



# Style Manual

[Home \(/\)](#) > [Structuring content \(/structuring-content\)](#) > Lists

## Lists

Lists make it easy for users to scan and understand a series of items. Structure and style lists with the user in mind. Set up grammatical structure for list items with a lead-in.

## Structure items in a series as a list

Lists are series of items. All lists have a 'lead-in' (a phrase or sentence) or heading to introduce the list.

Use lists to:

- help users skim information
- group related information
- help users understand how items relate to each other
- show an order of steps
- arrange information by importance.

Lists can be ordered or numbered (the order is important) or unordered (the order is not critical).

- A bullet list can be ordered or unordered.
- A numbered list is always ordered.

Don't use a list if you have only one item. Lists are only for a series of items.

### **Accessibility requirements**

User need:

Fundamental requirement: use lists to make it easier for users to skim content and navigate pages.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criterion: 1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A  
(<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/quickref/#info-and-relationships>).

## **Make short lists**

Long lists can lose meaning and hierarchy, as lower items are further away from the lead-in.

Move long lists to a separate page or an appendix.

## **Limit the number of lists**

Content with too many lists is hard to follow. The content should flow so people can read it easily.

## **Use a consistent pattern for list items**

Write items in a list so they follow a consistent pattern. The pattern is made up by the number of words you use and grammatical structure.

If items follow a consistent pattern, it makes a list easier to scan and understand.

# Write list items so they have parallel structure

Write all list items so they have the same grammatical structure. This is called 'parallel structure'. It makes lists easier to read.

To make a parallel structure, use the same:

- word type to start each item (such as a noun or a verb)
- tense for each item (past, present or future)
- sentence type (such as a question, direction or statement).

Move any words repeated in the list items to the lead-in.

## Write this

I will:

- read more emails
- go to meetings
- be punctual.

## Not this

I will be:

- reading more emails

- going to meetings
- punctual.

[The last item is an adjective while other list items begin with verbs.]

## Punctuate lists according to style

Unnecessary punctuation makes your list look cluttered. Current government style is for minimal punctuation.

### Punctuate lead-ins and headings consistently

Phrase lead-ins always end in a colon (:).

Sentence lead-ins can end in a colon or a full stop. Choose one punctuation mark and use it for all sentence lead-ins in your document. If in doubt, choose a colon; it is used more commonly.

Headings do not have punctuation marks.

### Use minimal punctuation for all lists

In a bullet or numbered list, don't use:

- semicolons (;) or commas (,) at the end of list items
- 'and' or 'or' after list items.

Only include 'and' or 'or' after the second-last list item if it is critical to meaning – for example, you are writing in a legal context. Make sure the lead-in is a clear guide for how this kind of list should be interpreted.

Lead-ins for incomplete lists can use 'for example', 'including' or 'includes'.

Don't write 'etc.' at the end of the list to show the list is incomplete.

When listing items that may be additional or optional, write a lead-in to explain any variables.

### **Example**

Select your preference from one of these options: [Lead-in with many options]

Please write your response to any 3 of the following questions: [Lead-in with a specific number of options]

Applicants need to choose between either: [Lead-in with a choice between 2 options]

## **Use full stops to complete sentences and fragment lists**

Sentence lists and fragment lists are 2 types of list that use full stops.

- Finish each item in a sentence list with a full stop, including the last one.
- Finish fragment lists with a full stop only after the last item.

If you don't include the full stop, people using screen readers may assume the next paragraph is part of the list.

A stand-alone list is a third type of list. Stand-alone lists don't end in a full stop.

# Choose a type of list

There are different ways to construct a list, whether the list is ordered or unordered.

Types of list include:

- sentence lists
- fragment lists
- stand-alone lists.

## Use sentence lists for a series of complete sentences

If you have a paragraph with a series of related sentences, you can consider breaking it into a sentence list.

Sentence lists have a list of sentences, each marked by bullets or numbers.

The list can have a:

- heading (without a colon or full stop)
- sentence lead-in (ending in a colon or full stop)
- phrase lead-in (ending in a colon).

Rules for sentence lists:

- Follow normal sentence structure in each list item.
- Start each list item with a capital letter and end it with a full stop.
- Align run-over lines with the text, not the bullet or number.

Avoid using multiple sentences in each bullet or numbered item. If you include more than one sentence per list item, consider whether:

- all list items conform to a similar pattern
- the list builds rhythm for readability.  
(/node/60#rhythm changes can help or hinder reading).

### Example

Actions for the committee [Heading without a colon before an ordered sentence list]

1. The secretary will respond to each recommendation.
2. The secretary will allocate responses that need more work to members.
3. Members will discuss the recommendations at the next meeting on 9 March.

The committee members decided on several actions. [Sentence lead-in to a sentence list, ending in a full stop]

1. The secretary will respond to each recommendation.
2. The secretary will allocate responses that need more work to members.
3. Members will discuss the recommendations at the next meeting on 9 March.

Use full sentence list items for imperative list items where there is no stated subject in the lead-in.

### Example

To write well:

- Use everyday words.
- Learn about the words people use.
- Choose simple words, not complicated expressions.

[Phrase lead-in to a sentence list, ending in a colon; imperative list items without a stated subject in the lead-in]

## Use fragment lists for a series of incomplete sentences

If you list more than 3 items in a sentence, consider breaking the sentence into a fragment list. This will aid readability.

Fragments are words, phrases or incomplete sentences. Another name for fragment lists is 'phrase lists'.

Fragment lists have a:

- lead-in phrase or sentence followed by a colon
- list of fragments, each marked by a bullet.

Use fragment list items when the lead-in states the grammatical subject (/node/120#a full sentence is grammatically complete).

Rules for fragment lists:

- Use lower case for the first letter of each fragment, unless it's a proper noun.
- Add a full stop to the last list item only.
- Use a grammatically parallel structure for each list item.
- Make sure each fragment can complete a phrase lead-in.



## Example

Writers should become familiar with the conventional types of content structure:

- hierarchical
- sequential
- narrative.

[Fragment list with a sentence lead-in]

The last rule for fragment lists means that if you add each fragment to a phrase lead-in, it will make a complete sentence.

If list items run-on from a phrase lead-in, the list should be very short. The full sentence should be fewer than 25 words.

## Write this

Queensland is famous for its:

- islands and coral reefs
- abundant wildlife
- tropical rainforest
- beautiful beaches.

[If you combine the lead-in with each fragment, you make 4 complete sentences:

- Queensland is famous for its islands and coral reefs.
- Queensland is famous for its abundant wildlife.
- Queensland is famous for its tropical rainforest.

- Queensland is famous for its beautiful beaches.]

### **Not this**

Queensland is famous for its:

- islands and coral reefs
- experience the tropical rainforest
- the wildlife. It can kill you.
- beautiful beaches.

[If you combine the lead-in with each fragment, the second sentence doesn't make sense, 'Queensland is famous for its ... experience the tropical rainforest'. Neither does the third sentence, 'Queensland is famous for its ... the wildlife. It can kill you.']

## **Use stand-alone lists for items under a heading**

If you are not breaking up a paragraph or a sentence, consider a stand-alone list.

Stand-alone lists have a heading without a colon. Brochures and technical documents often contain stand-alone lists.

Items in stand-alone lists can be nouns or noun phrases. They can also be sentence fragments. Items cannot be full sentences.

Rules for stand-alone lists:

- Use a heading, not a lead-in.
- Start each list item with a capital letter.
- Don't add full stops to the end of any of the list items (even the last item).

- Indent each list item if it helps people scan the content.

### **Example**

#### **My weekly tasks**

- Answer phone enquiries
- Book conference venues
- Order stationery
- Take meeting minutes

The differences between a fragment list and a stand-alone list are:

- A fragment list has a sentence or phrase lead-in.
- A stand-alone list has no lead-in, only a heading.
- Fragment list items complete phrase lead-ins to form a grammatical sentence.
- Stand-alone list items do not form a grammatical sentence.

## **Use consistent formatting for all lists**

Sometimes you need to use different types of lists in the same piece of content.

Use the right punctuation and capital letters for each type of list.

Follow your organisation's templates to format lists consistently.

## Make sure lists conform to their type

Each list must look the same as other lists of the same type. For example, a fragment list needs to have the same format as other fragment lists.

Consistency helps people scan lists.

Check that the list displays properly on all platforms.

## Indent most lists

Indent most types of lists after the lead-in.

Indent stand-alone lists if it helps the user scan the list.

## Write numbered lists if the order is critical

Use a numbered (ordered) list when the order is important, such as a list of instructions.

Sometimes you have more than one numbered list in the document. You must choose whether to continue or reset the numbering across the lists.

### Example

How to register for the conference:

1. Choose the days you will attend.
2. Pick the workshops you want to join.
3. Enter your discount code (if you have one).

[This list is numbered because users must complete each step in turn.]

## Avoid using in-line numbered lists

Break up text into a numbered list instead of using an in-line numbered list. This will aid readability.

### Write this

The facilitator will:

1. welcome participants to the conference
2. introduce each of the speakers.

[A numbered list]

### Not this

The facilitator will 1) welcome participants to the conference, and 2) introduce each of the speakers.

[An in-line numbered list]

To order points in general content, don't use ordinal numbers (</node/162>). Instead, you can either:

- use a numbered list
- rephrase the sentences to link them in the same paragraph.

### Write this

The facilitator will welcome participants to the conference. Next, they will introduce each of the speakers.

[The sentences are linked as a sequence with 'next' (an adverb [\(/node/127\)](#)).]

### Not this

The facilitator will firstly welcome participants to the conference. Secondly, they will introduce each of the speakers.

[The ordinals use more words than necessary. [\(/node/204#eliminate\\_unnecessary\\_words\)](#). They also affect tone [\(/node/40\)](#).]

## Put unordered lists in a sequence that helps the user

Use an unordered list if the order is not critical to understanding the content.

List items in the order that will make sense to the user reading it. It's common to write lists in alphabetical order.

### Example

#### National parks near Perth

- Avon Valley National Park
- Serpentine National Park
- Walyunga National Park
- Yanchep National Park

[This stand-alone list uses an alphabetical order, which is easy for users to follow. Context might give you a reason to use a different order for the same list of national parks. For example, you could also sort them by proximity to Perth.]

## Avoid using a multilevel list

Multilevel lists group information into a hierarchy. The levels explain how each item relates to other list items.

Some types of content need multilevel lists, but they can be hard for people to follow.

If you have to use multilevel lists:

- Don't use more than 2 levels.
- Use lowercase letters for the second level in a numbered list.
- Use a dash for the second level in a bullet list, not hollow (open) bullets.
- Use the same symbol, number or letter for the same level in each list.

### Like this

There are many types of birds in Australia, including:

- nocturnal birds
  - frogmouths
  - nightjars
  - owls
- marsh birds
  - crakes

- grebes
- snipes.

[A multilevel (bullet) list, using a dash for the second level]

### **Not this**

There are many types of birds in Australia, including:

- nocturnal birds
  - frogmouths
  - nightjars
  - owls
- marsh birds
  - crakes
  - grebes
  - snipes.

[A multilevel list with hollow bullets]

## **Release notes**

The digital edition, like the sixth edition, calls for punctuation only for the last item in a bullet list. The Content Guide advised against punctuating the final item in a bullet list.



The digital edition advises against using 'and' or 'or' at the end of dot points in lists. The sixth edition allowed 'or' at the end of a list item, though recommended avoiding this if possible.

The December 2020 update to the digital edition accommodates the need to use conjunctions in some lists (such as in legal material, where they can be critical for meaning and interpretation).

The digital edition says multilevel lists can be used if essential, but they should have no more than 2 levels. The Content Guide said lists should have no more than one level.

The sixth edition permitted the addition of sentences to fragments in lists with advice about punctuation. The digital edition does not include a rule for the addition of sentences in new rules for fragment lists.

In sentence lists, the sixth edition allowed each list item to include up to 2 paragraphs. The digital edition is silent on this particular issue. It says to avoid using multiple sentences in bullet or numbered lists. This guidance was expanded in the December 2020 release.

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## About this page

### References

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## Last updated

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