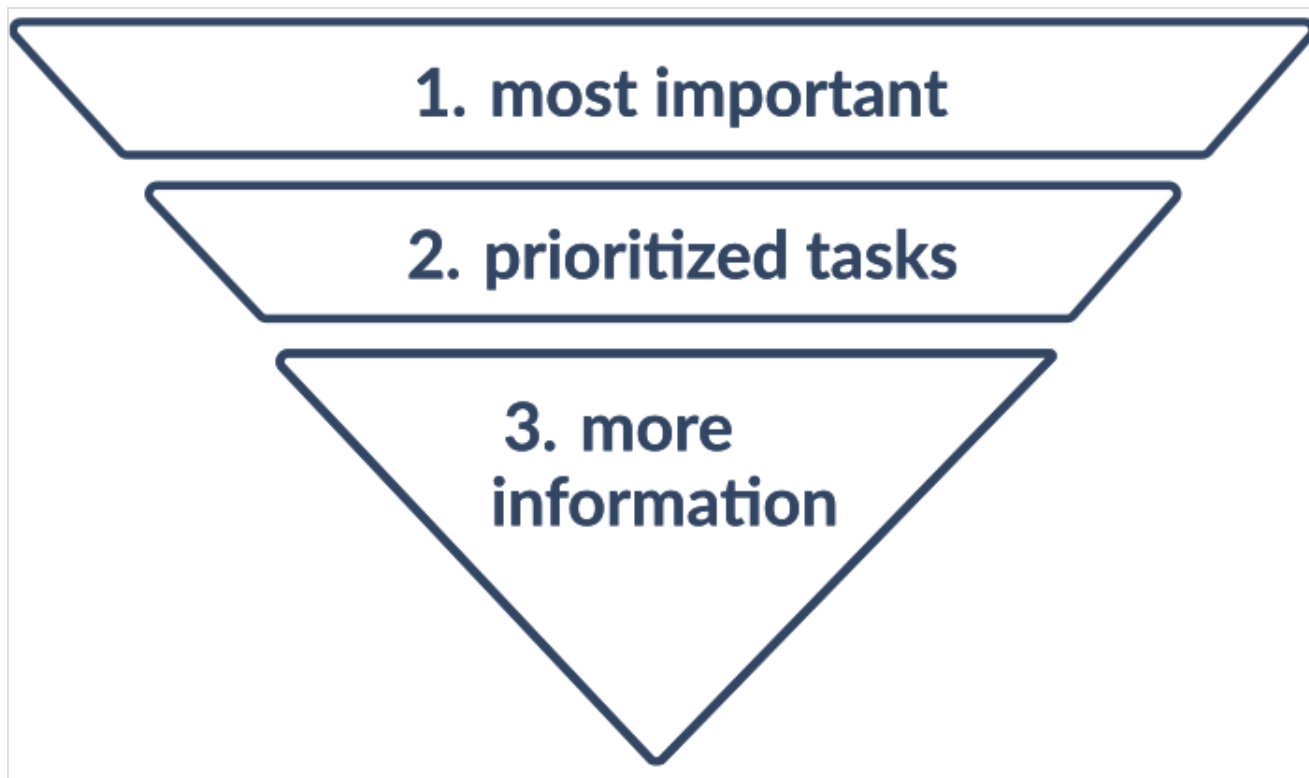

Figure 1: inverted pyramid for ordering content on a web page

The inverted pyramid is divided into three sections, moving from what people need to know at the top to what's less relevant at the bottom. Use the following list to help you plan and organize your content:

1. **most important**
   - start with the most important idea, step or information
   - focus on what people need to know to complete their main task
2. **prioritized tasks**
   - add details and tasks in order of importance
   - keep all task-related content in the centre of the page
   - use links to direct people to key information and tasks
3. **more information**
   - Only include extra details if they support, rather than distract from, the important content. This could include:
     - related links that may help some people (for example, statistics cited, related initiatives, relevant publications, etc.)
     - information for people who want to learn more
     - information for people who have more knowledge of the topic or service

Get to the point

Be direct. Write direct statements that help your target audience complete their task. Content needs to be easy to find, read and understand.

Stay on topic. Avoid distracting your audience with unnecessary content, like welcome messages or background information.

Example of direct statements

Write: Present your passport to the border officer.
Instead of: According to Canadian legislation, you're required to present your passport to the agent who will welcome you into the country.

See how this rule applies in French:

⎘ Share starting with the most important information

2.3 Use familiar words

Choose familiar words that a broad audience understands and uses.

Everyday words may include technical words your audience knows well. If you must include technical terms, explain them using concise, clear, easy-to-understand words or give an example to help non-specialists understand.

Examples of familiar and common words

Write: ask
Instead of: make a request

Write: you must
Instead of: you shall

Write: to
Instead of: in order to

Write: before
Instead of: prior to

Write: get
Instead of: obtain

Example of explaining a technical term

Write: Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), also known as mad cow disease
Instead of: Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Replace long words with short, simple and everyday words that most people understand and use. Simple words have 2 syllables or less. They're easier to scan than long, complex words.

See how this rule applies in French:

- 2.3 Utiliser des termes familiers

⤴ Share use familiar words

2.4 Write in the active and positive form

Write in the active voice and positive form. Direct your audience to what they need to know. Use action verbs to guide them to their next steps.

Write in the active voice

In most cases, using the active voice will help your audience understand what they're reading. Sentences in the active voice are direct, clear and easier to understand. Their structure is logical and easy to follow because the subject is the doer of the action:

- subject (the doer) + verb (the action) + object (who/what the action is about)

Avoid the passive voice

In a passive sentence, it may not be clear who or what is doing the action. This makes the sentence harder to understand. The structure of a passive sentence is:

- Object + verb + subject

Examples of active and passive voice

Write: We may ask you to provide proof of citizenship. (active)

Instead of: You may be asked to provide proof of citizenship. (passive)

Write: You must file your returns electronically. (active)

Instead of: Your returns must be filed electronically. (passive)

The passive voice is useful in some cases. For more on this topic, consult:

- *Writing Tips Plus*: Active voice, passive voice

Use the positive form

Whenever possible, tell people what they may or must do instead of what they may not or must not do to complete their task. Avoid negatives, double negatives and exceptions to exceptions.

Examples of positive and negative sentences

Positive: You will receive your Notice of Assessment once you've filed your return.

Negative: You can't receive your Notice of Assessment if you haven't filed your taxes.

Positive: You're entitled to part of the deduction.

Negative: You're not entitled to the entire deduction.

Positive: The procedure will be effective.

Double negative: The procedure will not be ineffective.

Positive: You may claim a child born in 1972 or earlier as a dependent if they have a mental or physical disability.

Double negative: You may not claim anything for a dependent child born in 1972 or earlier unless the child has a mental or physical disability.

Exception: Acceptable use of the negative form

You can use the negative form when something has serious or fatal consequences. The negative form will make it easier to explain what is not possible or should not be done. Do not use contractions (don't) to make sure your audience will read and understand the statement.

Examples of using the negative form for something that has serious consequences

- Do not try to locate the source of carbon monoxide. Leave your home immediately and move to fresh air.
- Do not attempt on your own as this can have serious or fatal consequences.

Use verbs instead of nouns formed from verbs

Avoid using nouns that are formed from verbs. Verbs alone clearly express the action needed. Always use the simplest form of a verb. When possible, use the present tense.

Examples of the use of verbs instead of nouns

Write: apply
Instead of: submit your application

Write: consider
Instead of: take into consideration

Write: modify
Instead of: make a modification

Write: needs
Instead of: is in need of

For more details read:

- _Writing Tips Plus_: Turn nouns into verbs

Avoid noun strings

Don't use a group of 2 or more nouns to modify another noun.

These noun strings are hard to understand. They force people to do a lot of unpacking to get at what the phrase means.

Write: standards for post-mortem evaluation of food animal carcasses
Instead of: Food Animal Carcass Post-mortem Evaluation Standards

See how this rule applies in French:

- [2.4 Rédigez avec la voix active, directe, et affirmative](#)

> ⤴ Share write in the active and positive form

2.5 Avoid jargon and similar language

Where possible, avoid using jargon, idioms, metaphors and expressions. Use the clearest, most popular term for your audience.

Legal and technical terms and "government-speak" confuse most people.

People who don't speak English or French might use online tools to translate text. These tools do not always translate words and ideas accurately.

Examples

- **Jargon**:
  - adverse effect (effect)
  - citizen engagement (meaningful involvement of citizens)
  - remuneration (pay)
  - disclosure (making information available)
  - pro bono (legal service provided free of charge)
- **Idiom**: to hire a helping hand (meaning to hire an employee)

- **Expression**: attack your least favourite task first (meaning do your least favourite task first)
- **Metaphor**: the sun was a ball of fire (meaning the sun was very hot)

If you must include jargon familiar to your target audience, be sure to:

- explain it using clear, easy-to-understand words or give an example to help non-specialists understand
- never use jargon to explain jargon

Examples of statements that avoid the use of jargon

Write: You have to file your income tax return (T1) by April 30.
Instead of: You have to file your T1 return by April 30.

Write: Learn about savings plans that can help you save enough money to retire.
Instead of: Learn about different types of savings plans that will let you build up your retirement nest egg.

Identify keywords your audience is using to find your content

Keywords are the words your audience uses to find your content. They are the most common terms used to talk about, or search for, a specific topic.

If you have access to primary sources (interviews, usability research, support tickets, emails, call centre transcripts, etc.) use these sources to identify your keywords.

You can also use online keyword research tools. Tools you can use to find popular search terms include:

- Ahrefs Free SEO Tools (no account required)
- Bing Keyword Research (need Microsoft account to access)
- Google Trends (no login required)
- Google Keyword Planner (need Google AdWords account to access)

- Hoth Free Google Keyword Planner (no account required)
- Moz Keyword Explorer

You can also use hashtag research tools to help identify trending keywords.

Refer to your analytics to find out which search terms your audience uses to find related content.

See how this rule applies in French:

- 2.5 Éviter le jargon et les expressions familières ou imagées

[⤤ Share avoid jargon and similar language]

2.6 Use short sentences and paragraphs

Use simple sentence and paragraph structure. Avoid complexity.

Be direct. Start sentences with the subject and verb. This structure helps people know immediately who is doing what.

Be brief. Use as few words as possible to express an idea. Being concise helps everyone, including specialists, complete their task.

Write easy-to-scan content. Keep sentences and paragraphs short. This makes them easier to scan and understand by everyone, on any screen size. Keep some paragraphs to one sentence when it makes the content easier to scan.

Use the following strategies to write clear, easy-to-scan content:

- break up long sentences (optimal is under 15 to 20 words)
- avoid sentences with lots of commas
- keep sentences to one idea each
- remove unnecessary words (modifiers, adverbs, adjectives, words that add no meaning)
- keep paragraphs to one main idea and no more than 3 sentences

- present a series of 2 or more ideas or words as a vertical list

Examples of shortened sentences

Write: We approved your request for funding.
Instead of: We received your request for funding, which we've thoroughly reviewed and approved in a timely manner.

Write: We'll consider any type of investment.
Instead of: Any type of investment will be taken into consideration.

Examples of concise and simple sentence structure

Write: Learn about Canada's transportation system. Find information about using paved roads, bike trails, airports and ports across the country.
Instead of: Learn all about Canada's vast transportation system, including information, tools and resources about using paved roads, bike trails, airports and ports all across the country, from coast to coast to coast.

Examples of a direct statement

Write: You have until April 30 to file your tax return.
Instead of: The period of time that you have to file your tax return ends on April 30.

See how this rule applies in French:

- [2.6 Utiliser des phrases et paragraphes simples et concis](#)

⮺ Share use short sentences and paragraphs

2.7 Explain references to legislation

When explaining a requirement that comes from an act or regulation, avoid mentioning the act or regulation by name. Include only the information people need to complete the task.

If you **must** include the name of the act or regulation, always give a plain-language description. First, explain what your audience needs to know and why they need to know more about the act or regulation. Then, you may add a reference to the act or regulation.

Examples of references to legislation

Write: You can apply for your child to become a Canadian citizen after they arrive in Canada as a permanent resident.

Related links

- *Citizenship Act*, section 5.1

Instead of: After your child arrives in Canada as a permanent resident, you can apply for citizenship on the child's behalf under section 5.1 of the Citizenship Act.

For later mentions, you can refer to it as "the act" or "the legislation." Alternatively, include an abbreviated form in parentheses after the first mention. For additional guidance and examples see:

- Section 4.4 abbreviations and acronyms

See how this rule applies in French:

- 2.7 Expliquer les références aux lois

⤷ Share avoid references to legislation

2.8 Additional resources on plain language and clear communication

The following resources offer trustworthy information to help you write clearly in plain language:

Relevant *Writing Tips Plus* articles on clear communication

- choose positive over negative phrasing
- coherence
- overview of the writing process and techniques
- polish your paragraphs
- reduce redundancy
- responsibilities of writers, editors and decision makers
- simplify your sentences
- transition words
- turn nouns into verbs
- use clear words and expressions
- use the active voice
- write clear and effective briefing notes
- write relevant and effective emails

External resources:

- Content Design London | Readability Guidelines
- ISO 24495-1:2023 Plain language
- Plain Language - International Plain Language Federation
- PlainLanguage.gov | Plain language guidelines (US government)
- Province of British Columbia:
  - Writing web content - Province of British Columbia
  - Government of British Columbia Plain language checklist
- WebAIM Writing Clearly and Simply Guide (external link)

See how this section applies in French:

- [2.8 Liens vers des ressources externes sur le langage clair](#)

⎘ Share additional resources on plain language and clear communication

3.0 Tone

In this section

- [3.1 Write directly to the person](#)
  - [Address the person in page titles, links and navigation labels](#)
  - [Don't use the first person](#)
- [3.2 Use "we" to refer to the Government of Canada](#)
  - [Third parties](#)
- [3.3 Expressing an obligation or a recommendation](#)

The tone of the government's web content should be:

- direct
- informative
- conversational
- professional

Write as if you were talking to your audience in person, but with the authority of an institution that provides information as part of its mandate.

3.1 Write directly to the person

Use an informal tone, and speak directly **to** people by using the second person ("you," "your").

Examples of statements that use the second person

- Send your application to...
- To get this benefit you must...

Address the person in page titles, links and navigation labels

For page titles, links and navigation labels, use the possessive adjective "your" when the audience might consider the item being referred to as belonging to them.

Examples of navigation labels that address the person

- Change your address
- Replace your card

If the subject of the title, link or label refers to general information, use the indefinite article ("a" or "an") or no article at all.

Examples of navigation labels that don't use a possessive adjective

- Start a new business
- Pay application fees

Don't use the first person

Don't switch from speaking to people to speaking on their behalf. Don't use "I" or "my" statements.

Example of statements that don't use "I" or "my"

Write:

- How to renew your passport
- Renew your passport

Instead of: How do I renew my passport?

Exception

You may use "my" in content, page titles and links for proper names (such as My Service Canada Account).

See how this rule applies in French:

- [3.1 Écrire directement à la personne](#)

> ⤴ Share the rule for writing directly to the audience

3.2 Use "we" to refer to the Government of Canada

We generally provide information to people from the perspective of the government as a whole rather than from a specific institution.

Use "we" and "our" when writing on behalf of the Government of Canada.

Examples of statements that use "we" or "our" to refer to the Government of Canada

Write: If you started a new claim within the last 52 weeks and there are still weeks payable on that claim, we will automatically renew your existing claim.
Instead of: If you started a new claim within the last 52 weeks and there are still weeks payable on that claim, Service Canada will automatically renew your existing claim.

Use "Government of Canada" when:

- describing Canada's stance on a topic relative to another named jurisdiction (country, province, territory city, etc.)
- explaining Canada's role with respect to a topic or issue

Use the name of a specific institution in situations when the:

- institution will be contacting the person
- person needs to contact the institution by phone, mail or online process
- role of the institution in a process is relevant to the task

Examples of statements that refer to specific institutions

- The Canada Revenue Agency will inform you if you have to repay benefits.
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency gives permits for some meat products.
- All restricted or controlled drugs need an import permit from Health Canada.

Don't include references to your website on your website.

Example of a statement that doesn't refer to Canada.ca on the Canada.ca site

Write: <u>Determine whether you're eligible</u>.

Instead of: Get <u>more information about eligibility on the Canada.ca website</u>.

Third parties

Don't provide information on behalf of another organization. Don't duplicate information provided on another organization's website. Instead, direct people to that website to get the information.

Name the other organization when your content refers to it.

Example of a reference to a third party

Write: If you plan to <u>travel to or transit through the United States</u>, find out about the rules you need to follow from U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Instead of: If you plan to travel to or transit through the U.S., CBSA

encourages you to visit the <u>U.S. Customs and Border Protection website</u> for information on the U.S. Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, and the requirements for entering or returning to the U.S.

See how this rule applies in French:

- <u>3.2 Utiliser le pronom « nous » pour désigner le gouvernement du Canada</u>

[⤴ Share the rule for referring to the Government of Canada]

3.3 Expressing an obligation or a recommendation

As a government organization, we often publish rules, information and instructions that are set out in law. We also provide advice on how to follow them.

Express an obligation

When telling people about:

- what the law requires them to do, use "must" instead of "legally required to" or similar language
- an administrative requirement, use "need to"

Example of statements that express legal and administrative requirements

Legal: To be eligible for compassionate care benefits, you must be able to show that...

Administrative: After you apply online, you'll need to provide us with the following documents before we can finalize your claim.

Express a recommendation

When telling people that they're allowed to perform an action:

- do use "may" or "might" (expresses permission or a possibility)
- don't use "can" or "could" (expresses ability)

See how this rule applies in French:

- [3.3 Exprimer une obligation ou une recommandation](#)

 Share the rule for expressing an obligation or a recommendation

4.0 Style

In this section

On the web, less is more. Keep style and punctuation simple. Formatting (such as bold, italics and underlining) and complex punctuation can be distracting and make reading difficult for many people.

4.1 Capitalization and punctuation

Use these styles for capitalization and punctuation of content in text, links and applications.

Capitalize the main words of:

- titles of official publications (such as reports, frameworks, strategies and plans)
- institution names
- program names
- titles of policy instruments
- titles of legislation (in other words, acts and regulations)
- Government of Canada

Lowercase the short form of proper names.

Example of proper names and their short forms

Full names: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Canada Pension Plan, the Public Service of Canada
Short form: the department, the plan, the public service

All caps

Don't capitalize all the letters in a word.

Exceptions

- Abbreviations (although avoid them unless they're necessary)
- Military exercise or operation names (for example, Operation PROVISION)

Titles, headings and subheadings
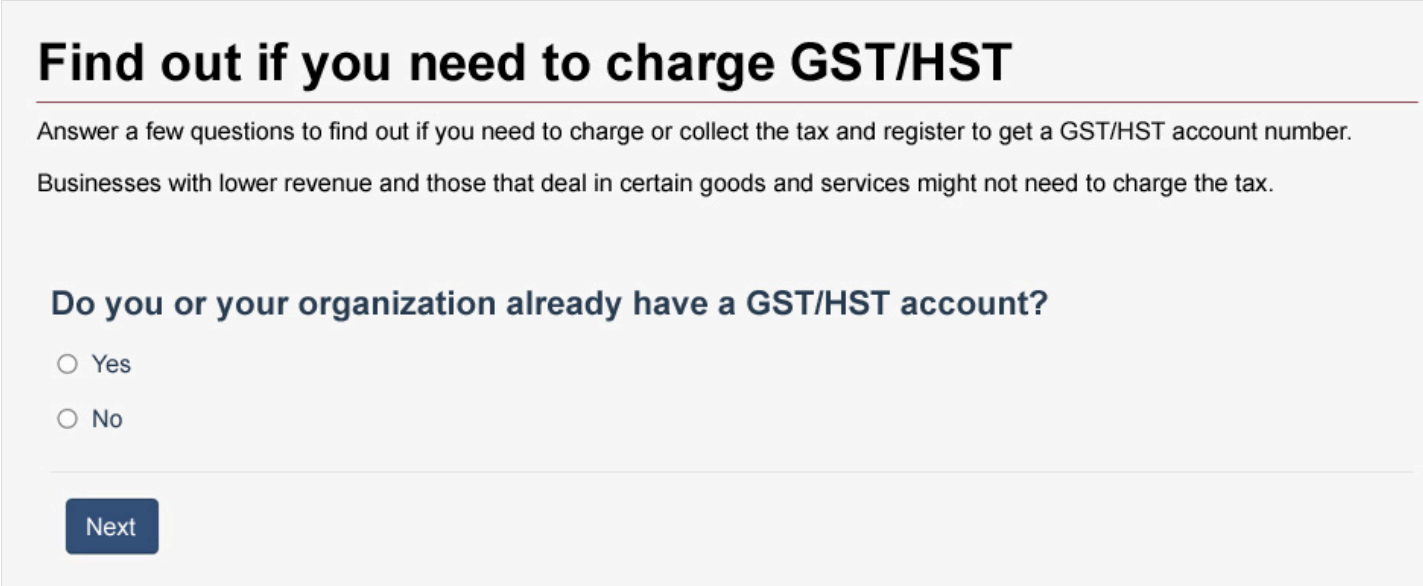
- Capitalize the first letter of the first word (sentence case) of all page titles, headings, subheadings, table captions and table headers
- Capitalize proper nouns in page titles, headings and subheadings
- Don't use punctuation at the end of page titles, headings and subheadings

Exceptions

- You may use punctuation at the end of page titles, headings and subheadings for campaign slogans
- Only use question marks when asking for information in a form, wizard, survey or quiz

Example of question marks being used in forms, wizards, surveys or quizzes

Figure 3

Find out if you need to charge GST/HST

Answer a few questions to find out if you need to charge or collect the tax and register to get a GST/HST account number.

Businesses with lower revenue and those that deal in certain goods and services might not need to charge the tax.

Do you or your organization already have a GST/HST account?

○ Yes

○ No

Next

▼ Figure 3 - Text version

A web page containing a heading with a question mark.

- Title of page
  - Find out if you need to charge GST/HST

- Plain language summary of page
  - Answer a few questions to find out if you need to charge or collect the tax and register to get a GST/HST account number. Businesses with lower revenue and those that deal in certain goods and services might not need to charge tax.
- Heading
  - Do you or your organization already have a GST/HST account?
- 2 clickable options
  - Yes
  - No
- Action button to continue process
  - Next

Lists

- Avoid having more than 1 sentence in a single list item
- Don't end the list items with any punctuation

When list items are grammatically independent of each other or follow a heading, capitalize the first letter of each list item.

Example of punctuation in independent list items

Most requested

- <u>Financing your new business</u>
- <u>Financing for innovation</u>
- <u>Find a loan for your small business</u>
- <u>Canada job grants for employers</u>

When the meaning of list items depends on a lead-in phrase, don't capitalize the first letter of each unless it's a proper name.

Example of punctuation in interdependent list items preceded by a colon

Representatives can be:

- citizenship or immigration consultants
- lawyers
- other representatives

Links

Use lower case for a link in a sentence, unless the link contains a proper name.

Commas

Remove unnecessary commas to make web content easier to read:

- avoid multiple commas in a sentence by breaking it up into a few shorter sentences
- place a comma before "and" and "or" only if it will help people understand a list of items in a sentence

Hyphen and dashes

Hyphens and dashes have different uses. They aren't interchangeable.
Avoid using dashes:

- use a hyphen (-) to join words together
- use "to" instead of the en dash (–) in a span or range of numbers, dates or time
- use a comma (,) to emphasize or frame an idea instead of an em dash (—)
- simplify your sentence instead of using em dashes

See how this rule applies in French:

- 4.1 Majuscules et ponctuation

☐ Share the rule for capitalization and punctuation

4.2 Underlining, bold and italics

Formatting must support the most important information on the page.

Don't combine styles, like underlining and bold formatting, unless it's part of the hyperlinked text found on a topic page.

Underlining

Use underlining for links only.

Bold

Use bold for emphasis, **but** use it sparingly: the more you use it, the less effective it is.

Italics

People with dyslexia or other reading disorders may find it difficult to read italicized text.

Don't use italics:

- for design or decorative purposes
- to emphasize a word or phrase (use bold sparingly instead)
- for long passages of text, such as quotations
- in page titles

Follow *Writing Tips Plus* rules for applying italics for the following:

- italics: French and foreign words
- italics: legal references
- italics: mathematical and scientific material
- italics: titles of works
- Latin terms and abbreviations

See how this rule applies in French:

- [4.2 Soulignement, caractères gras et italique](#)

⤤ Share the rule for bold, italics and underlining

4.3 Symbols

Some symbols make web content more difficult to read while others improve readability. Research whether they're understood by a wide audience before using them.

Ampersand

- Spell out the word "and" instead of using an ampersand (&)
- Use the ampersand only for proper names when it's part of a company name and in certain abbreviations, including:
  - R&D (research and development)
  - O&M (operating and maintenance)

Percent

- 20% (not 20 percent)
- A quarter or one quarter (not ¼)
- Half (not ½)

Currency

- $100 per month

See how this rule applies in French:

- [4.3 Symboles](#)

⤤ Share the rule for symbols

4.4 Abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviations are shortened forms of full terms. Both acronyms and initialisms are types of abbreviations. They are formed from the first letters of a group of words, without spaces.

Write out the long form of the term with the abbreviated form in parentheses at first mention. For example:

- Canadian Space Agency (CSA)
- Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART)
- Ontario (Ont.)

Use the abbreviation without its long form once it's been introduced.

Research common keywords

Check your analytics to find out what keywords your audiences are using to find your content.

If you have to use a multi-word term more than once on a web page, use the full term the first time you use it. For any further uses of the term use a short form such as "the program" or "the plan," in lower case instead of repeating the full term or using an abbreviation.

Example of statements that avoid the use of abbreviations and acronyms

Write: There are 15 client contact centres across Canada.
Instead of: There are 15 CCCs across Canada.

Write: The act strengthens the Government of Canada's commitment to...
Instead of: The EEA strengthens the Government of Canada's commitment to...

Include abbreviations that your audience uses in your metadata (for example, in the description field) to help search engines find your page more easily.

Avoid abbreviations and acronyms by rethinking the content

If your content contains a lot of abbreviations and acronyms, rethink its structure. Consider placing related content under distinct headings and sections.

For example, when introducing legal requirements, use the title of the act once, if necessary, and then talk about what people "must" do. The context will make it clear that the things they "must" do are requirements under the act. Don't use the abbreviation for the act, because it makes the text harder to follow.

Close the topic before referring to other obligations under different legislation.

Latin abbreviations

Avoid using e.g. and i.e. Use clearer alternatives instead, for example:

Write: for example, such as, or like
Instead of: e.g.

Write: that is, in other words
Instead of: i.e.

You may use these abbreviations when space is limited, for example, in a table or a figure.

Styles of address: How to abbreviate and punctuate titles with personal names

Follow the *Writing Tips Plus* rules:

- <u>abbreviations: titles with personal names</u> (abbreviations for non-military titles preceding or following personal names)
- <u>doctors</u> when using PhD, Ph.D., Dr.
- <u>abbreviations: degrees and distinctions</u>
- <u>styles of address:</u> how to use formal and honorific titles to address individuals respectfully, both in writing and in conversation.

See how this rule applies in French:

- <u>4.4 Abréviations, acronymes et référence</u>

⤷ Share the rule for abbreviations and acronyms

4.5 Contractions

Use contractions that people use when they speak. They're easier to scan than the full form.

Use most positive contractions of auxiliary verbs. For example:

- you've (you have), you're (you are), you'll (you will) or you'd (you would)
- we've (we have), we're (we are), we'll (we will) or we'd (we would)

Use some negative contractions of auxiliary verbs. For example:

- can't (cannot)
- don't (do not) or didn't (did not)
- won't (will not)
- isn't (is not)
- weren't (were not) or wasn't (was not)
- aren't (are not)

Use, but don't confuse:

- **its** (possessive) and **it's** (it is)
- **they're** (they are) and **their** (possessive)

Uncommon or more complex contractions can be harder for people with low literacy skills to understand.

Don't use:

- should've (should have) or could've (could have)
- shouldn't (should not), couldn't (could not) or wouldn't (would not)
- mightn't (might not)
- mustn't (must not)
- it'll (it will)

Negative contractions: exceptions

Don't use contractions when there is a **critical** difference between two things, for example, between doing and not doing something.

Example of statements showing differences that are critical and not critical

Critical: Do **not** drive while taking this medicine.
Not critical: Most people **don't** have reactions to the flu vaccine.

See how this rule applies in French:

- 4.5 Forme contractée

 Share the rule for contractions

4.6 Numbers

General

- Write numbers as numerals (0, 1, 2, 3, etc.), except in:
  - proper names (First Baptist Church)
  - titles (Three Men in a Boat)
  - figurative expressions (one day, things will be better)

- Keep Roman numerals when used in proper names (*Canada Gazette*, Part II)
- Place a non-breaking space (Ctrl+Shift+Spacebar) between all numeral and word combinations ($5 million, 20 years)
- Write first, second, third, and so on, up to and including ninth
- Use the ordinal indicator in the same text size (not in superscript) for numbers 10 and above (10th, 50th, 150th)
- Use "to" instead of an en dash in number ranges (for example, $4,000 to $10,000, 4 to 10 years)

Ages

- Adults aged 30 or more
- People 30 to 65 years old
- A 10-year-old child

See how this rule applies in French:

- 4.6 Nombres

 Share the rule for numbers

4.7 Dates

- Write dates without an ordinal indicator ("st," "nd," "rd," "th")

  Write: July 31, 2016, or just July 31 if the year is already clear
  Instead of: July 31st, 2016, or July 31st

- Use non-breaking spaces between the month and the day
- Use the numeric date format **only** when space is limited (for example, in a table)
  - write yyyy-mm-dd
  - explain the format in surrounding text (for example, notes, legends)

- Capitalize the first letter of the month (for example, January, February, March)
- Abbreviate month names when space is limited (for example, Jan, Feb, Mar)

Date ranges

- Use "to" instead of an en dash in date ranges. For example:
  - calendar year 2014
  - Monday to Friday
  - March 29 to April 4
  - fiscal year 2015 to 2016
  - January to March 2016 (instead of Q1, Q2, Q3 or Q4)
- For date ranges like fiscal years, explain what period the range covers in surrounding text. For example:
  - This report covers the 2015 to 2016 fiscal year. A fiscal year runs from April 1 to March 31.

See how this rule applies in French:

- 4.7 Dates

 Share the rule for dates

4.8 Times

- 4:30 pm
- 9 am to 5 pm

See how this rule applies in French:

- 4.8 Heures

 Share the rule for times

4.9 Phone numbers

Use non-breaking hyphens (Ctrl+Shift+Hyphen) in phone numbers. For example:

- if you need help, call 1-800-622-6232
- 613-999-9900 ext. 123

See how this rule applies in French:

- 4.9 Numéros de téléphone

 Share the rule for phone numbers

4.10 Addresses

Mailing addresses

- Abbreviate street types, street direction and province or territory
- Use the correct abbreviations for provinces and territories
- Insert 2 spaces between the province or territory abbreviation and the postal code
- Use uppercase to write the letters in the postal code
- Don't use punctuation except for a hyphen between the unit designator and the civic number

[Organization name or person name]
[Additional delivery information]
[Suite or office]-[Civic number] [Street name] [Abbreviated street type]
[Abbreviated street direction]
[City] [Two-letter province or territory abbreviation] [Postal code]

Example of a mailing address.

Integrity Regime

Departmental Oversight Branch

Public Services and Procurement Canada

Portage III Tower A 10A1

105-11 Laurier St

Gatineau QC K1A 0S5

Email addresses

Spell out email addresses instead of embedding them within your text.

Write:

- Please submit your request by email to <u>abcxyz@canada.ca</u>.
- Please submit your request by email: <u>abcxyz@canada.ca</u>.

Instead of: <u>Email us</u> to submit a request.

See how this rule applies in French:

- <u>4.10 Adresses</u>

 Share the rule for addresses

4.11 Words and expressions in transition

Words and expressions in transition are those written commonly in 2 or more different ways. Reduce confusion by using the following spellings:

- website (not "web site")
- web page (not "webpage")
- web (not "Web")
- email (not "e-mail")
- online (not "on line")

See how this rule applies in French:

This rule doesn't apply to content in French.

⎘ Share the rule for words and expressions in transition

5.0 Content structure

In this section

The structure and layout of content components help people find what they need quickly. Content components include:

- page title
- headings
- lists
- tables

On a web page

Make sure you:

- divide the page into logical sections to give an overview of the information it contains
- focus on the task and show only the information people need to complete the task

Structure the content components efficiently to make your page:

- more visible to search engines and easier to find
- easier to view on mobile devices

Across multiple web pages

Think about how a person will journey through the content. If:

- your web page content covers too many topics, you might need to divide it into several pages
- several web pages contain pieces of content that relate to the same subject, consider combining them into a single page

5.1 Write useful page titles and headings

In your page title, accurately describe what's on the page. A descriptive page title is important because search engines often display the title without the context that the rest of the page provides.

Most people scan page titles and headings, looking for keywords that will confirm that they have found what they're looking for. People who use assistive technology may listen for keywords using software or may use keyboard shortcuts to access all the headings on a page.

When writing a page title, heading or subheading, make sure that it:

- gives a clear idea of what follows

- is short and contains no unnecessary words
- contains the most relevant terms at the beginning
- makes sense on its own
- is followed by text and not by another heading, unless the heading introduces a table of contents on the same page
- has no punctuation at the end
- contains no promotional messaging (boastful, subjective claims) because it might confuse and stop people from navigating to the page

Make the page title unique

Most search engines identify relevant search results based on:

- page title
- headings
- subheadings

They display the page title as a link on the results page.

Unique page titles help search engines tell the difference between similar pages. They also help ensure that people don't need to look at many pages with the same name to find the information they need.

Check whether your page title is unique by using a search engine. Search for the title of the page followed by "site:" and the domain extension (for example, "food safety site:gc.ca" or "food safety site:canada.ca").

Use a page title, headings and subheadings to show structure

The page title, headings and subheadings help people find information on the screen easily. Use headings to divide text into logical sections approximately every 200 words.

Structuring headings clearly helps establish the authority of one heading over another.

For the page **title**:

- use this style: Heading 1
- apply a Heading 1 only once per page

For the **main sections**:

- use this style: Heading 2
- can appear many times

For **subsections**:

- use this style: Heading 3
- can appear many times and in many main sections

For **sub-subsections**:

- use this style: Heading 4 (and so on)
- can appear many times in many subsections

▶ Structure your content with automated style features

Publication and program titles usually don't make good web page titles

Using the titles of reports, brochures, publications or programs as the web page title can make it difficult for people to find your content, even if it relates to their task.

The titles of publications are usually not written in plain language, short enough or descriptive enough.

To help make sure your page ranks high in search results, use page titles that:

- are short
- describe the page accurately
- are relevant to what people type into search engines

When you post a publication online, you must adapt it for the web. Here are some things you can do to get better results:

Write a title that describes the contents of the page

The web page title (Heading1) is the title you see at the top of the page when you're looking at it. Make sure that it accurately describes, in plain language, what your publication is about.

Use the first paragraph to introduce your publication

The first paragraph of your web page should introduce your publication in plain language. It helps people who've landed on the page decide whether they've found what they are looking for. You can include the title of your publication here.

Include keywords in the page's metadata

Use the title tag and the description metadata field to improve where your publication ranks in search results. Here's what you can do:

Title tag: The page title tag is the blue hyperlinked text you see when a search engine generates a list of results. Write an effective page title (Heading1), and use it as your title tag.

Description metadata field: The description metatdata is the content you see under the blue hyperlinked text in search results. **Avoid listing only keywords**, because search engines might ignore these. Write 1 or 2 short sentences that summarize the page. Make sure they contain keywords that people use when searching for your content (for example, abbreviations familiar to your audience).

Refer to the section on plain language for tips on using simple and common words as keywords.

See how this rule applies in French:

- 5.1 Rédiger des titres et sous-titres de page descriptifs

C **Share the rule for writing useful page titles and headings**

5.2 Use lists to help people scan

A short vertical list is easier for people to scan and remember than a long paragraph. If possible, aim for maximum of 7 items in your list.

When writing lists:

- use positive statements as much as possible
- place negatively phrased items together, if you must use them
- use consistent grammatical structure. For example, if you:
  - use the imperative mood (or command) for the first item of your list, use the same mood for each subsequent list item
  - start your first item with a noun, start the other list items with nouns
- if a list contains more than 7 items, consider breaking it up into categories

Lead-in sentence

If you need to clarify the relationship between each element, start the list with a lead-in paragraph that:

- introduces or applies to all the list items
- emphasizes the common element between all the items

If necessary, specify "all" or "or" in the introductory paragraph to clarify whether the list is comprehensive or conditional. For example, you can write:

- "You must meet all of the following requirements:"
- "To be eligible, you must meet 1 or more of the following requirements:"

Numbered lists

Use numbered lists to show:

- ranking
- order
- priority
- step-by-step instructions

Bulleted lists

Place only one idea in each bulleted item. If you need to include more information to explain an idea, use sub-bullets, but use them sparingly.

Example of bulleted list items

Write:

To draft a high-quality source document:

- organize your ideas
  - arrange your ideas from most to least important to the task
  - test your order with a representative audience
- use the active voice
- use the right words
- write short sentences and paragraphs
- follow the guidelines in the *Canada.ca Content Style Guide*

Instead of:

To draft a high-quality source document:

- organize your ideas
- arrange your ideas from most to least important to the task
- test your order with a representative audience
- do not use the passive voice
- it is important to use the right words
- use only short sentences and paragraphs
- use the *Canada.ca Content Style Guide* to ensure you have followed the guidelines

Take a look at the <u>section on capitalization and punctuation rules that apply to lists</u>.

Alphabetical lists

Only present your web content in an alphabetical order if it's the most logical and intuitive approach for the audience.

For example, listing provinces and territories in alphabetical order could be appropriate.

If you present content in alphabetical order in English, also present it in alphabetical order in French to provide the same intuitive experience.

See how this rule applies in French:

- <u>5.2 Utiliser des listes d'éléments pour aider les gens à survoler le texte</u>

 Share the rule for using lists to support scanning

5.3 Use tables to organize data

Use tables to organize and present data. Make sure that the:

- value of each cell relates to the column and row headers
- entries in a column don't contain information that could be considered a subhead
- value of each cell aligns with the column header that appears directly above it

Give your table a clear title that describes the information in it.

Example of a table that organizes data

Comparison of net budgetary authorities and expenditures for Vote 1 as of December 31, for fiscal years 2011 to 2012 and 2012 to 2013 ($

millions)

Vote 1	2011 to 2012	2012 to 2013
Net budgetary authorities	287.4	252.4
Year-to-date expenditures ending December 31	184.1	154.6

Use column and row headers

Each column and row of a table must have a header that describes the information in that column or row.

Column and row headers are different from headings and subheadings:

- column and row headers appear in the cells at the top and on the far left of a table
- headings and subheadings refer to the title of a table or a section of content that appears on a web page

Check that there is a consistent relationship between the columns and rows.

For example, to check the table above, ask yourself whether you can align the information that appears in:

- the column, with the column header that appears directly above it ("Vote 1," "2011 to 2012" ($ millions) and "2012 to 2013" ($ millions))
- a row, with the row header that defines it ("Net budgetary authorities" and "Year-to-date expenditures ending December 31")

Your web team will use the information in the headers to code the table. Afterwards, screen readers will be able to correctly interpret the data within the table.

In the following example, all the cells in the first:

- row are column headers and appear bolded and in grey
- column are row headers (except the top-left cell) and appear bolded

Disclosure of contracts over $10,000 from January to March 2010 [*]

Date contract was awarded	Vendor name	Description	Value
2010-02-01 **	ABC Business Solutions	Rental of machinery office furniture and fixtures	$227,703.22
2010-02-20	IT Consultants R Us	Other professional services not elsewhere specified	$227,956.64
2010-02-23	Management Consulting Group Limited	Management consulting	$285,575.89
2010-03-01	XYZ Consultants	Other professional services not elsewhere specified	$56,294.42

*   Fourth quarter of the April 1, 2009, to March 31, 2010, fiscal year.

**   Dates in this table represent the year, month and day (yyyy-mm-dd).

By looking at the column headers "Date contract was awarded," "Vendor name" and "Value," people can understand that on February 23, 2010, Management Consulting Group Limited was awarded a contract valued at $285,575.89.

Use the simplest structure possible

It can be difficult to make tables accessible and easy to read for people using screen readers or mobile devices.

To make information useful to the widest possible audience:

- turn a complex table into one or more simple tables
- convert a table to a list if the data is simple

Before: complex table

The following table is complex and poorly designed. It would be difficult for someone using a screen reader or a mobile device to access and understand the information.

Example of a complex table

National Hockey League Stanley Cup Canadian winning teams

Eastern Conference						Western Conference			
Team	**Wins**	**Team**	**Wins**	**Team**	**Wins**	**Team**	**Wins**	**Team**	**Wins**
Montréal Canadiens	22	Toronto Maple Leafs	11	Ottawa Senators	1	Edmonton Oilers	5	Calgary Flames	1

After: simple tables

The complex table easily converts into simple tables.

Example: one simple table

National Hockey League Stanley Cup Canadian winning teams

Team	Conference	Wins
Montreal Canadiens	Eastern	22
Toronto Maple Leafs	Eastern	11
Edmonton Oilers	Western	5
Calgary Flames	Western	1
Ottawa Senators	Eastern	1

If it's important to highlight Stanley Cup championships by NHL conference (region), present the information using 2 simpler tables, and use table titles to clarify which conference the teams represent.

Example: multiple simple tables

Table 1: Eastern conference: National Hockey League Stanley Cup Canadian winning teams

Team	Wins
Montreal Canadiens	22
Toronto Maple Leafs	11
Ottawa Senators	1

Table 2: Western conference: National Hockey League Stanley Cup Canadian winning teams

Team	Wins
Edmonton Oilers	5
Calgary Flames	1

The complex table also easily converts into 2 lists.

Example: convert tables to text

Eastern conference National Hockey League:

The Stanley Cup Canadian winning teams

- Montreal Canadiens: 22
- Toronto Maple Leafs: 11
- Ottawa Senators: 1

Western conference National Hockey League:

The Stanley Cup Canadian winning teams

- Edmonton Oilers: 5
- Calgary Flames: 1

Limit the use of texture and colour

Avoid formatting cells with textures or colours, because it can make text difficult to read.

If you must use textures and colours in a table, explain what they mean (for example, in a table note or in a legend). Make sure you comply with the minimum colour contrast rules (1.4.3) from the *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0*.

Never rely on colour or texture alone to convey important information.

Avoid having blank cells

Assistive technologies like a screen reader will notify the person if the cell is blank. If a cell has no value, explain why in your table's:

- notes
- legend
- caption
- surrounding content

You may also write one of the following in the cell, as long as it's clear and doesn't create visual noise that would distract your audience:

- "no data"
- "0" (zero)
- "n/a" (not applicable)

See how this rule applies in French:

- 5.3 Utiliser des tableaux pour organiser des données

⮺ Share the rule for using tables to organize data

6.0 Images and videos

In this section

You can use images and videos to:

- enhance key messages
- help people complete their task
- make complicated information easier to understand
- reflect Canada's diverse population as much as possible (including seniors, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and people from a wide variety of ethnic origins)

When planning your content, weigh the benefits of using videos with the impact on people who will try to view them using mobile devices. Data plans and reliable network access vary.

Obtain permission to publish

Make sure that you have the appropriate permissions to publish images, audio files and videos online. You'll need to have the written proof of those rights. Refer to the *Procedures for Publishing* or contact your institution's authoring team for more details.

Help with images, audio files or videos on Canada.ca

For specific information about consent forms or licensing requirements related to Canada.ca, contact the Principal Publisher: <u>na-web_support-soutien_du_web-gd@servicecanada.gc.ca</u>.

6.1 Understand the purpose of images online

Images can distract people. They can also make the page take longer to load. Make sure your images **add value** to your content.

There are 2 main types of images:

- functional images
- decorative images

Functional images

Functional images:

- illustrate information or data to help people understand it
- explain a complex concept
- illustrate concrete things (such as a valid passport, species at risk, standard symbols)
- convey branding (such as approved logos and campaign graphics)

Functional images add value to the content because they provide more information than can be provided through text alone. Examples of functional images:

- infographics
- illustration
- diagram
- image map

<u>Include the appropriate alternative text</u> to describe the image for people who are unable to view it.

Example of functional images

Figure 4
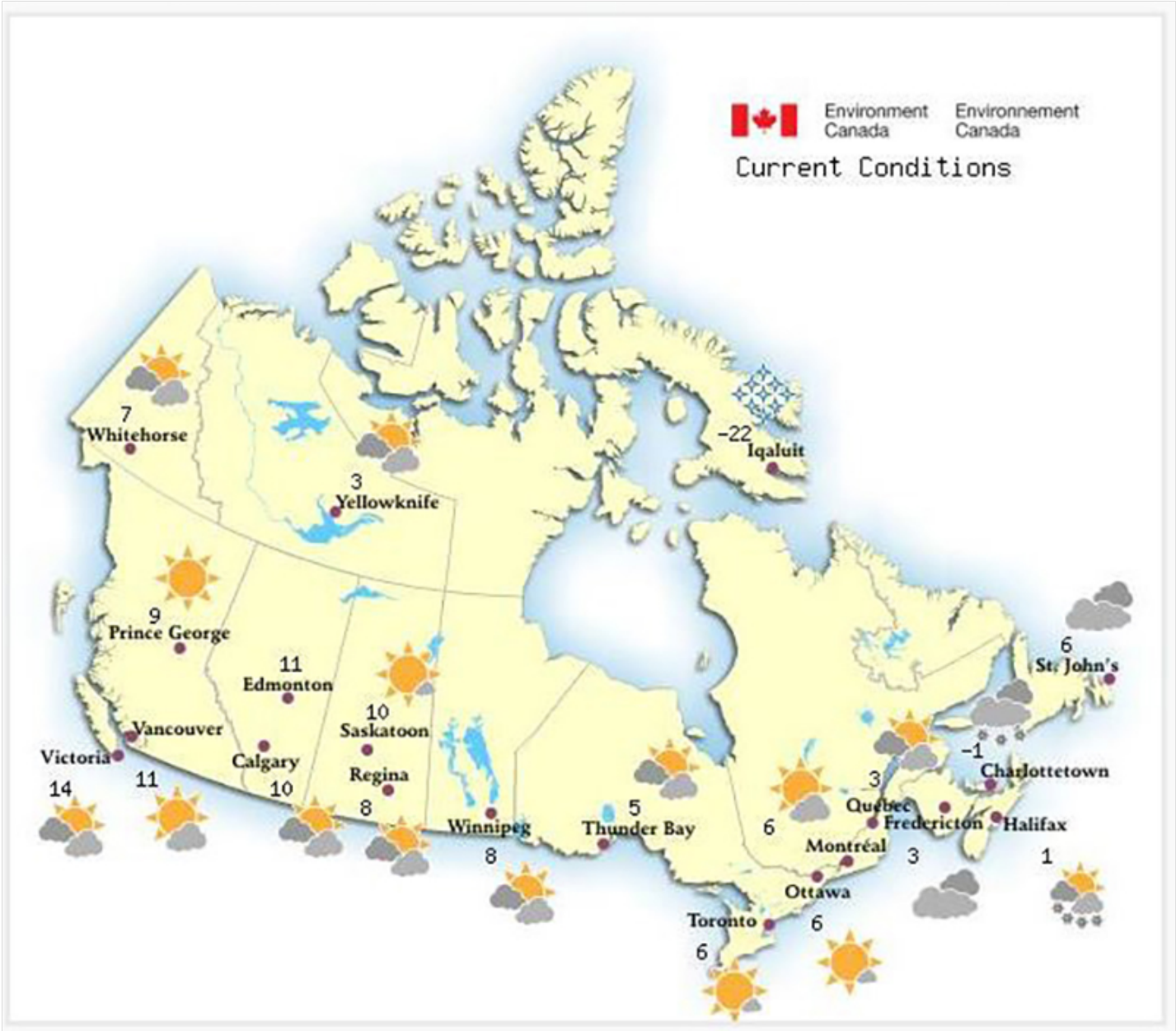
▼ Figure 4 - Text version

City	Condition	Temperature
Calgary	Mainly sunny	0°C
Charlottetown	Drifting snow	-11°C
Edmonton	(no data)	0°C
Fredericton	Sunny	-12°C
Halifax	Mainly sunny	-7°C

City	Condition	Temperature
Iqaluit	Drifting snow	-22°C
Montréal	Sunny	-16°C
Ottawa (Kanata - Orléans)	Mainly sunny	-15°C
Prince George	Partly cloudy	2°C
Québec	Partly cloudy	-19°C
Regina	Cloudy	-4°C
Saskatoon	Mist	-8°C
St. John's	Mist	2°C
Thunder Bay	Partly cloudy	-14°C
Toronto	Light snow	-6°C
Vancouver	Mostly cloudy	9°C
Victoria	Light rain	8°C
Whitehorse	Partly cloudy	-19°C
Winnipeg	Sunny	-18°C
Yellowknife	Mainly sunny	-28°C

Figure 5

The chart below will help you choose the accessibility project that is right for you!

Is the entrance to your building barrier-free?

YES   NO

Are the hallways wide enough for persons with assistive devices, such as electric wheelchairs, to get through?

Ramps, accessible doors, reserved parking, and leveling the ground can improve the accessibility of your building.

YES   NO

Are persons with disabilities able to access all necessary floors, levels and sections of your building?

Making halls and doorways wider, installing automatic door operators, elevators or lifts can all help reduce accessibility barriers in your building.

YES   NO

Can persons with reduced mobility use the washroom in your building?

Accessible washrooms or barrier-free stalls should be available in all facilities.

YES   NO

Are there automatic door openers to the washrooms? Is the washroom entrance wide enough to accommodate assistive devices?

NO

YES

Congratulations! Here are some examples of other accessibility projects that EAF funds: safety and security items, such as visual fire alarms; multi-sensory rooms; hearing loops; and more!

▼ Figure 5 - Text version

The chart asks you yes or no questions. If you answer "no", it gives you recommendations of other accessibility projects.

Question 1: Is the entrance to your building barrier-free?

- If your answer is "Yes", go to question 2
- If your answer is "No":
  - ramps, accessible doors, reserved parking, and leveling the ground can improve the accessibility of your building

Question 2: Are the hallways wide enough for persons with assistive devices, such as electric wheelchairs, to get through?

- If your answer is "Yes", go to question 3
- If your answer is "No":
  - making halls and doorways wider, installing automatic door operators, elevators or lifts can all help reduce accessibility barriers in your building

Question 3: Are persons with disabilities able to access all necessary floors, levels and sections of your building?

- If your answer is "Yes", go to question 4
- If your answer is "No":
  - making halls and doorways wider, installing automatic door operators, elevators or lifts can all help reduce accessibility barriers in your building

Question 4: Can persons with reduced mobility use the washroom in your building?

- If your answer is "Yes", go to question 5
- If your answer is "No":
  - accessible washrooms or barrier-free stalls should be available in all facilities.

Question 5: Are there automatic door openers to the washrooms? Is the washroom entrance wide enough to accommodate assistive devices?

- If your answer is "Yes":
  - congratulations! Here are some examples of other accessibility projects that EAF funds: safety and security items, such as visual fire alarms; multi-sensory rooms; hearing loops; and more!
- If your answer is "No":
  - making halls and doorways wider, installing automatic door operators, elevators or lifts can all help reduce accessibility barriers in your building

Decorative images

Use decorative images only to provide visual context for the following templates:

- a theme or topic page
- the home page
- campaign pages
- promotional features on a topic page or home page (Government of Canada activities and initiatives)

Don't place meaningful text, such as campaign or program titles, in decorative images.

Get details about the templates above in the Canada.ca Specifications.

Example of a decorative image

Healthy food

Fusce nec lectus eget justo iaculis aliquet id quis erat.
Donec ac feugiat ipsum. Aenean porttitor ligula ex.
Maecenas a finibus nunc, eget porttitor quam.

Don't describe decorative images

Decorative images don't require a description. Their only purpose is to add visual appeal to content, not to add contextual information. The decorative image in our example just helps to create visual interest. Using a description for a decorative image gives users unnecessary information that can distract from the content on the page.

Alt text for decorative images

Use the null indicator as the alternative text (alt="") for decorative images. This tells screen readers to ignore the image.

Image sizing and placement

Learn where to place images and videos on Canada.ca and what size they should be:

- use the templates in the Canada.ca Specifications
- see the Canada.ca page types on GitHub

See how this rule applies in French:

- 6.1 Comprendre le but des images sur le Web

⊡ Share the rule for using images

6.2 Include alternative text for images

Alternative text (or alt text) is text that describes an image. It makes it possible for people using assistive technologies to access the information conveyed by an image. It also helps search engines better understand the purpose of the image.

When you're writing alternative text for a functional image:

- describe the image as if you were describing it to someone over the phone
- use as few words as possible
- limit the text to around 140 characters (including spaces)
- use the text that is embedded in the image only if it provides enough context; otherwise, write different text that includes more information
- use the null indicator as the alternative text (alt="") if the image doesn't provide any more information than what is already provided in the text on the page
- don't use "image of..." or "graphic of..." to describe the image; screen readers do this already

Decorative images don't require additional information to make them accessible or visible to search engines. Use the null indicator as the alternative text (alt="").

See how this rule applies in French:

- 6.2 Ajouter un texte alternatif aux images

 Share the rule for alternative text for images

6.3 Include long descriptions for complex images

Long descriptions explain information that is presented in complex infographics or images. You must provide a long description if you can't describe the content and function of the image in less than 140 characters. If you can describe the image in less than 140 characters, use alternative text instead.

If a detailed and equivalent explanation of the image appears in the text immediately before or after a complex image, you don't have to provide a long description.

If you provide a long description for an image, you must also provide alternative text for the long description.

Figure 1 illustrates a number of concepts. It requires a long description.

Example: Long description for the balanced scorecard

Figure 1: using a balanced scorecard approach to monitor key performance indicators
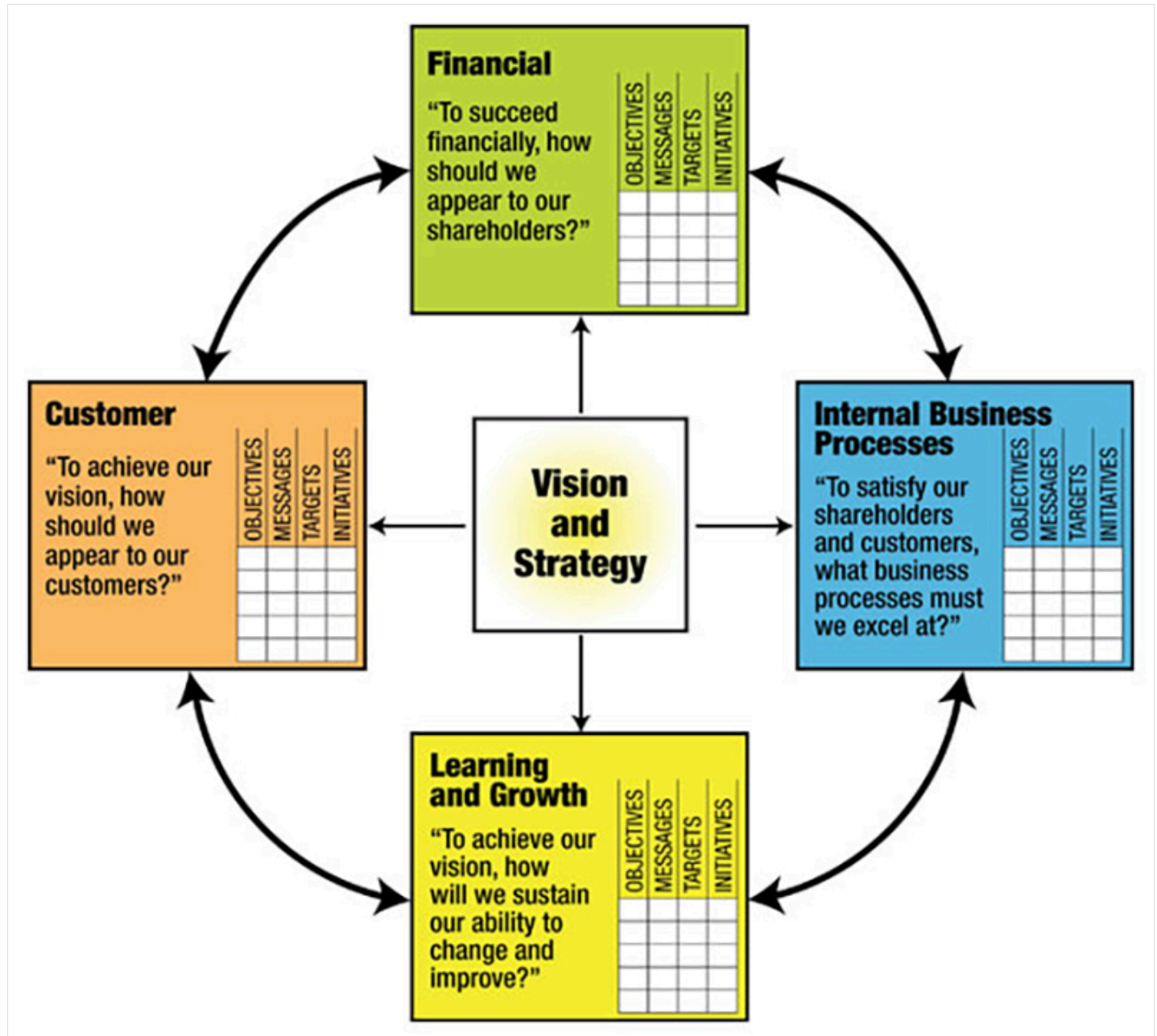
Alternative text

You could write the following alternative text for the image shown in Figure 1:

A balanced scorecard showing how business activities align with an organization's vision and strategy to monitor key performance indicators. Text version below.

Long description

You could write the following long description for the image shown in Figure 1:

A balanced scorecard is a strategic planning and management system used worldwide to align business activities with an organization's vision and strategy.

Business activities are grouped into 4 perspectives, all of which are interdependent and come from the vision and strategy. These are learning and growth, internal business processes, financial, and customer. Each has a question associated with it.

- Learning and growth

To achieve our vision, how will we sustain our ability to change and improve?

- Internal business processes

To satisfy our shareholders and customers, what business processes must we excel at?

- Financial

To succeed financially, how should we appear to our shareholders?

- Customer

To achieve our vision, how should we appear to our customers?

Each perspective can be monitored using the following 4 components:

- objectives
- messages
- targets
- initiatives

Figure 2 is a bar chart. The information in it came from a data table. You could therefore use the table as the long description for this image.

Example: Long description for the bar chart illustrating the proportion of men and women in the public service for selected years from 1983 to 2010

Figure 2: proportion of men and women in the public service for selected years from 1983 to 2010
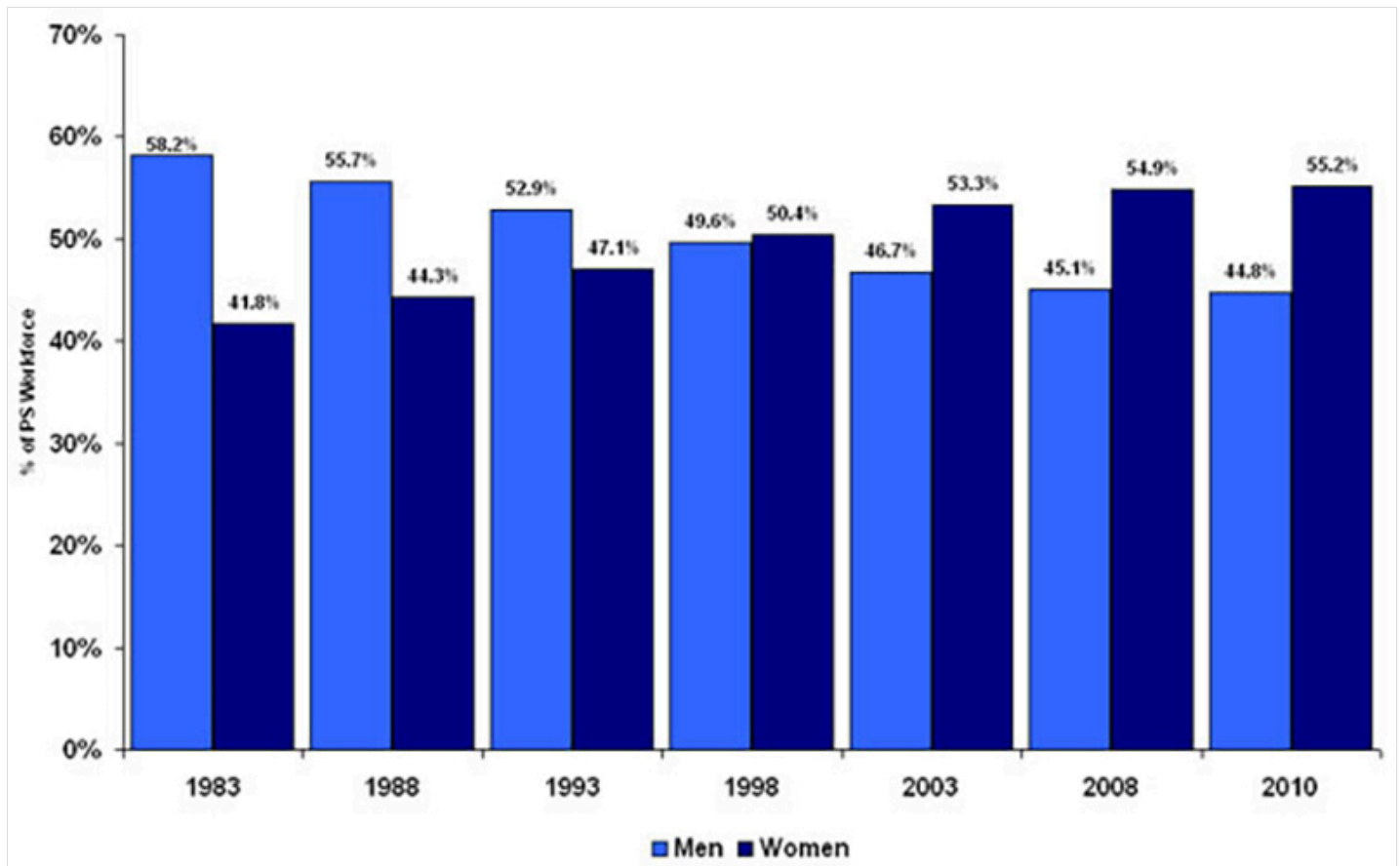
Source: Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat

Note: Includes all tenures. Figures do not include employees on leave without pay.

Alternative text

You could write the following alternative text:

Comparison of the ratio of women and men in the civil service between 1983 and 2010. Text version below.

Long description

You could write the following long description text:

Figure 2: proportion of men and women in the public service for selected years 1983 to 2010

Gender (by percentage)	1983	1988	1993	1998	2003	2008	2010
Men	58.2	55.7	52.9	49.6	46.7	45.1	44.8
Women	41.8	44.3	47.1	50.4	53.3	54.9	55.2
Source: Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat Note: Includes all tenures. Figures do not include employees on leave without pay.							

Work with your web team to determine the best way to include the long description information. They'll guide you on how to make sure the image is accessible to people using assistive technology. They'll also ensure that your image meets the *Canada.ca Specifications*.

See how this rule applies in French:

- [6.3 Ajouter une description longue pour expliquer les images complexes](#)

⮕ Share the rule for long descriptions

6.4 Include transcripts to describe audio and video files

A transcript is the text equivalent of an audio or video file. They make it easier for people who need to access information in audio or visual media but can't hear or see the content because:

- they have a disability
- don't have equipment such as speakers or headphones
- don't want to download a large file

Make sure the transcript describes all pre-recorded information and action, including:

- on-screen text
- dialogue and narration
- important sounds (such as an explosion)
- important action (for example, people running away from an explosion or characters wearing disguises)

See how this rule applies in French:

- [6.4 Ajouter une transcription pour décrire les fichiers audio et vidéo](#)

[Share the rule for transcripts to describe audio and video files]

7.0 Links

In this section

- [7.1 Use links strategically](#)
  - [Carefully select related content](#)
- [7.2 Write descriptive links](#)
  - [Focus on the task](#)
  - [Use parentheses to include contextual information](#)

A link (or hyperlink) is a word, phrase or image on a web page that people click on to move to another part of the same content or to access an entirely different web resource (such as a web page, video or downloadable file).

People who use assistive technology can navigate web content using links. For example, screen readers list all links on a page without the contextual content.

Your links should be descriptive and able to stand alone so that it's clear what people can expect if they click on them.

7.1 Use links strategically

Be strategic about how you place and create links on a web page and about how many links you provide:

- include links that directly support the topic or task on the current page
- link to the original information posted by the authoritative source
- don't include links to intranet sites unless the content targets government employees, in which case you should add "(accessible only on the Government of Canada network)"
- don't bury links that are crucial to completing a task in the middle of a paragraph or at the bottom of the page

Example of appropriate use of links

Write:

A Food Guide serving is how much food you should eat from each of the 4 food groups every day. In some cases, a serving is the amount of a given food group that you normally eat in one sitting, like an apple. In other cases, the daily amount is more than one serving, such as for rice or pasta.

Number of daily food servings for children, teens and adults

Instead of:

A Food Guide Serving is simply a reference amount. It helps you understand how much food is recommended every day from each of the four food groups. In some cases, a Food Guide Serving may be close to what you eat, such as an apple. In other cases, such as rice or pasta, you may serve yourself more than one Food Guide Serving.

Carefully select related content

Providing links to other relevant web pages can help people find related information quickly. Links to your pages from other pages may also help improve where your page ranks in search results.

Be sure to select related links carefully. Too many links on a page can cause people to leave the page without reading important information or can discourage them from completing a task.

See how this rule applies in French:

- 7.1 Utiliser les liens de façon stratégique

⤢ Share the rule for using links strategically

7.2 Write descriptive links

A link must describe the content a person will find once they click on it. It's easier to complete a task when a link's destination matches a person's expectations.

Tips for providing useful links:

- use the first words of the target page or its entire title if it's descriptive enough

- start with keywords that accurately describe the target page if the page title isn't enough
- make sure that all links on the same page use unique descriptive text if they link to different target pages
- when more than one link on a web page links to the same destination page, use the same words for the hyperlink
- describe any content that must be downloaded
- write email addresses in full, in lower case and as active links (contact helpdesk@canada.ca)

Don't use:

- the same link text to point to 2 different pages
- vague statements such as "click here" or "read more"
- promotional messaging that might confuse someone who is deciding whether to go to the page that is being linked to

Focus on the task

When writing instructions for completing a task, sometimes you need to insert a link to guide the person to forms or other documents. Focus on the action they must perform when you create the link.

Don't repeat the name of a form or document in the steps to accomplish a task if the name isn't descriptive.

Example of the use of links that focus on the task

Write:

To get the highest Employment Insurance amount available to you:

1. open the form you need to declare your income
2. identify your highest weeks of insurable income in the shortest period below:
   - the last 52 weeks of employment

   - since the start of your last claim

3. return the completed form in person to the <u>Service Canada office closest to you</u>

Instead of:

To ensure that you are paid the maximum Employment Insurance (EI) benefit rate that you are entitled to, complete the <u>Claimant Attestation - Highest Weeks of Insurable Earnings (Variable Best Weeks) form</u> with the required information about your highest weeks of insurable earnings in the last 52 weeks of employment or since the start of your last claim, whichever is the shorter period of the two.

Use parentheses for contextual information

Use parentheses inside a link to add information that provides context about the linked content. Only provide necessary, contextual information to help users decide whether to proceed.

This guidance applies in the following situations:

- **Link is to a downloadable document.** Make sure to include **the file type** and **size** in the parentheses:

   - **Example**: <u>State of the Canadian Space Sector Report (PDF, 4.35 MB)</u>

- **Link to external content is in a different language.**

   Some non-government web content isn't available in both official languages. If you're linking to external web content that isn't available in the language of the current page, say in which language(s) it is available after the link.

   - Add parentheses inside the link and specify the language of the linked content, formatted as (Language X only).
   - Do not translate the title of the linked content.
   - Ensure its language is indicated in the link's code.

On an English page, write:

- Link text (French only)
- Link text (Inuktitut only)
- Link text (Spanish and Portuguese only)

    - **Example**: To renew your French passport while abroad in Canada, follow the steps described in Effectuer le renouvellement de votre passeport (French only).

Follow the same structure on French-language pages linking to English content:

- L'article 508 révisé, la norme EN 301 549 ou les Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) (en anglais seulement)

- **Link opens video or audio content.** Specify the length of the content inside the parentheses.

    - **Example:** Using Magnifier in Windows: At a Glance - YouTube (2:07 minutes)

- **When more than one situation applies**, include all applicable information in parentheses.

    - **Example:** Complete your application « Demande de passeport temporaire (French only, PDF 0.46 MB) »

See how this rule applies in French:

- 7.2 Rédiger des liens descriptifs

 Share the rule for writing descriptive links

7.3 Make sure that links work

Make sure that your links work and point to the correct information. Broken or outdated links are frustrating. They can cause people to lose confidence in your content.

You should check your links and update them as part of your regular content maintenance schedule:

- fix broken links (those that lead to a 404 "Page not found" message, for example)
- make sure that link destinations are correct and have relevant, up-to-date information
- evaluate your URL redirects:
  - make sure they are current, redirecting people to the correct page
  - update your site links so they to point to current links, not to the URLs that are being redirected
- verify that links point to the appropriate official language

See how this rule applies in French:

- [7.3 Vérifier que les liens fonctionnent](#)

⮥ Share the rule for verifying links

7.4 Linking to internal-to-government content

In most cases, public-facing content should not link to content that is accessible only through internal government networks. Occasionally, the audience for content that is accessible to the public may be primarily internal.

When a link leads to content available only on internal government networks, write "(accessible only on the Government of Canada network)."

See how this rule applies in French:

- [7.4 Créer des liens vers du contenu interne](#)

⎘ Share the rule for internal-to-government content

Web content makeovers

Case study A: improve plain language and content structure

Before

The Employment Insurance (EI) program offers temporary financial assistance to Canadians and individuals who are legally entitled to work in Canada, have a valid Social Insurance Number and remain in Canada during their benefit period. One type of benefits that the EI program offers is regular benefits. EI regular benefits are offered to people who have lost their employment through no fault of their own (for example, because of a shortage of work or because they were employed in seasonal work) and who are ready, willing, and capable of working each day but unable to find work.

After

The Employment Insurance (EI) program could give you temporary financial help if you lost your job.

To qualify for regular benefits, you must:

- be Canadian or legally able to work in Canada
- have a valid social insurance number
- have lost your job through no fault of your own
- be ready, willing and able to work each day but still can't find work

- stay in Canada while you're getting EI help

What we did

To improve this content, we:

- created a list out of the items in the text
- replaced complex nouns with verbs and complex verbs with simpler forms

Case study B: improve and simplify tables

Before

Table: supporting families and communities (in $ millions), Budget 2013

Supporting Families and Communities (in $ millions)	2013 to 2014	2014 to 2015	Total
Support for Families			
Expanding Tax Relief for Home Care Services	5	5	10
Palliative and End-of-Life Care	1	1	2
Tariff Relief for Canadians Consumers	76	76	152
Subtotal—Support for Families	82	82	164
Investing in Communities			
Housing for Canadians in Need			
Homelessness Partnering Strategy		119	119
Investment in Affordable Housing		253	253
Investment in Nunavut Housing	30	70	100
Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.			

Supporting Families and Communities (in $ millions)	2013 to 2014	2014 to 2015	Total
Supporting and Honouring Veterans			
Enhancing Veterans Affairs Canada's Funeral and Burial Program	63	2	65
Road to 2017	1	2	3
Investments in Arts and Culture			
Massey Hall Revitalization	8		8
Expanding Library Services for the			
Blind and Partially Sighted	3		3
First-Time Donor's Super Credit	25	25	50
Supporting the Economic Transition of Communities Economically Linked to the Chrysotile Asbestos Industry	3	5	8
Subtotal—Investing in Communities	133	476	609
Protecting Canada's Natural Environment			
Nature Conservancy of Canada	20		20
Improving the Conservation of Fisheries			
Through Community Partnerships	5	5	10
Salmon Conservation Stamp	1	1	2
Enabling Responsible Marine Management	4		4
Protecting Against Invasive Species	2	2	3
Expanding Tax Support for Clean Energy Generation		1	1
Subtotal—Protecting Canada's Natural Environment	32	9	41
Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.			

Supporting Families and Communities (in $ millions)	2013 to 2014	2014 to 2015	Total
Building Strong Aboriginal Communities			
Resolving Specific Claims	27	27	54
First Nations Land Management Regime	2	7	9
First Nations Policing Program	18	18	36
Aboriginal Justice Strategy	11		11
Renewal of the Family Violence Prevention Program	12	12	24
Improving Health Services to First Nations Communities	24	24	48
Enhancing Mental Health Services in First Nations Communities	2	2	4
Subtotal—Building Strong Aboriginal Communities	95	90	185
Total—Supporting Families and Communities	**342**	**657**	**999**
Less funds existing in the fiscal framework	**76**	**422**	**498**
Less funds sourced from internal reallocations	**1**	**11**	**12**
Net fiscal cost	**265**	**224**	**489**
Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.			

After

Table 1: supporting families and communities for fiscal years 2013 to 2014 and 2014 to 2015, net fiscal costs (in $ millions) [1]

Cost breakdown	2013 to 2014	2014 to 2015	Total

Cost breakdown	2013 to 2014	2014 to 2015	Total
Total: supporting families and communities [2]	342	657	999
Less funds existing in the fiscal framework	(76)	(422)	(498)
Less funds sourced from internal reallocations	(1)	(11)	(12)
Net fiscal costs	265	224	489

1   Totals may not add due to rounding.

2   See Table 1B for detailed breakdown.

Table 1A: supporting families and communities for fiscal years 2013 to 2014 and 2014 to 2015, total costs (in $ millions) [1]

Initiatives and programs	2013 to 2014	2014 to 2015	Total
Support for families [2]	82	82	164
Investing in communities [3]	133	476	609
Protecting Canada's natural environment [4]	32	9	41
Building strong Aboriginal communities [5]	95	90	185
Total: supporting families and communities	342	657	999

Initiatives and programs	2013 to 2014	2014 to 2015	Total

1	Totals may not add due to rounding.
2	See Table 1B for detailed breakdown.
3	See Table 1C for detailed breakdown.
4	See Table 1D for detailed breakdown.
5	See Table 1E for detailed breakdown.

Table 1B: support for families for fiscal years 2013 to 2014 and 2014 to 2015 (in $ millions) [1]

Initiatives and programs	2013 to 2014	2014 to 2015	Total
Expanding tax relief for home care services	5	5	10
Palliative and end-of-life care	1	1	2
Tariff relief for Canadian consumers	76	76	152
Subtotal: support for families	82	82	164

1	Totals may not add due to rounding.

Table 1C: investing in communities for fiscal years 2013 to 2014 and 2014 to 2015 (in $ millions) [1]

Initiatives and programs	2013 to 2014	2014 to 2015	Total
Housing for Canadians in need	0	0	0
Homelessness partnering strategy	0	119	119
Investment in affordable housing	0	253	253
Investment in Nunavut housing	30	70	100
Supporting and Honouring veterans	0	0	0
Enhancing Veterans Affairs Canada's Funeral and Burial Program	63	2	65
Road to 2017	1	2	3
Investments in arts and culture	0	0	0
Massey Hall revitalization	8	0	8
Expanding library services for the blind and partially sighted	3	0	3
First-time Donor's Super Credit	25	25	50
Supporting the economic transition of communities economically linked to the chrysotile asbestos industry	3	5	8
Subtotal: investing in communities	133	476	609

1   Totals may not add due to rounding.

Table 1D: protecting Canada's natural environment for fiscal years 2013 to 2014 and 2014 to 2015 (in $ millions) [1]

Initiatives and programs	2013 to 2014	2014 to 2015	Total

Initiatives and programs	2013 to 2014	2014 to 2015	Total
Nature Conservancy of Canada	20	0	20
Improving the conservation of fisheries through community partnerships	5	5	10
Salmon conservation stamp	1	1	2
Enabling responsible marine management	4	0	4
Protecting against invasive species	2	2	3
Expanding tax support for clean energy generation	0	1	1
Subtotal: protecting Canada's natural environment	32	9	41

1   Totals may not add due to rounding.

Table 1E: building strong Aboriginal communities for fiscal years 2013 to 2014 and 2014 to 2015 (in $ millions) [1]

Initiatives and programs	2013 to 2014	2014 to 2015	Total
Resolving specific claims	27	27	54
First Nations Land Management Regime	2	7	9
First Nations Policing Program	18	18	36
Aboriginal Justice Strategy	11	0	11

1   Totals may not add due to rounding.

Initiatives and programs	2013 to 2014	2014 to 2015	Total
Renewal of the Family Violence Prevention Program	12	12	24
Improving health services to First Nations Communities	24	24	48
Enhancing mental health services in First Nations communities	2	2	4
Subtotal: building strong Aboriginal communities	95	90	185

1   Totals may not add due to rounding.

What we did

To create these tables, we:

- divided a complex table into several simple tables that are more accessible and can be viewed easily on mobile devices
- applied the inverted pyramid approach to provide the summary or conclusion first, followed by increasingly detailed information
- created a clear title for each table
- updated titles to reflect capitalization requirements
- used existing subheadings embedded in the original example to create table headers
- made sure that the last 3 column headers reflect the unit value of the information in each column
- added zeros to provide relevant information in otherwise empty cells
- removed empty cells, rows and irrelevant information (underlining) and subheadings (such as those that were not aligned with the column

headers)

Resources

- [Addressing Guidelines](), Canada Post
- [Clear Writing](), Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs of Ontario
- [Communicating with Seniors: Advice, Techniques and Tips](), Health Canada
- [Good Fonts for Dyslexia](), Luz Rello, NLP & Web Research Groups, et Ricardo Baeza-Yates, Yahoo! Labs & Web Research Group, UPF
- [How Users Read on the Web, Nielsen Norman Group]()
- [Introduction to Administrative Justice and To Plain Language]() (PDF), Council of Canadian Administrative Tribunals
- [Introduction to content design](), Government Digital Service, GOV.UK
- [Language Portal of Canada](), Government of Canada
- [Literacy and Access to Administrative Justice in Canada]() (PDF), Council of Canadian Administrative Tribunals
- [Literacy and Numeracy in Canada](), ABC Life Literacy Canada
- [Lower-Literacy Users: Writing for a Broad Consumer Audience](), Jakob Nielsen, Nielsen Norman Group
- [Minimize Cognitive Load to Maximize Usability](), Kathryn Whitenton, Nielsen Norman Group
- [Mobile User Experience: Limitations and Strengths](), Raluca Budio, Nielsen Norman Group
- [Negative contraction](), Richard Nordquist
- [Plain Language Clear and Simple](), Public Works and Government Services Canada (reprinted 2003)
- [Plain Language Association International]()
- [Plain Language, Please! Here's Why to Avoid "Marketese" Only](), Sarah Bauer
- [Reaching Out: A Guide to Communicating With Aboriginal Seniors](), Health Canada
- [Resources of the Language Portal of Canada](), Government of Canada

- [Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies](#), Statistics Canada
- [Study: Literacy and numeracy among off-reserve First Nations people and Métis](#), 2012, Statistics Canada
- [Study: University graduates with lower levels of literacy and numeracy skills](#), 2012, Statistics Canada
- [TERMIUM Plus](#)®, Translation Bureau
- [The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing](#), George A. Miller
- [Use pair writing to collaborate with subject matter experts](#), Jonathan Kahn, GatherContent
- [Watch Your Punctuation Online](#), Search Engine People
- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0](#), World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)
- [Why Don't Screen Readers Always Read What's on the Screen?](#), The Deque Blog
- [Writing for the web](#), Nielsen Norman Group
- Writing for the Web: Principles and Guidelines, University of Ottawa
- *Writing Tips Plus*, Resource of the Language Portal of Canada, Government of Canada

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Footnotes

[1]   International Plain Language Federation: https://www.iplfederation.org/plain-language

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Date modified:

2024-08-06