Grammar, punctuation and conventions

Grammar, punctuation and conventions

Reference this section for definitive rules and examples of Australian Government style.

- Types of wordsKeep the functions of words in mind to write clear content. Grammar and sentence structure help people understand meaning.AdjectivesAdverbsConjunctionsDeterminersNounsPrepositionsPronounsVerbs
- Adjectives
- Adverbs
- Conjunctions
- Determiners
- Nouns
- Prepositions
- Pronouns
- Verbs
- Parts of sentencesA sentence is a group of words that makes sense on its own. Structure the parts of a sentence so meaning is easy to understand.ClausesPhrases
- Clauses
- Phrases
- PunctuationUse punctuation correctly to help readability and comprehension. Don't overuse punctuation marks. The Style Manual follows the principles of minimal punctuation and capitalisation.Punctuation and capitalisationApostrophesBrackets and parenthesesColonsCommasDashesEllipsesExclamation marksForward slashesFull stopsHyphensQuestion marksQuotation marksSemicolons
- Punctuation and capitalisation
- Apostrophes
- Brackets and parentheses
- Colons
- Commas
- Dashes
- Ellipses
- Exclamation marks
- Forward slashes
- Full stops
- Hyphens
- Question marks
- Quotation marks

- Semicolons

- SpellingSpelling errors detract from readability. Follow one dictionary for consistency and use it to check variable spellings.Common misspellings and word confusion

- Common misspellings and word confusion

- Shortened words and phrasesUse shortened forms if they help the user understand quicker. Make sure everyone understands them.AbbreviationsAcronyms and initialismsContractionsLatin shortened forms

- Abbreviations

- Acronyms and initialisms

- Contractions

- Latin shortened forms

- Numbers and measurementsStyle for numbers and measurements supports accessibility and readability for users.Choosing numerals or wordsCurrencyDates and timeFractions and decimalsMathematical relationshipsMeasurement and unitsOrdinal numbersPercentagesTelephone numbers

- Choosing numerals or words

- Currency

- Dates and time

- Fractions and decimals

- Mathematical relationships

- Measurement and units

- Ordinal numbers

- Percentages

- Telephone numbers

- ItalicsItalic type contrasts with roman type. It draws people's attention to convey meaning. Use italic type sparingly as it can affect readability.

- Names and termsCheck official sources for correct names and terms. Use consistent capitalisation and punctuation.Australian place namesCommercial termsGovernment termsMedical termsNationalities, peoples and places outside AustraliaNatural phenomenaOrganisation namesPersonal namesPlants and animalsShips, aircraft and other vehiclesTopographic terms

- Australian place names

- Commercial terms

- Government terms

- Medical terms

- Nationalities, peoples and places outside Australia

- Natural phenomena

- Organisation names

- Personal names

- Plants and animals

- Ships, aircraft and other vehicles

- Topographic terms

- Titles, honours, forms of addressUse correct titles and capitalisation for academics, diplomats, judges, government officials, royalty and members of the armed forces.Academics and professionalsAustralian Defence ForceAwards and honoursDiplomatsJudiciaryParliaments and councilsRoyalty, vice-royalty and nobility

- Academics and professionals

- Australian Defence Force

- Awards and honours

- Diplomats

- Judiciary

- Parliaments and councils

- Royalty, vice-royalty and nobility

Types of words

Keep the functions of words in mind to write clear content. Grammar and sentence structure help people understand meaning.

- Adjectives

- Adverbs

- Conjunctions

- Determiners

- Nouns

- Prepositions

- Pronouns

- Verbs

Parts of sentences

A sentence is a group of words that makes sense on its own. Structure the parts of a sentence so meaning is easy to understand.

- Clauses

- Phrases

Punctuation

Use punctuation correctly to help readability and comprehension. Don't overuse punctuation marks. The Style Manual follows the principles of minimal punctuation and capitalisation.

- Punctuation and capitalisation

- Apostrophes

- Brackets and parentheses

- Colons

- Commas
- Dashes
- Ellipses
- Exclamation marks
- Forward slashes
- Full stops
- Hyphens
- Question marks
- Quotation marks
- Semicolons

Spelling

Spelling errors detract from readability. Follow one dictionary for consistency and use it to check variable spellings.

- Common misspellings and word confusion

Shortened words and phrases

Use shortened forms if they help the user understand quicker. Make sure everyone understands them.

- Abbreviations
- Acronyms and initialisms
- Contractions
- Latin shortened forms

Numbers and measurements

Style for numbers and measurements supports accessibility and readability for users.

- Choosing numerals or words
- Currency
- Dates and time
- Fractions and decimals
- Mathematical relationships
- Measurement and units
- Ordinal numbers
- Percentages
- Telephone numbers

Italics

Italic type contrasts with roman type. It draws people's attention to convey meaning. Use italic type sparingly as it can affect readability.

Names and terms

Check official sources for correct names and terms. Use consistent capitalisation and punctuation.

- Australian place names
- Commercial terms
- Government terms
- Medical terms
- Nationalities, peoples and places outside Australia
- Natural phenomena
- Organisation names
- Personal names
- Plants and animals
- Ships, aircraft and other vehicles
- Topographic terms

Titles, honours, forms of address

Use correct titles and capitalisation for academics, diplomats, judges, government officials, royalty and members of the armed forces.

- Academics and professionals
- Australian Defence Force
- Awards and honours
- Diplomats
- Judiciary
- Parliaments and councils
- Royalty, vice-royalty and nobility

Types of words

Keep the functions of words in mind to write clear content. Grammar and sentence structure help people understand meaning.

Words are grouped by function

Each word has a function in a sentence, clause or phrase. You can group words into different types depending on the way they function.

Functions include:

- adjectives
- adverbs
- conjunctions
- determiners
- nouns
- prepositions
- pronouns
- verbs.

Functional categories for words are also known as 'parts of speech'.

Sentence structure sets the function of words

Many individual words can belong to different word types. This depends on what the word is doing in the sentence.

The function of the word depends on the role it plays in combination with others.

Example

- You can face penalties for using a still to make alcohol without the proper licence. ['Still' is a noun.]
- The dinghy was floating in still water. ['Still' is an adjective.]
- The people stood still during the national anthem. ['Still' is an adverb.]

You can change the meaning of a sentence by moving a word.

Place modifying words, such as adjectives and adverbs, next to the thing that they're modifying. The same applies to adverbial and adjectival phrases and clauses.

If you don't put the modifier in the right place, people will find it difficult to understand your content.

The following sentences are all grammatically correct. The meaning changes as the modifier 'only' is moved.

Example

Only Jamilah told Freddie that she respected him. [No one else told Freddie.]

Jamilah only told Freddie that she respected him. [Jamilah didn't write to Freddie. She just told him.]

Jamilah told only Freddie that she respected him. [Jamilah didn't tell anyone else she respected him. She also didn't tell anyone else that she respected them.]

Jamilah told Freddie only that she respected him. [Jamilah didn't tell Freddie anything else.]

Jamilah told Freddie that only she respected him. [No one else respects Freddie.]

Jamilah told Freddie that she only respected him. [Jamilah doesn't have any other opinion of Freddie.]

Jamilah told Freddie that she respected only him. [Jamilah doesn't respect anyone else.]

Fixing a misplaced modifier is more complicated. Sentences with this issue often need some rewriting.

Write this

The report suggested that the drug is beneficial, even though it's harmful in larger doses. ['It' in the modifier refers to 'the drug'.]

Not this

Even though it's harmful in larger doses, the report suggested the drug is beneficial. ['It' in the modifier could go with 'the report' or 'the drug'. This structure weakens the modifier's link with 'the drug'. It creates ambiguity in meaning.]

The digital edition relates grammatical concepts to the principles of plain language.

It provides an overview on types of words to introduce grammatical concepts about parts of speech and how they relate to sentence structure.

The sixth edition called types of words 'word classes'. It had summary information about parts of speech on pages 68 to 70. This formed part of Chapter 5 on grammar.

The Content Guide did not have any in-depth information on grammatical concepts.

About this page

Garner BA (2016) Garner's modern English usage, 4th edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Murphy EM (2011) Working words, Canberra Society of Editors, Canberra.

Oxford University Press (2017) Australian concise Oxford dictionary, 6th edn, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Peters P (1995) The Cambridge Australian English style guide, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Stilman A (2004) Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021.

Parts of sentences

A sentence is a group of words that makes sense on its own. Structure the parts of a sentence so meaning is easy to understand.

A full sentence is grammatically complete

Sentences can be statements, questions, exclamations or commands. A full sentence expresses a complete idea.

Sentences contain at least a subject and a verb.

A basic sentence can have more components, for example:

- who did something (the subject)
- what they did (the verb)
- who or what they did it to (the object or complement).

The verb plus the object or complement form the 'predicate'. Not all sentences contain an object or complement as part of the predicate.

A subject and verb can be enough to complete the subject–predicate structure of a sentence.

Example

- The manager moved. [The subject is 'the manager'. The verb or predicate is 'moved'.]
- The manager moved their desk. [The subject is 'the manager'. The verb is 'moved' and the object or complement is 'their desk'. 'Moved their desk' is the predicate.]

The predicate can sometimes appear as a whole sentence because the subject is implied. This can depend onthe 'mood' of the verb.

Example

- Sign in. [The implied subject is 'you'. The predicate is 'sign in'.]
- Confirm your password. [The implied subject is 'you'. The predicate is the verb 'confirm', plus the object or complement 'your password'.]

Subject

The subject is the person or thing that is doing the action in the sentence. The subject can be a pronoun, noun, noun phrase or noun clause.

- Theymet in the boardroom. ['They' is the subject.]

- Peopleuse the website to find information. ['People' is the subject.]

- The Digital Service Standardhas 13 criteria. ['The Digital Service Standard' is the subject.]

- The heavy rain that fell last weeksubdued the fire. ['The heavy rain that fell last week' is the subject.]

A noun phrase that is part of the subject is partially formed bydeterminers (such as 'the').

Verb

The verb carries information about the subject. It affects the object or complement (if there is one). It can convey an action, an event, a change or a state.

- Theymetin the boardroom. ['met' is the verb]

- The meetingfinishedearly. ['finished' is the verb]

- Theywereall late. ['were' is the verb]

Objects and complements

An object is the thing, person or concept that complements the verb. Objects can be direct or indirect.

- Ravi sent clear instructions to the team.

- ['Clear instructions' is the direct object of the verb 'sent'. 'The team' is the indirect object of the verb. Both objects plus the verb form the predicate.]

Some verbs have no action. They have complements that describe a quality or characteristic of the subject.

- Mary is the new office manager.

- ['Mary' is the subject. 'The new office manager' complements the verb 'is'. The complement plus the verb forms the predicate.]

Sentences are simple, compound or complex

Simple sentences

A simple sentence contains only onemain (or principal) clause. This means it has only one complete verb in it.

The Senate voted on the Aged Care Bill. ['The Senate' is the subject. The verb is 'voted'. 'On the Aged Care Bill' complements the verb to form the predicate.]

The subject can be implied by using a verb in the imperative mood.

Enter your verification code. [The implied subject is 'you'. The verb is 'enter'. 'Your verification code' complements the verb to form the predicate.]

Compound sentences

A compound sentence contains 2 or more main clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction ('and', 'or', 'but', 'so'). Each clause has a complete verb and could stand on its own.

If they have different subjects, use a comma before the coordinating conjunction.

The agency planned to start the project next year, but the group ran out of funding. ['But' is the coordinating conjunction that joins the 2 main clauses.]

If the 2 clauses share the same subject, don't repeat the subject or insert a comma before the conjunction.

The agency planned to start the project next year but ran out of funding. ['The agency' is the subject of the verb 'planned' and the implied subject of the verb 'ran out'.]

You could also write this as 2 short sentences, but this approach can appear repetitive.

Complex sentences

A complex sentence contains a main clause and at least one subordinate clause.

You can start the sentence with the main clause.

She finished the report before she left work. [The focus of the sentence is that 'she finished the report', which is the main clause.]

You can also start the sentence with the subordinate clause to change the emphasis.

Before she left work, she finished the report. [The focus of the sentence is that she finished 'before she left work', which is the subordinate clause.]

Passive voice changes standard sentence order

Simple subject–verb–object sentences are standard in English. This order is clearer and more accessible for people.

Build most sentences in this order with active voice when using active verbs (doing or action verbs).

In passive voice, the 'agent' of an active verb is not the grammatical subject in the sentence order. Using active verbs with passive voice disguises who is doing what.

Example

- Wind forecastsare produced to show average speeds. [Passive voice: the grammatical subject is 'wind forecasts'. It does not answer the question, 'Who or what produces wind forecasts?']
- Wind forecasts are producedby computer modelsto show average speeds. [Passive voice with modified sentence structure: 'by computer models' is anadverbial phrase. It answers the question, 'Who or what produces wind forecasts?']
- Computer modelsproduce wind forecasts to show average speeds. [Active voice: the subject of the verb matches the answer to the question, 'Who or what produces wind forecasts?']

Use passive voice only if there is a good reason – for example, if you can't say who did the action or because information has to be concealed for ethical or legal reasons.

Example

A formal complaint was made about the use of discriminatory language.

The digital edition has practical guidance on plain language.

- It relates grammatical concepts to the principles of plain language and discusses plain languagesentences.
- It consolidates information from the sixth edition and highlights the basics aboutclauses. It takes a different approach to the sixth edition by breaking the grammar pages into specific subject areas like 'phrases' and 'types of words'.

The sixth edition and Content Guide referred to 'plain English' only. This term is used in the digital edition to relate plain language to writing in the English language.

The Content Guide did not have any in-depth information on grammatical concepts.

About this page

Evidence

Content Design London (2020) 'Simple sentences',Content Design London readability guidelines, Content Design London website, accessed 6 April 2020.

GOV.UK (2019)Content design: planning, writing and managing content, GOV.UK.

New Zealand Government (2020)Plain language, Digital.govt.nz.

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) '2.6: Use simple sentences',Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) '2.7: Use short sentences and paragraphs',Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca.

United States Government (n.d.) 'Be concise',Plain language guidelines, plainlanguage.gov.

W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) (n.d.) 'Understanding Success Criterion 3.1.5: reading level',Understanding WCAG 2.1, W3C website.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019a)Course notes and exercises: English grammar for writers, editors and policymakers, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019b)Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

European Commission (2020)English style guide: a handbook for authors and translators in the European Commission, European Commission.

Garner BA (2016)Garner's modern English usage, 4th edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Oxford University Press (2017)Australian concise Oxford dictionary, 6th edn, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Peters P (1995)The Cambridge Australian English style guide, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Nicoll C (2018)Upskill your editing[unpublished course notes], Communication Breakthrough, Canberra.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Strunk W and White EB (2000)The elements of style, 4th edn, Longman, New York.

University of Chicago Press (2017)Chicago manual of style: the essential guide for writers, editors, and publishers, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

W3C (2016) 'Readable: understanding Guideline 3.1',Understanding WCAG 2.0: A guide to understanding and implementing WCAG 2.0, W3C website.

This page was updated Thursday 22 December 2022.

Punctuation

Punctuation

Use punctuation correctly to help readability and comprehension. Don't overuse punctuation marks. The Style Manual follows the principles of minimal punctuation and capitalisation.

- Punctuation and capitalisationPunctuation and capitalisation have rules for correct use. Use minimal punctuation and capitalisation to make content more readable.

- ApostrophesApostrophes show possession and contractions. Don't use them in descriptive phrases or to make nouns and shortened forms plural.

- Brackets and parenthesesBrackets can help users scan text more easily. Only use brackets if you can remove the enclosed text and the meaning does not change.

- ColonsColons draw attention to the text that follows. Only add colons that are essential. Use them to introduce examples, contrasts, lists and block quotes.

- CommasCommas separate parts of a sentence so the meaning is clear. Sentence structure determines their correct use.

- DashesDashes show a relationship. Generally, en dashes for spans are less accessible for users than a phrase. Use spaced en dashes to set off non-essential information in sentences.

- EllipsesEllipses show users that ideas or words are missing from a sentence or a quote. Don't use ellipses to change the intent of the original source.

- Exclamation marksExclamation marks show emphasis and convey emotion. Only use them in informal content.

- Forward slashesForward slashes are useful in a small number of situations. Users are familiar with them in mathematical expressions, dates, web addresses and in some shortened forms.

- Full stopsFull stops mark the end of sentences which aren't questions or exclamations. Users need them to scan text and to recognise decimal values.

- HyphensHyphens connect words and prefixes so meaning is clear. Refer to your organisation's preferred dictionary when you are not sure if you need to use a hyphen for spelling.

- Question marksUsers expect direct questions and requests to end with a question mark. Indirect questions, commands and rhetorical questions can take other punctuation.

- Quotation marksQuotation marks draw attention to words and reference certain kinds of titles. Write most direct speech in single quote marks. For long quotes, use block quotes without quotation marks.

- SemicolonsSemicolons link sentences. They complicate sentences for users if overused. Do not use them at the end of bullet and numbered list items.

Punctuation and capitalisation

Punctuation and capitalisation have rules for correct use. Use minimal punctuation and capitalisation to make content more readable.

Apostrophes

Apostrophes show possession and contractions. Don't use them in descriptive phrases or to make nouns and shortened forms plural.

Brackets and parentheses

Brackets can help users scan text more easily. Only use brackets if you can remove the enclosed text and the meaning does not change.

Colons

Colons draw attention to the text that follows. Only add colons that are essential. Use them to introduce examples, contrasts, lists and block quotes.

Commas

Commas separate parts of a sentence so the meaning is clear. Sentence structure determines their correct use.

Dashes

Dashes show a relationship. Generally, en dashes for spans are less accessible for users than a phrase. Use spaced en dashes to set off non-essential information in sentences.

Ellipses

Ellipses show users that ideas or words are missing from a sentence or a quote. Don't use ellipses to change the intent of the original source.

Exclamation marks

Exclamation marks show emphasis and convey emotion. Only use them in informal content.

Forward slashes

Forward slashes are useful in a small number of situations. Users are familiar with them in mathematical expressions, dates, web addresses and in some shortened forms.

Full stops

Full stops mark the end of sentences which aren't questions or exclamations. Users need them to scan text and to recognise decimal values.

Hyphens

Hyphens connect words and prefixes so meaning is clear. Refer to your organisation's preferred dictionary when you are not sure if you need to use a hyphen for spelling.

Question marks

Users expect direct questions and requests to end with a question mark. Indirect questions, commands and rhetorical questions can take other punctuation.

Quotation marks

Quotation marks draw attention to words and reference certain kinds of titles. Write most direct speech in single quote marks. For long quotes, use block quotes without quotation marks.

Semicolons

Semicolons link sentences. They complicate sentences for users if overused. Do not use them at the end of bullet and numbered list items.

Spelling

Spelling errors detract from readability. Follow one dictionary for consistency and use it to check variable spellings.

Choose one dictionary for consistency

Government organisations should choose one dictionary of Australian English.

This manual recommends either:

- theAustralian concise Oxford dictionary(ACOD)
- theMacquarie dictionary.

Use your organisation's preferred dictionary as a spelling reference when you write.Spelling and word usage can change over time. Make sure you use an up-to-date edition that reflects current language usages.

Dictionaries include any variable spellings for words. Always use the first entry in the list. This helps to ensure words are spelt consistently in government content.

Only use an alternative spelling listed for a word if you have evidence it will meet auser need. Record decisions you make about alternative spellings in astyle sheet.

The entry for a spelling can expand on changes to the basic form of a word. These changes show things like the plural, past tense, or the root from which a word is formed. These changes are called 'inflections' and 'derivations'.

Dictionaries will also show hyphenation, when to use capital letters and how to write foreign words and phrases.

Specialist dictionaries

General dictionaries won't meet all needs. Other dictionaries may have helpful features, for example:

- more details on origins of words (etymologies)
- clearer examples
- word division for breaking words over lines of text
- appendices.

more details on origins of words (etymologies)

clearer examples

word division for breaking words over lines of text

appendices.

Specialist dictionaries are essential for scientific or technical writing. The style sheet for the content should include specialist terms.

Dictionaries describe language usages

English is a global language. There are many regional varieties of written and spoken English. Dictionary spellings capture standard English words. Dictionaries also capture words and usages particular to varieties of English, including Australian English.

Dictionaries are descriptive not prescriptive. They describe how people actually use and spell English rather than prescribing rules for using English correctly. Dictionaries objectively record language for the people who speak it.

This is why dictionary entries include different meanings for each word and alternative spellings. The important thing is to use the word that matches the meaning you want to convey.

Most words have a single spelling. This can lead people to assume there is always a 'correct spelling'. But spellings aren't uniform or consistent around the world. Australian, British and American English share words that have the same meaning, but can be spelt differently.

Australian spellings generally follows British spellings, but there are exceptions. For Australian spellings, always use an Australian English dictionary.

In addition, style guides (like the Style Manual) usually have guidance for their users about how to write specific terms and phrases.

Follow guidance in this manual

The Style Manual has specific guidance about writing certain terms and phrases correctly.

Follow our guidance for:

- names and terms, including Australian place names
- titles, honours and forms of address
- numbers and measurements
- terms that support inclusion
- common misspellings and word confusion.

names and terms, including Australian place names

titles, honours and forms of address

numbers and measurements

terms that support inclusion

common misspellings and word confusion.

There is also guidance related to spelling atpunctuation and capitalisation.

Spelling in this manual

The spelling in this manual follows the sixth edition of the ACOD. This dictionary reflects Australian English usage.

Style Manual also recognises conventions and spellings particular to government content.

The spellings used by Australian Government organisations that follow theMacquarie dictionarymight differ from those in this manual.This is perfectly acceptable – choose either of our recommended dictionaries (or a specialist dictionary) and follow it consistently.

Always follow our guidance for specific terms and phrases.

Users might notice that the Style Manual departs from some spellings used in the sixth edition. For example, we now write 'ement' not 'ment' in acknowledgement, lodgement and judgement (but we use 'judgment' forlegal material). This is consistent with current advice in Australian English dictionaries.

The digital edition reflects contemporary spellings and Australian English usages.

Corpus data informs departures from the sixth edition. The primary set of corpora for Australian-specific data are those onEnglish-Corpora.org. 'News on the web' and 'Global Web-based English' corpora enabled comparative analysis between Australian English usages and other varieties of English.

Checks through the Australian National Dictionary Centre also used data on Factiva and the Oxford National Corpus.

Subject matter experts across the Australian Public Service assisted with spellings that have a legislative basis.

The Content Guide recommendedThe Macquarie dictionary.It did not mention theAustralian concise Oxford dictionaryor any other alternative. It gave advice on setting spellcheckers in Microsoft Word, which the digital edition does not.

Shortened words and phrases

Use shortened forms if they help the user understand quicker. Make sure everyone understands them.

- AbbreviationsAbbreviations are shortened words. They can hinder people's understanding, so they have limited uses.

- Acronyms and initialismsAcronyms and initialisms are shortened forms. They replace full names and special terms in text. Use them only if people recognise and understand them.

- ContractionsContractions are shortened words. People will read and understand them depending on their context. Avoid them in formal content.

- Latin shortened formsUse English rather than Latin shortened forms, except in some cases. People will prefer the English equivalent unless the context requires special use.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are shortened words. They can hinder people's understanding, so they have limited uses.

Acronyms and initialisms

Acronyms and initialisms are shortened forms. They replace full names and special terms in text. Use them only if people recognise and understand them.

Contractions

Contractions are shortened words. People will read and understand them depending on their context. Avoid them in formal content.

Latin shortened forms

Use English rather than Latin shortened forms, except in some cases. People will prefer the English equivalent unless the context requires special use.

Numbers and measurements

Numbers and measurements

Style for numbers and measurements supports accessibility and readability for users.

- Choosing numerals or wordsNumbers as numerals are generally easier for people to scan. Numbers as words remain a convention that people expect in some types of content.

- CurrencyUse the correct numbers, words and symbols for currency so people are clear about the amount.

- Dates and timeDates and expressions of time need to be readable and clear, particularly in content that contains detailed timelines. Write, abbreviate and punctuate dates and times consistently so people can understand your content. Follow international and Australian standards to write dates and times for data systems and international communication.

- Fractions and decimalsDecimals are useful when people need a precise value. Fractions are useful when an exact value is not important.

- Mathematical relationshipsA mathematical relationship is the connection between sets of numbers or variables. In most content, the connection should be described in words. Only use symbols if there's a user need. Code symbols correctly to ensure they are accessible.

- Measurement and unitsStandard units of measurement support readability and accuracy. Express precise values for users by combining numerals with the correct unit symbol.

- Ordinal numbersOrdinal numbers, such as 'first', 'second' and 'third', show the order, position or importance of things in a list or sequence.

- PercentagesPercentages help people compare things and understand proportions. Use numerals with the percentage sign. Be concise when you write about percentages.

- Telephone numbersWrite telephone numbers so people can read and use them easily. There are rules for grouping the numbers, using spacing and creating links.

Choosing numerals or words

Numbers as numerals are generally easier for people to scan. Numbers as words remain a convention that people expect in some types of content.

Currency

Use the correct numbers, words and symbols for currency so people are clear about the amount.

Dates and time

Dates and expressions of time need to be readable and clear, particularly in content that contains detailed timelines. Write, abbreviate and punctuate dates and times consistently so people can understand your content. Follow international and Australian standards to write dates and times for data systems and international communication.

Fractions and decimals

Decimals are useful when people need a precise value. Fractions are useful when an exact value is not important.

Mathematical relationships

A mathematical relationship is the connection between sets of numbers or variables. In most content, the connection should be described in words. Only use symbols if there's a user need. Code symbols correctly to ensure they are accessible.

Measurement and units

Standard units of measurement support readability and accuracy. Express precise values for users by combining numerals with the correct unit symbol.

Ordinal numbers

Ordinal numbers, such as 'first', 'second' and 'third', show the order, position or importance of things in a list or sequence.

Percentages

Percentages help people compare things and understand proportions. Use numerals with the percentage sign. Be concise when you write about percentages.

Telephone numbers

Write telephone numbers so people can read and use them easily. There are rules for grouping the numbers, using spacing and creating links.

Italics

Italic type contrasts with roman type. It draws people's attention to convey meaning. Use italic type sparingly as it can affect readability.

Limit use of italics

Italics are sloping letters. Roman type is upright and the default font type.

Italic type makes text stand out from surrounding roman type. The contrast can help readers notice important words, identify differences and find those words again.

Example

The Australian of the Year honour is a government award. It is different fromThe Australian's annual award of the same name. [Publication titles use italics, but not awards.]

Italics lose their effectiveness when many italicised words appear on a page.

Limit italics to the uses described on this page, which link to detailed guidance.

Don't use italics for:

- large blocks of text
- material that would normally be in italics but is set apart (such as a list of titles under a heading)
- aggregation pages (such as apage listing legislation).

Overuse affects the content's accessibility,readability and usability.

People with disability experience text in many ways. Many have no problems interpreting your written words in any way you present them.

Italic type has different letter shapes to surrounding text. This feature can cause issues for some people with reading difficulties.

Accessibility requirements

User need:

I can read and understand text, even if there are unusual words and shortened forms, or languages other than English.

Fundamentals:

- Use a consistent type style. For some users, it can be difficult to read the text when presented in a style that is different or unfamiliar. This includes changes to the shapes of letters, as between roman and italic type.
- Avoid chunks of italic text.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criterion:Guideline 3.1 – readable. (WCAG 2.0 advisory techniques remain relevant.)

Italicise titles of stand-alone works, legal cases and Acts

A title or name in italic type shows that it is formal and complete. Shortened versions of the title and common titles are in roman type. Follow thedetailed guidance for referencing and attribution.

Don't use italics for the titles of sacred texts, such as the Bible or the Koran.

Published works

Use italics for the titles of these published works:

- books and periodicals
- plays
- classics
- most musical compositions
- ballets and operas
- films, videos and podcasts
- blogs
- television and radio programs
- artworks.

David Williamson's play *Emerald city* was first performed in 1987.

Elena Kats-Chernin's *Piano concerto no. 3* is a recent work by the award-winning composer.

In 2018, Yvette Coppersmith won the Archibald Prize with *Self-portrait, after George Lambert*.

Unpublished works are in roman type.

In some titles, there are words that would normally be italicised. To make sure they stand out from the rest of the italicised title, write the words in roman type. This is called 'reverse italics'.

Gone on The Ghan *and other great railway journeys of Australia* [The *Ghan* is the official name of a train; it would normally be italicised.]

Full titles of Acts and legal cases

Use italics for primary legislation and legal cases but not for delegated legislation or bills. Follow the guidance for legal material.

The Franklin Dam Case is the informal title of *Commonwealth v Tasmania* (1983) 158 CLR 1. The case led to the World Heritage Properties Conservation Bill which became an Act in 1983. In 1999, the Act was replaced by parts of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

[The case name and the Act are italicised; the name for the bill, before enacted, is in roman type.]

Set off most foreign words and phrases

Italics contrast words and phrases that are not in English from surrounding text. Foreign words and phrases should generally be avoided in government writing, unless there is no English equivalent.

Example

The more things change,plus c'est la même.

Standard Australian English can absorb words or phrases from other languages. Write these 'borrowed' words without italics or accent marks.

Example

John was the headbaristaat the department's coffee shop.

Check a dictionary if you are unsure about whether a word of foreign origin should be italics.

Do not italicisenames or words from First Nations languages. They are Australian languages, not foreign languages.

Don't use italics for Latin shortened forms

The 'common use' principle applies to Latin shortened forms (such as 'etc.' and 'i.e.'). Write the full Latin word in italics but not the shortened form.

Example

The abbreviation 'cf.' is from the Latin wordconferand means 'compare'.

Show that formulas and some text have special meaning

Italics are often used for the first instance of a technical term when it's defined or introduced for the first time. Instead, to draw attention to words with special meaning,use single quotation marks.

Specialist uses of italics include well-knownmathematical theorems and formulas.

Example

Pythagoras's theorem for a right-angled triangle proved that$a^2+b^2=c^2$.

Special material

Some content needs to be set apart from the text for readers to make sense of it. Examples of italicised notes, instructions and extra material in published works include:

- Theatre and film scripts can use italics for stage directions.
- Books often italicise a prelude or brief introductory remark to set the scene.

- Musical scripts sometimes use italics for instructions.

Remember to avoid blocks of italics wherever possible. Blocks of italics are difficult to read, so consider other formatting and design options.

Official names of vehicles

Ships, trains, aircraft and other vehicles sometimes have a proper name. The name is in italics excluding any definite article. The brand or type of vehicle is in roman type.

Until 1997, Queen Elizabeth II would use the Britannia to sail to official visits overseas. [The definite article 'the' is in roman type, while the ship's official name is in italics.]

Qantas uses Australian names like Great Southern Land for the Dreamliner fleet.

Follow the detailed guidance for official names of vehicles.

Scientific names

Use italics for the genus and species, including any subspecies, but not for the common name.

Write the scientific names of infectious organisms, including some bacteria and fungi, in italics.

Acacia phlebocarpa is the scientific name for the tabletop wattle.

Certain strains of the bacteria Staphylococcus aureus cause golden staph.

Follow the detailed guidance for names of plants and animals. This guidance also relates to medical terms.

Stress words with special emphasis, but rarely

Sometimes you want to stress a word for meaning or to convey emotion, including a change in tone. Italics, used sparingly, can work for this purpose.

Example

'I didn't mean her,' they said, 'I meant him.'

The deadline is Monday, not Friday.

Don't use italics when another style or formatting option is available. Single quotation marks can work for emphasis unless they're serving a different stylistic use.

Emphasis in quotations

Sometimes, you might want to add italics to quotations to bring attention to particular words or phrases. If you do this, write 'emphasis added' in square brackets following the italicised text. This way, people will know the italics didn't appear in the original quotation.

'Subsequently, in 1903, Parliament passed aunanimousresolution that it should be flown.'[emphasis added]

If the italics is part of the original text, write 'emphasis from original' in the square brackets following the quotation.

The digital edition revises guidance on italics.

The Content Guide recommended avoiding use of italics. The digital edition outlines limited uses for italics. It reinstates the use of italics for Acts and titles of formal publications.

The sixth edition use of italics for titles is retained, with the exception of long poems. Italicised titles are now reserved for poems in book form.

The digital edition departs from sixth edition advice to use italics for letters, words and phrases cited as themselves, terms that are deliberately misused and terms that are newly coined. This reflects expert advice about limiting the use of italics in digital content to ensure readability and accessibility.

The guidance for reverse italics has changed from the sixth edition, which recommended single quotes in addition to roman type for words embedded in an italicised title. The digital edition change is in keeping with the principle of minimal punctuation.

The digital edition recommends against use of italics for names or words from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. This departs from stylistic convention: 'borrowed' words (not absorbed into Australian English) are otherwise italicised.

About this page

American Psychological Association (2020)Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edn, American Psychological Association, Washington DC.

Australian House of Representatives (1908)Debates, HR19:10969.

Gustafsdottir G (30 March 2020) 'Accessibility: bold vs. strong and italics vs. emphasis',Siteimprove, accessed 17 June 2020.

Intelligent Editing (8 June 2015) 'How to decide if you should italicize foreign words and phrases',Intelligent Editing, accessed 17 June 2020.

Mann T (ed) (2013)Australian law dictionary, 2nd edn, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne.

Melbourne University Law Review Association Inc and Melbourne Journal of International Law (2018)Australian guide to legal citation, 4th edn, Melbourne University Law Review Association Inc, accessed 17 June 2020.

Miniukovich A et al (2017) 'Design guidelines for web readability' [conference presentation],2017 DIS'17: Designing Interactive Systems Conference 2017, Edinburgh, accessed 17 June 2020.

Hetherington P (2019)Advice on style for poetry titles[unpublished training materials], University Of Canberra International Poetry Studies Institute, Canberra.

Oxford University Press (2016)New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Peters P (2007)The Cambridge guide to Australian English usage, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Purchase S (1998)The little book of style, AusInfo, Department of Finance and Administration, Canberra.

University of Chicago (2017)Chicago manual of style,17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

W3C (Worldwide Web Consortium) (2016) 'Readable: understanding Guideline 3.1',Understanding WCAG 2.0: A guide to understanding and implementing WCAG 2.0, W3C website.

This page was updated Wednesday 19 April 2023.

Names and terms

Names and terms

Check official sources for correct names and terms. Use consistent capitalisation and punctuation.

- Australian place namesSpell official place names correctly. Follow style rules so people recognise names for other public places. Use standard shortened forms in addresses.

- Commercial termsBrands and model names are protected by law. Unless using common names, write trade mark names and use symbols so people can understand legal status.

- Government termsUse the correct term and follow the rules for capitalising government terms. People find it easier to understand content that has a consistent style.

- Medical termsMedical terms have specific meanings. Introduce scientific terms and common names if that helps users, but always use the correct spelling and style.

- Nationalities, peoples and places outside AustraliaRefer to peoples and places outside Australia based on current information. Correct spelling and style avoids causing confusion or offence among users.

- Natural phenomenaTreat terms for climate and weather events with consistent style. It helps users scan content for keywords and supports readability.

- Organisation namesSpell and punctuate organisation names correctly. This helps people to understand your content.

- Personal namesGetting personal names right is respectful. It also helps users avoid any confusion. Check that you've used the correct spelling, punctuation and capitalisation.

- Plants and animalsNames for plants and animals come from classification systems. The right style for the classification conveys meaning to people reading the content.

- Ships, aircraft and other vehiclesNames of ships, aircraft and other vehicles follow a set style. Using the correct style helps people identify the names of vehicles in text.

- Topographic termsCorrect capitalisation helps people identify topographic and geographic terms in your content. Refer to landmark features, regions and compass points correctly.

Australian place names

Spell official place names correctly. Follow style rules so people recognise names for other public places. Use standard shortened forms in addresses.

Commercial terms

Brands and model names are protected by law. Unless using common names, write trade mark names and use symbols so people can understand legal status.

Government terms

Use the correct term and follow the rules for capitalising government terms. People find it easier to understand content that has a consistent style.

Medical terms

Medical terms have specific meanings. Introduce scientific terms and common names if that helps users, but always use the correct spelling and style.

Nationalities, peoples and places outside Australia

Refer to peoples and places outside Australia based on current information. Correct spelling and style avoids causing confusion or offence among users.

Natural phenomena

Treat terms for climate and weather events with consistent style. It helps users scan content for keywords and supports readability.

Organisation names

Spell and punctuate organisation names correctly. This helps people to understand your content.

Personal names

Getting personal names right is respectful. It also helps users avoid any confusion. Check that you've used the correct spelling, punctuation and capitalisation.

Plants and animals

Names for plants and animals come from classification systems. The right style for the classification conveys meaning to people reading the content.

Ships, aircraft and other vehicles

Names of ships, aircraft and other vehicles follow a set style. Using the correct style helps people identify the names of vehicles in text.

Topographic terms

Correct capitalisation helps people identify topographic and geographic terms in your content. Refer to landmark features, regions and compass points correctly.

Titles, honours, forms of address

Titles, honours, forms of address

Use correct titles and capitalisation for academics, diplomats, judges, government officials, royalty and members of the armed forces.

- Academics and professionalsFollow these rules to address and title academics and professionals correctly. The guidance focuses on academics, medical practitioners, dentists and veterinarians. Apply the rules when writing about individuals in other professions.

- Australian Defence ForceUse the correct title and style to refer to members of the armed services. This guidance is intended primarily for users outside the Department of Defence and the Australian Defence Force.

- Awards and honoursPost-nominals and titles of status show the awards and honours an individual has. List them in the correct order.

- DiplomatsUse the correct term when referring to ambassadors, high commissioners, nuncios and other diplomatic staff.

- JudiciaryUse the correct titles to refer to members of the judiciary.

- Parliaments and councilsRefer to members of Australian parliaments and councils in the correct style. Follow these rules to address and title people correctly.

- Royalty, vice-royalty and nobilityRoyalty and representatives of the royal family should be addressed with their correct title.

Academics and professionals

Follow these rules to address and title academics and professionals correctly. The guidance focuses on academics, medical practitioners, dentists and veterinarians. Apply the rules when

writing about individuals in other professions.

Australian Defence Force

Use the correct title and style to refer to members of the armed services. This guidance is intended primarily for users outside the Department of Defence and the Australian Defence Force.

Awards and honours

Post-nominals and titles of status show the awards and honours an individual has. List them in the correct order.

Diplomats

Use the correct term when referring to ambassadors, high commissioners, nuncios and other diplomatic staff.

Judiciary

Use the correct titles to refer to members of the judiciary.

Parliaments and councils

Refer to members of Australian parliaments and councils in the correct style. Follow these rules to address and title people correctly.

Royalty, vice-royalty and nobility

Royalty and representatives of the royal family should be addressed with their correct title.

Adjectives

Adjectives describe, compare and define nouns and words that act as nouns. Use adjectives to help people understand meaning.

Adjectives describe nouns

Adjectives describenouns,noun phrasesandnoun clauses.

Adjectives usually go immediately before the noun. They can go elsewhere in a sentence – for example, asa predicate.

Example

- They had ashortconversation. [The adjective 'short' describes the noun 'conversation'.]
- Their conversation wasshort. [The adjective 'short' describes the noun 'conversation', but appears as the predicate in this sentence.]

Adjectives also modify noun phrases and noun clauses.

Example

- They hada short conversation about the meeting. [A noun phrase]
- They hada short conversation that led to a decision. [A noun clause]

Different types of words, such as nouns, can also function as adjectives.

Example

- Amovingspeech brought the sound of applause. [A verbal noun (gerund) functioning as an adjective]

Adjectives can affect clarity

Use adjectives sparingly and only when they are essential for meaning. Remove any adjective that doesn't play a critical function in asentence.

Because adjectives are modifiers, they can affect clarity. A lack of clarity can cause users to lose trust in government content.

Compound adjectives can have hyphens

Adjectives can be joined withhyphens to make compound adjectives. A compound adjective usually has a hyphen if the adjective is before the noun it is describing.

Example

- We need afit-for-purposestrategy to solve this specific problem. [Adjective before the noun 'strategy']
- The strategy isfit for purpose. [Adjective after the noun 'strategy']

A compound adjective can be made up of anadverband averb.

A common error with adverbs and hyphens is when people insert a hyphen into this kind of compound adjective. Don't use hyphens with most adverbs finishing in '-ly'.

Correct

- Abadly wordedsentence can be difficult to read, even if it isgrammatically correct.

Incorrect

- Abadly-wordedsentence can be difficult to read, even if it isgrammatically-correct.

There are few exceptions to this rule, so check a dictionary if you are unsure.

Most adjectives use different degrees for comparisons

Degree shows the relative scale of the words being described, such as speed, size or quality. Most adjectives can have 'degree'.

These adjectives usually follow the pattern of adding '-er' or '-est' to the end to show the degree.

Example

Claire is afasttalker. [There is no comparison. Claire is fast.]

Sam is afastertalker than Claire. [Adds '-er' to compare Claire's and Sam's talking speed.]

Sam is faster than Claire, but Petra is thefastestof them all. [Adds '-est' to compare Petra's talking speed to that of the others.]

Not all adjectives follow the regular pattern of 'fast–faster–fastest'. These irregular adjectives have different patterns.

Example

- little, less, least
- good, better, best
- bad, worse, worst

Some adjectives don't have a different form to show degree. They show degree by using 'more' for comparative or 'most' for superlative.

Example

- The department decided on amore flexibleapproach to working arrangements.
- This is themost significantreform of public health policy in decades.

Some adjectives don't have degree because you can't compare them. For example, nothing can be more unique than something else.

There is a common order for strings of adjectives

Write strings of adjectives in an order that creates a more natural-sounding English. This order is determined by the types of adjectives used. List adjectives in this order:

- evaluative – features of a noun that you can measure or compare
- descriptive – features of a noun that you can't measure
- definitive – features of a noun that are intrinsic to the noun.

Evaluative adjectives can also express an opinion.

Example

- Abeautifulroundcommitteetable

In this example:

- 'beautiful' is evaluative because it expresses an opinion
- 'round' is descriptive because it's a feature you can observe but can't measure
- 'committee' is definitive because it is intrinsic to the noun 'table'.

Strings of adjectives have:

- commas between adjectives of the same type
- no commas between adjectives of different types
- no commas and no 'and' before definitive adjectives.

Example

- Alarge,blacknuclearsubmarine ['Large' and 'black' are descriptive; 'nuclear' is definitive.]
- Anew,redlong-rangeelectriccar ['New' and 'red' are descriptive; 'long-range' and 'electric' are definitive.]

You can also use 'and' instead ofcommas to help the sentence flow more smoothly.

Example

- A newandshiny red long-range electric car

The meaning of nouns and adjectives shouldn't overlap

Don't use an adjective if it repeats a quality or property that is part of the noun.

Example

- absolute perfection[Perfection is always absolute.]
- added bonus[All bonuses are added.]
- emergency situation[An emergency is always a situation.]
- future prospect[Prospects are always in the future.]

The digital edition gives an overview of adjectives based on the information from the sixth edition. It links to other pages that have detailed information on specific aspects of adjectives.

The sixth edition had information about adjectives in many different sections of the manual.

The Content Guide had only a brief mention of adjectives.

About this page

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019a)Course notes and exercises: English grammar for writers, editors and policymakers, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019b)Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Turnbull G (14 March 2014)Giles Turnbull interviews Sarah Richards: What we mean when we talk about content design[interview audio file], UK Government Digital Service blog, accessed 29 June 2020.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

This page was updated Tuesday 27 September 2022.

Adverbs

Adverbs modify meaning when they're added to a sentence. Use them occasionally to show people how, when, where, or the extent to which something happens.

Adverbs add more information about other types of words

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives and other adverbs. They often, but not always, end in '-ly'.

Example

- The staff workedhappily. [Modifies the verb 'worked']
- The staff arrivedearlythis morning. [Modifies the verb 'arrived']
- She is averydedicated worker. [Modifies the adjective 'dedicated']
- You finishedquitequickly. [Modifies the adverb 'quickly']

Adverbs can affect clarity

Use adverbs sparingly. Remove any adverb that doesn't play a critical function in asentence.

Because adverbs are modifiers, they can affect clarity. A lack of clarity can cause users to lose trust in government content.

Comparison with adverbs is by degree

Like adjectives, adverbs can have degree to show or imply a comparison. In general, you simply add the word 'more' or 'most' in front of the adverb.

Depending on the context, somewords can be adjectives or adverbs. Make sure you use the correct form. For example, 'quickest' is the adjective and 'most quickly' is the adverb.

Example

Bob spokemore quicklythan Tom. [Uses 'more' to compare Tom's and Bob's speaking speed]

Tom speaks more quickly than Bob, but Harry speaks themost quicklyof them all. [Uses 'most' to compare Harry's speaking speed to that of the others]

Not all adverbs follow this regular pattern of using 'more' or 'most' to show comparison. The following examples show irregular adverbs.

Example

- He spokewell, but she spokebetter.
- You finished workearly, but they finished evenearlier.

Adverbs don't always show or imply comparison. These are called positive adverbs.

Example

- Tom spokequickly. [Tom's speaking speed is not compared with anything else.]
- The staff workedhappily. [We don't know if they worked more happily than others.]

The digital edition provides an overview of adverbs. It gives examples of correct and incorrect use.

The sixth edition has substantial information about adverbs in different sections.

The Content Guide mentions adverbs in the advice on hyphens. It does not provide any other information about adverbs.

About this page

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019a)Course notes and exercises: English grammar for writers, editors and policymakers, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019b)Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

This page was updated Thursday 24 March 2022.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions join whole sentences or parts of a sentence together. They can show people how ideas are linked, or how ideas contrast.

Conjunctions join words, phrases and clauses

Use conjunctions to connect words,phrasesandclauses.

Examples of conjunctions are:

- and
- but
- or
- because
- when.

Example

- The team met earlybecausethe manager requested it.
- Print the page in blackandwhite, please.
- Lee wanted casualorpart-time work.

- Give me a callwhenyou have finished the report.

Some conjunctions are paired

Some conjunctions come in pairs, such as 'whether/or', 'either/or' and 'neither/nor'. Each conjunction in the pair should appear before the same type of word, phrase or clause.

Example

- Whetherrainorshine, we're going ahead with the team-building exercise. [Both conjunctions pair with a noun.]
- My manager and I discussedbothmy performance reviewandmy career prospects. [Both conjunctions pair with a noun phrase.]
- Eitherwe complete the report today,orwe work on it tomorrow. [Both conjunctions pair with clauses.]

Coordinating conjunctions join things of equal importance

Coordinating conjunctions include 'and', 'but' and 'or'. They link words, phrases and clauses that are of the same importance.

Example

- The Australian Defence Force will build new patrol boatsandsubmarines. [Joining nouns]
- Work quicklybutcarefully. [Joining adverbs]
- The answer is trueorfalse. [Joining adjectives]
- The content designers had Post-its on the wallandon the floor. [Joining phrases]
- Schools reopenedsostudents returned. [Joining clauses]

Coordinating conjunctions can also join clauses that could stand alone as sentences.

Example

Keep the sentence simpleotherwisethe message will get lost.

Subordinating conjunctions join clauses and phrases to a main clause

Subordinating conjunctions join the main clause to a subordinate (or 'dependent') clause or phrase.

The main clause can stand alone as a sentence. Dependent clauses add to the main clause: they depend on it toform a complete sentence.

Examples of subordinating conjunctions are:

- when
- if
- unless
- until
- because
- since.

Example

- Whenyou get to work, please phone your new client. ['Please phone your new client' is the main clause; 'when you get to work' is the dependent clause.]
- Take care of your healthas thoughyour life depends on it. ['Take care of your health' is the main clause; 'your life depends on it' is the dependent clause.]

Some adverbs work as conjunctions

A conjunctive adverb is a word that does 2 things at the same time.

- It joins 2 main clauses.
- It modifies a verb, an adjective, another adverb or a whole clause.

They are weaker connections than coordinating or subordinating conjunctions.

Example

A quick guide outlines the issue,besidesdetailing other sources on the topic.

Conjunctive adverbs are often not needed. They add nuance to writing, but use them sparingly. You can usually delete them and keep meaning clear.

Example

- The deadline was still weeks away;however, it was going to be tough to meet. [The adverb 'however' links 2 main clauses.]
- The deadline was still weeks away. It was going to be tough to meet. [No adverb links the 2 main clauses.]

'With' is not a conjunction

Don't use 'with' to add a clause at the beginning or end of a sentence. Reword or split the sentence to prevent this misuse. This helps create shorter, simpler sentences that are easier to read.

Correct

The lake has had several blue-green algae outbreaks this year. It has been closed to swimming at least once a year since 2002.

Incorrect

The lake has had several blue-green algae outbreaks this year,withthe lake closed to swimming at least once a year since 2002.

The digital edition expands what was in the sixth edition by providing context and more examples. The information is consolidated in one page to help the user.

The sixth edition had information about conjunctions in many sections of the manual.

The Content Guide did not have any information about conjunctions.

About this page

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019a)Course notes and exercises: English grammar for writers, editors and policymakers, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019b)Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021.

Determiners

Determiners always go with a noun. They tell people something specific or general about the noun.

Determiners are 'articles' that go with nouns

Determiners introduce anounor anoun phrase. Determiners give more information about the noun they are introducing. They are also called 'articles'.

They show users:

- which things you are referring to
- whether you are referring to specific or to generic things and ideas
- how many things there are.

Determiners include:

- articles such as 'a', 'an' or 'the'
- pronouns such as 'those', 'my' or 'some'
- numbers such as '2', '14' or '23 million'.

Definite articles refer to a specific thing or things

The word 'the' is the 'definite article'. It defines which specific thing you are referring to.

Example

They finishedthereport on time and on budget. [This sentence refers to a specific report.]

You can use 'the' for a group of things, but only if you refer to a specific group.

Example

Theemployees were on time for the meeting. [Specific employees were on time.]

Don't use 'the' when you make a generalisation.

Example

People work in offices. [This is a generalisation about people and offices.]

Indefinite articles let you make generalisations

The words 'a' and 'an' are 'indefinite articles'. Use them when you are referring to a generic thing or idea rather than a specific one.

Example

- Aschool should teachachild how to read and write. [This could be any school and any child.]
- AnEL2 usually supervises several staff. [This could be any EL2.]

Choose 'a' or 'an' according to the sound of the word after it:

- Use 'a' if the following word starts with a consonant sound.
- Use 'an' if the following word starts with a vowel sound.

The same rule applies to shortened words and phrases (abbreviations,acronyms and initialisms, andcontractions).

Some vowels have a hidden 'y' consonant sound at the beginning. For example, you would read 'universal' as 'yew-nee-ver-sahl'.

Say the noun out loud. If it starts with the hidden 'y' sound, use 'a'.

Example

- It wasanerror. [The 'e' sound in 'error' is a vowel.]
- It wasacold office. [The 'c' sound in 'cold' is a consonant.]
- The job requiredauniversity degree. [The 'u' sound in 'university' sounds like the consonant 'y'.]

For words that start with 'h':
- Use 'an' only before words that start with a silent 'h', such as 'honour' or 'hour'.
- Use 'a' for all other words starting with 'h', such as 'historian' or 'hotel', when the 'h' is spoken.

Pronouns can function as determiners

Some pronouns introduce nouns, so they work as determiners. Examples of these pronouns are 'any', 'some', 'this', 'that', 'these', 'those', 'my', 'your', 'his', 'her'.

Pronouns, working as determiners, can show which noun you are referring to.

Example

- Writesomeinstructions.
- Thosemeetings were long but fruitful.
- Give ityourbest shot.

Pronouns can also quantify the noun.

Example

- Everypublic servant knows the code of conduct.
- Mostreports are well written.
- Fewpeople have time to fill out forms.

Numbers can function as determiners

Numbers work as determiners because they give information about how many nouns they are introducing.

Example

- They had2meetings.
- This is mysecondcup of coffee for the day.
- This month, the minister delivered3keynote addresses.

The digital edition relates grammatical concepts to the principles of plain language. It relates word choice to grammatical information abouttypes of words.

It provides an overview on types of words to introduce grammatical concepts about parts of speech and how they relate to sentence structure.

The sixth edition called types of words 'word classes'. It had summary information about parts of speech on pages 68 to 70. This formed part of Chapter 5 on grammar.

The Content Guide did not have any in-depth information on grammatical concepts.

About this page

Altenberg EP and Vago RM (2010)English grammar: understanding the basics, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019a)Course notes and exercises: English grammar for writers, editors and policymakers, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019b)Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021.

Nouns

Nouns are the words that name people, places, organisations and things. Style and grammar support how people interpret nouns in content.

Proper nouns are the names of people and specific things

Any name for a specific person, organisation, place or thing is a 'proper noun'.

Proper nouns always start with capital letters, except forsome commercial terms.

Example

- June
- Shark Bay
- Collingwood Football Club
- Torres Strait Regional Authority
- Prime Minister of Australia

There are specific capitalisation conventions for the:
- titles of office holders
- names of organisations
- government terms.

Common nouns are words for generic things

Common nouns describe people, places, times or things in a general sense. They have a capital letter only when they are the first word in a sentence.

Example

- month
- coast
- local government
- prime ministers

Capitalise nouns only if they are part of a proper noun. Don't capitalise them if you use them as common nouns.

Example

- The ACT'sOfficeof the Commissioner for the Environment was the first such agency in Australia. ['Office' is part of the formal title.]
- I worked in theofficefor 11 years. ['Office' is not part of the formal title, even if it refers to the Office of the Commissioner for the Environment.]

Common nouns can be concrete or abstract

Concrete nouns name things you can identify through one or more of the 5 senses.

Example

- server
- phone
- software
- person

Abstract nouns name intangible things. These include ideas, emotions and physical feelings.

Example

- honesty
- reliance
- engagement
- admiration

Some nouns can be either concrete or abstract, depending on the context.

Example

- Theofficeis upstairs. [Concrete noun]
- Alfred Deakin was the first to hold theofficeof Attorney-General in Australia. [Abstract noun]

Verbal nouns are also called 'gerunds'

Gerunds are nouns that form by attaching an '-ing' to a verb.

Example

- meet [verb], meeting [noun]
- report [verb], reporting [noun]

You can combine gerunds and other verbal nouns with adeterminer(such as 'my' or 'your').

Example

- Yourwritinghas improved. ['Your' is the determiner; 'writing' is the noun; 'has improved' is the verb.]
- They resent Bill'slaughingat them. ['Bill's' is the determiner; 'resent' is the verb; 'laughing' is the noun.]

Verbal nouns also include nouns that relate to verbs in another way. For example, the noun can form by adding other types of suffix to a verb like '-ation' or '-ment'. These are not gerunds.

Example

- fixation [Noun related to the verb 'fix']
- attachment [Noun related to the verb 'attach']

Other verbal nouns don't have any suffix but have the same spelling as the verb. It is context that gives the distinction.

Example

- 'fixthe issue' [verb], 'a quickfix' [noun]
- 'reportan issue' [verb], 'annualreportto the minister' [noun]

Nouns can be singular or plural

Nouns can be singular or plural. Most English words add an '-s' or '-es' to form the plural, but there are many exceptions. Check a dictionary if you're not sure.

Example

- a computer, many computers
- a policy, many policies
- the standby, many standbys
- the Attorney-General, many attorneys-general

Some nouns don't change to form the plural.

Example

an aircraft, many aircraft

Don't use an apostrophe before (or after) the 's' to show the plural.

Correct

Adjust the desks and chairs.

Incorrect

Adjust the desk's and chair's.

Collective nouns describe a group in a single word

Collective nouns are a type of common noun. They label groups of people or things.

Example

- crowd
- committee
- cluster [for example, of desks]

Subject–verb agreement

A collective noun usually has asingular verb. This is so, even if it's made up of component parts.

- The governmentintendsto act.
- The committeeismeeting.
- The governmentintendto act.
- The committeearemeeting.

An exception is when you need to draw attention to the individual parts of the collective noun.

- The branchmeetsonce a week. ['The branch', as a whole, meets once a week. The singular form of the verb is used.]
- The branchare dividedover the new meeting schedule. [The individuals in 'the branch' have different opinions about the new meeting schedule. The plural form of the verb is used.]

Nouns can be countable or uncountable

You can sort nouns by whether they can be separated into individual units and counted:

- You can count countable nouns.
- You cannot count uncountable nouns.

Example

Would you likea cupofcoffeeortea? ['Cup' is countable; 'coffee' and 'tea' are uncountable.]

A countable singular noun must have a determiner.

Correct

- Thereport is being printed.

- Ourreport is being printed.

Incorrect

Report is being printed.

An uncountable noun has no plural and only a singular verb. Uncountable nouns don't need to have a determiner. Whether it has one depends on the meaning of the sentence.

Example

- Respect is an Australian Public Service value. [No determiner with 'respect'. The value is not quantifiable.]
- Theleadership avoided a spill. ['The' is the determiner with 'leadership'. The noun refers to a single, specific group of people.]

Some nouns can be used both ways. The meaning depends on whether the noun is countable or uncountable in the way it is used:

- In the uncountable form, it refers to the whole idea or quantity.
- In the countable form, it refers to a specific example or type.

Example

- Languageis powerful. [In this context, 'language' is uncountable.]
- Australians speak manylanguagesbesides English. [In this context, 'language' is countable.]

Noun trains are hard to understand

Strings of 3 or more nouns are known as 'noun trains'. Each noun in a noun train modifies the next.

Rewrite a sentence to avoid using a noun train. This will help youwrite in plain language.

Write this

The agency's new system will help to improve how it manages injuries. [No noun train]

Not this

The agency's new system will help in the achievement ofinjury management outcome improvements. [Noun train included]

The digital edition relates grammatical concepts to the principles of plain language. It relates word choice to grammatical information abouttypes of words.

It provides an overview on types of words to introduce grammatical concepts about parts of speech and how they relate to sentence structure.

The sixth edition called types of words 'word classes'. It had summary information about parts of speech on pages 68 to 70. This formed part of Chapter 5 on grammar.

The Content Guide did not have any in-depth information on grammatical concepts.

About this page

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019a)Course notes and exercises: English grammar for writers, editors and policymakers, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019b)Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021.

Prepositions

A preposition creates relationships between words or phrases. Some words only work with specific prepositions. Choose them deliberately to convey meaning to users.

A preposition creates relationships between words or phrases

Prepositions show a relationship between anounorverb. Use prepositions to give information about the time and place of an action or thing.

Examples of prepositions are:

- in
- before
- around
- since
- between.

Prepositions often come before related words orphrases.

Example

- Put the book on the table. ['On' shows the position of 'the book' in relation to 'the table'.]
- During her time in office, she launched 50 projects. ['During' refers to 'her time'; 'in' refers to 'office'.]
- They had many discussions about the restructure. ['About' refers to 'the restructure'.]

You can use some prepositions as a different type of word, depending on their function in the sentence. For example, 'down' can be a preposition, part of a verb or an adverb.

Example

- I walked down the hill. ['Down' is a preposition.]
- Prices came down from an all-time high. ['Down' is part of the phrasal verb 'came down'. 'From' is the preposition.]
- Please read down to the bottom of the page. ['Down' is an adverb describing the verb 'read'.]

Some words only work with specific prepositions

Not all prepositions work for every word or phrase. Some words are always followed by particular prepositions. For example, 'different' is always followed by 'to' or 'from', but not by 'than'. Check a dictionary if you are not sure.

Correct

- This is different from that.
- The discussion about the program is continuing.

Incorrect

- This is different than that.
- The discussion around the program is continuing.

The digital edition relates grammatical concepts to the principles of plain language. It relates word choice to grammatical information about types of words.

It provides an overview on types of words to introduce grammatical concepts about parts of speech and how they relate to sentence structure.

The sixth edition called types of words 'word classes'. It had summary information about parts of speech on pages 68 to 70. This formed part of Chapter 5 on grammar.

The Content Guide did not have any in-depth information on grammatical concepts.

About this page

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019a)Course notes and exercises: English grammar for writers, editors and policymakers, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019b)Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

This page was updated Wednesday 31 January 2024.

Pronouns

Pronouns replace other words. People will find content easier to read when pronouns match their context.

Pronouns stand in for other words

Pronouns stand in fornouns. They stand in for groups of words that function as nouns (noun phrasesandnoun clauses). They can also act likedeterminers.

Example

- I, he, she, they, it
- myself, yourself, ourselves
- who, which, that
- any, several

Pronouns can be singular or plural.

Example

- I, we
- she, they
- me, us

Types of pronouns function as different types of words

There are 6 main types of pronouns:

- Personal pronouns replace the names of people or things. They include 'I', 'me', 'we', 'us', 'it', 'they', 'them', 'she', 'her', 'he' and 'him'.

- Reflexive pronouns reflect the action of the verb back to the subject. They include 'myself', 'ourselves', 'itself', 'themself', 'themselves', 'herself' and 'himself'.

- Relative pronouns refer to nouns that are already known from the context. They include 'who', 'whom', 'whose', 'which' and 'that'.

- Interrogative pronouns ask questions. They include 'what', 'which', 'who', 'whom' and 'whose'.

- Demonstrative pronouns specify which noun you are referring to. They include 'this', 'that', 'these' and 'those'.

- Indefinite pronouns don't specify quantity or number. They include 'any', 'each', 'several' and 'some'.

Some pronouns can work as other types of words. For example, 'my', 'his', 'hers', 'our', 'their' and 'your' work as determiners.

Example

- I gave her the report. She gave me a card. [Personal pronouns]

- I told myself I could finish on time. [Reflexive pronoun]

- The person who wrote the report has left. [Relative pronoun]

- Who left the lights on in the office? [Interrogative pronoun]

- This is mine. That one is yours. [Demonstrative pronouns]

- Do you have any feedback? Yes, I have some. [Indefinite pronouns]

Singular pronouns have a gender-neutral form. Use the forms:

- 'they' instead of 'he' or 'she'

- 'them' instead of 'him' or 'her'

- 'their' instead of 'his' or 'hers'.

Pronouns take different forms depending on their function

The form of a pronoun will change depending on whether it is the subject or the object of the verb. This is the 'case' of the pronoun.

A pronoun used as the subject in a sentence is in the subjective case (for example, 'I', 'they').

A pronoun used as the object in a sentence is in the objective case (for example, 'me', 'them').

Example

- I emailed them. ['I' is the subject and 'them' is the object.]

- They emailed me. ['They' is the subject and 'me' is the object.]

When the singular 'they' is used in a sentence as agender-neutralterm, it takes the plural form of a verb.

Use the correct case when writing pronouns. Check whether the pronoun should be in the subjective or the objective case – whether it is thesubject or object.

Correct

- My colleague andItravelled with the delegation.
- My manager senttheir directorandmean email.

Incorrect

- My colleague andmetravelled with the delegation.
- My manager senttheir directorandIan email.

Sentences can have reflexive pronouns when the subject is also the object of the verb.

Example

The manager emailedthemself. ['Themself' is the object but refers to 'the manager', which is the subject.]

Don't use a reflexive pronoun if the subject and the object are not the same person or thing.

Correct

I emailedmyself.

Incorrect

The manager emailedmyself.

Don't use reflexive pronouns such as 'yourself' and 'myself' as the subject of the verb.

Correct

My colleague andItravelled with the delegation.

Incorrect

My colleague andmyselftravelled with the delegation.

Relative pronouns show essential or non-essential information

To make your writing clear, use:

- 'that' for essential information
- 'which', with punctuation, for non-essential information.

It is important to show users whether information is essential or non-essential by using punctuation, for examplecommas.

Example

- The farmthatproduces oats is for sale. [The only farm that is for sale is the one that produces oats.]
- The farm,whichproduces oats,is for sale. [The farm, which happens to produce oats, is for sale.]

Choosing between relative pronouns can be a matter of style in some situations, depending onvoice and tone. It is the use of punctuation with the relative pronoun that clarifies meaning.

The digital edition relates grammatical concepts to the principles of plain language. It relates word choice to grammatical information abouttypes of words.

It provides an overview on types of words to introduce grammatical concepts about parts of speech and how they relate to sentence structure.

The sixth edition called types of words 'word classes'. It had summary information about parts of speech on pages 68 to 70. This formed part of Chapter 5 on grammar.

The digital edition consolidates information about pronouns. It gives an overview of the types of pronouns and highlights common cases of incorrect use. Some of the information covered in the sixth edition – for example, gender-neutral pronouns – is relevant toinclusive language for gender and sexual diversity.

The Content Guide did not have any in-depth information on grammatical concepts. It recommended avoiding use of gender-specific pronouns, consistent with advice in this edition of the Style Manual to use gender-neutral language. It also had some information onusing pronouns for tone.

About this page

Canberra Society of Editors (2000)A singular use of THEY, Canberra Society of Editors website, accessed 20 February 2020.

Carey S (18 October 2011) 'That which is restrictive',Sentence First blog, access November 2020.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019a)Course notes and exercises: English grammar for writers, editors and policymakers, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019b)Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Explorations of Style (28 February 2012) 'Commas and relative clauses',Explorations of Style blog, accessed 13 October 2020.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

This page was updated Thursday 4 January 2024.

Verbs

Verbs express when something happened, or that something is continuing or finished. Verbs help people make sense of other parts of a sentence or clause.

Verbs describe an action, a state, an event or a change

Verbs are words that describe:

- an action
- a state
- an event
- a change.

Example

- to work,to discuss,to try[actions]
- to be,to have,to seem[states]
- to happen,to occur,to result in[events]
- to become,to grow,to dissolve[changes]

The form of the verb changes depending on the grammatical subject and tense.

Verbs must 'agree' with the subject

The form of the verb changes to show whether the subject is singular or plural (the number). This is called 'subject–verb agreement'.

Correct

The analystworksin the office on Mondays. [There is one specific analyst, so the verb takes the singular form 'works'.]

Incorrect

Janworkin the office on Mondays. [There is one person, Jan, so the verb should not take the plural form 'work'.]

To decide which form of the verb you need, find its subject and ask 'who' or 'what' is doing the verb. Using the first example:

- Question: Who works in the office on Mondays?
- Answer: The analyst.

This answer might seem obvious, but subject–verb agreement is not always intuitive. For example, a common mistake is to use the plural form of a verb with acollective noun.

Sentences contain at leasta subject and a verb. Keep the relationship between the grammatical subject and the verb clear to users. This relationship is the basis for writingplain language sentences.

Objects complement some verbs

Some verbs need an object to have meaning. For example, you don't just need or take – you need 'something' or take 'something'. These are 'transitive' verbs.

Example

- Theyneedadvice before the hearing. ['Advice' is the object of the verb 'need'.]
- Takemy advice. ['My advice' is the object of the verb 'take'.]

Some verbs don't have an object. These are 'intransitive' verbs. Intransitive verbs can instead have a complement in the form of anadverboradverbial phrase.

Example

- The power gridfailed. [The verb 'failed' does not have an object.]
- The candidatecampaignedtirelessly. [The verb 'campaigned' does not have an object. 'Tirelessly' is an adverb. The adverb complements the verb.]

Some verbs can be transitive or intransitive. They can have meaning with or without an object, depending on the rest of the sentence.

Example

- Theyopenedthe door. [The object is 'the door'.]
- The dooropened. ['Opened' has no object.]

A complement can go with a verb that links the subject to an attribute, quality or characteristic. This type of complement is not an object, but completes the sentence. They are oftenadjectival phrasesoradjectives.

Example

- The door isopen. ['Open' complements the verb 'is'. It is an adjective that describes the subject, 'the door'.]
- The forecasts seemreasonable. ['Reasonable' complements the verb 'seem'. It is an adjective describes the subject, 'the forecasts'.]
- Each agency hasits own arrangements. ['Its own arrangements' complements the verb 'has'. The complement is a noun phrase describing an attribute of the subject, 'each agency'.]

Tense changes the form of the verb

The form of the verb can also change to show:
- when something happened (past, present or future) – this is the tense of the verb
- whether something is continuing or has finished.

Example

- Iwas writingthe report last week, but I couldn't finish it. [The action is in the past tense and is continuing. I didn't finish writing the report last week.]
- Iwrotethe report yesterday. [The action is in the past tense and has finished.]
- Iam writinganother report today. [The action is in the present tense and it is continuing.]
- Iwill writea final report tomorrow. [The action is in the future tense and it will be finished tomorrow.]
- By next week, the executivewill have reviewedthe report. [The action is in the future tense and will be finished by next week.]

Verbs like 'will' change the form of the main verb 'to write'. Verbs added to the main verb are 'auxiliary' verbs.

The 'mood' of a verb conveys meaning

You can use verbs to describe a fact, express a wish, or make a command or request. The term for this use is 'mood'.

Indicative mood

This mood expresses simple statements or questions.

- Janwentinto the office on Monday.
- The commanderorderedthe troops to stand at ease.
- Wasthe reporttabledin July this year?

Imperative mood

This is the mood for expressing urgency, commands, pleas and requests.

The imperative mood is direct. It works well for instructions and where there is limited space, such as informs.

- Applynow.
- Lodgeyour submission by 31 July.
- Verifyyour corporate credit card.

Be deliberate about the tone the content needs to convey. Imperative commands can seem blunt, even if you use the word 'please'.

Pleasespeak up.

Subjunctive mood

This is the mood for expressing possibility. It shows that something is hypothetical, possible, conceivable or desirable.

- If supplywere to stop, wewouldn't be ableto meet demand.
- If only theywould updatethe data!
- Youshould applynow.

Verbs in the subjunctive mood can work together with other words to express a condition.

- If youtooka sample, youwould havesome data.
- If youappliednow, wecould processyour application tomorrow.

The subjunctive mood doesn't always need an auxiliary verb to show the mood, only the main verb. Recommendations can follow this formula.

Recommendations

- That the Ministermeetwith peak body representatives.

You can use auxiliary verbs to convey ability, possibility, permission or obligation. This affects thetone of your writing.

These verbs are:

- can
- could
- may

- might
- will
- would
- shall
- should
- must
- ought to.
- Thiscouldtake some time.
- Youmustsubmit your application by close of business.

Phrasal verbs need a preposition or adverb

Phrasal verbs are verbs paired with one or moreprepositions. They can also go with anadverb. Check the dictionary entry for the verb to use the correct combination.

Example

- We need tocheck in witheach other. [The verb 'check' pairs with the prepositions 'in' and 'with'.]
- Theyfound out6 breaches had occurred. [The verb 'found' goes with the adverb 'out'.]

When phrasal verbs need an object, you can put the object between the verb and its other part.

Example

The cluegave awaythe answer. [The object, 'the answer', comes after both parts of the phrasal verb, 'gave away'.]The cluegavethe answeraway. [The object comes between the first and second part of the phrasal verb.]

The digital edition relates grammatical concepts to the principles of plain language. It relates word choice to grammatical information abouttypes of words.

It provides an overview on types of words to introduce grammatical concepts about parts of speech and how they relate to sentence structure.

The sixth edition called types of words 'word classes'. It had summary information about parts of speech on pages 68 to 70. This formed part of Chapter 5 on grammar.

The Content Guide did not have any in-depth information on grammatical concepts.

About this page

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019a)Course notes and exercises: English grammar for writers, editors and policymakers, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019b)Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Oxford University Press (2017)Australian concise Oxford dictionary, 6th edn, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Peters P (1995)The Cambridge Australian English style guide, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman S (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021.

Clauses

Clauses are building blocks: sentences can have one or more. When they're well structured, clauses give people clear information.

Clauses contain at least one verb

A clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb.

A clause can be:

- a main clause
- a subordinate clause – noun, adjectival or adverbial.

A main clause can usually stand alone as a sentence, but a subordinate clause can't.

A main clause can stand alone as a sentence

Every sentence has at least one main clause. The main clause is also known as:

- a principal clause
- an independent clause.

The main clause has at least one complete (finite) verb and can stand alone as a sentence.

Example

We will price the project accurately.

[The entire sentence is a main clause.]

When we know the final cost estimates,we will price the project accurately.

[The main clause is 'we will price the project accurately'.]

A compound sentence contains 2 or more main clauses joined by acoordinating conjunction. Each clause has a complete verb and could stand on its own.

Example

We will price the project accuratelyandit will finish on time.

[There are 2 main clauses in this sentence, joined by the coordinating conjunction 'and'.]

Subordinate clauses depend on the main clause

A subordinate clause can't stand alone as a sentence. Subordinate clauses depend on the main clause to make sense. This is why they are also called 'dependent clauses'.

Types of subordinate clauses are:
- noun clause
- adjectival clause
- adverbial clause.

Noun clauses

Noun clauses act asnounsin a sentence, even though they may consist of other types of words. You can replace a noun clause with 'it' and the sentence will still make sense.

How you are still workingis a mystery. /Itis a mystery.

['How you are still working' is a noun clause.]

Noun clauses often start with a:
- relative pronoun – such as 'that' or 'who'
- subordinating conjunction – such as 'although' or 'because'.

That Canberra winters are coldis well known. /Itis well known.

['That Canberra winters are cold' is a noun clause.]

They can also start with a verb in its basic form, which means it has the word 'to' (such as 'to sleep', 'to sit').

He learnedto Skype. / He learnedit.

['To Skype' is a noun clause.]

Adjectival clauses

An adjectival (or relative) clause acts as an adjective. It describes a noun.

Adjectival clauses are usually, but not always, introduced by a relative pronoun (such as 'that', 'which', 'who', 'whom', 'whose').

The sentence should still make sense if you remove the adjectival clause.

The office, which is in the city, closed for the day. / The office closed for the day.

['Which is in the city' is an adjectival clause.]

This is the committee that met for 12 hours last Tuesday. / This is the committee.

['That met for 12 hours last Tuesday' is an adjectival clause.]

The manager, whose staff work hard, often stays back late. / The manager often stays back late.

['Whose staff work hard' is an adjectival clause.]

Adverbial clauses

Adverbial clauses stand in for adverbs. They describe time, place, manner, reason, condition, purpose or concession.

The sentence should still make sense if you remove the adverbial clause.

I always eat breakfast before I go to work. / I always eat breakfast.

['Before I go to work' is an adverbial clause.]

Adverbial clauses are usually, but not always, introduced by:
- a relative pronoun – such as 'that', 'which', 'who', 'whom', 'whose'
- a preposition.
- I always check all my emails before I respond. [Adverbial clause of time]
- Let's meet where there are videoconferencing facilities. [Adverbial clause of place]
- She works as well as any other staff member. [Adverbial clause of manner]
- I'm late for work because I missed the bus. [Adverbial clause of reason]
- I'll dial into the meeting if the server is working. [Adverbial clause of condition]
- Please approve the $20 expense so that I can pay for the stationery. [Adverbial clause of purpose]
- Although the deadline was almost upon her, she had a rest during the weekend. [Adverbial clause of concession]

In the last example, the comma after the adverbial clause helps users find the subject in the sentence ('she').

In some sentences, the subject isn't easy to find without thecomma.

When I met with Eun-jung,Deng met with Evelyn.

['Deng' is the subject of the main clause.]

When I met with Eun-jung Deng met with Evelyn.

[The adverbial clause is not marked with a comma, which obscures the main clause.]

Conjunctions 'if' and 'whether'

'If' and 'whether' are both subordinating conjunctions. They can often be interchangeable, particularly in spoken English. Yet they have different meanings. When you're writing, choose the right one:

- 'If' is conditional. It defines a condition that needs to exist for the main clause to be true.
- 'Whether' shows 2 possibilities. Sometimes one of the possibilities can be understood rather than explicitly mentioned.

We can eat lunch outsideif the rain stops.

[The condition for eating lunch outside is that the rain stops.]

We can choosewhether to eat lunch outside or inside.

[There are 2 places to eat lunch.]

We askedwhether the office was open[or not].

[The 'or not' is implied. The office could be open or not open.]

When there are 2 concrete possibilities, using 'if' instead of 'whether' can lead to ambiguous sentences.

We askedwhetherhe was working from home or from the office.

[Was he working from home or was he working from the office?]

We askedifhe was working from home or from the office.

[Was he working at all, regardless of the location?]

The digital edition has practical guidance on plain language. It relates grammatical concepts to the principles of plain language.

The digital edition consolidates information from the sixth edition and highlights the basics about clauses. It takes a different approach to the sixth edition by breaking related topics into specific subject areas like 'phrases' and 'types of words'.

The Content Guide did not have any in-depth information on grammatical concepts.

About this page

Altenberg EP and Vago RM (2010)English grammar: understanding the basics, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019a)Course notes and exercises: English grammar for writers, editors and policymakers, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019b)Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

European Commission (2020)English style guide: a handbook for authors and translators in the European Commission, European Commission.

Murphy EM (2011)Working words, Canberra Society of Editors, Canberra.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Strunk W and White EB (2000)The elements of style, 4th edn, Longman, New York.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

This page was updated Wednesday 5 July 2023.

Phrases

Phrases are groups of words that add meaning to a sentence. Write and punctuate them correctly to give people clear and useful information.

Phrases are groups of words with a specific function

A phrase is a group of words that makes sense on its own but doesn't contain a subject and a verb.

Phrases can only add meaning to a sentence. They can't stand on their own.

Types of phrases include:

- noun phrases
- adverbial phrases
- adjectival phrases.

Noun phrases function as nouns

A noun phrase is a group of words that works in a sentence as anoun. A noun phrase always includes a noun. It can also include determiners, adjectives, adverbs and other nouns.

Example

Our well-prepared colleagueentered the meeting room.

[The phrase 'our well-prepared colleague' works as the noun in the sentence. This phrase contains the determiner 'our', the adjective 'well-prepared' and the noun 'colleague'.]

She was well suited tolife in an office.

[The phrase 'life in an office' works as the noun in the sentence. This phrase contains the noun 'life', the preposition 'in', the determiner 'an' and the noun 'office'.]

Possessive phrases

A possessive phrase is a particular type of noun phrase. It shows that one noun in the phrase belongs to another noun in the phrase. Possessive phrases usually have an apostrophe.

I thought it wassomeone else's problem.

[The problem belongs to someone else.]

This was one of thecommander-in-chief's first ordersto the troops.

[The first orders belong to the commander-in-chief.]

Non-possessive and generic phrases

Non-possessive and generic phrases use plural nouns as adjectives. No apostrophes are needed.

She signed thevisitors book.

[The book doesn't belong to the visitors. The word 'visitors' describes the type of book.]

TheHistoric Shipwrecks Delegates Committeemet once a year.

[The committee is made up of delegates. The name of the committee relates to theHistoric Shipwrecks Act 1976.]

Adverbial phrases function as adverbs

An adverbial phrase is a group of words that describes a verb, adjective or otheradverb.

Example

Grammar rules arequite frequentlymisunderstood.

[The phrase 'quite frequently'modifies the adjective 'misunderstood'.]

Best of all, we can tick this off the list.

[The phrase 'best of all' modifies the main clause 'we can tick this off the list'.]

Adverbial phrases can describe the manner of or reason for a verb's action.

Example

We'll do thisby the rules. [Adverbial phrase of manner]

We came insidebecause of the rain. [Adverbial phrase of reason]

Adverbial phrases can also describe time and place. These are known as 'prepositional phrases'. Prepositional phrases consist of:

- the preposition
- any adjectives or determiners that accompany it.

Example

I'll see youafter knock-off time. [Adverbial phrase of time]

The manual saton the shelf. [Adverbial phrase of place]

Adjectival phrases function as adjectives

An adjectival phrase is a group of words that works as anadjective. It modifies a pronoun, noun or noun phrase.

Example

The staff showcased their workon the new project.

[The phrase 'on the new project' describes the staff's work.]

Adjectival phrases that modify a pronoun, noun or noun phrase can also appear after the verb 'to be'.

Example

They areeager to hear good news.

[The phrase 'eager to hear good news' describes the pronoun 'they'.]

The developer wascategorical about accessibility requirements.

[The phrase 'categorical about accessibility requirements' describes the noun phrase 'the developer'.]

Adjectival phrases can start with a preposition. They are also known as prepositional phrases.

Example

The top linein the budget reportshowed a deficit.

[The preposition 'in' starts the prepositional phrase 'in the budget report', which describes 'the top line'.]

The digital edition has practical guidance on plain language. It relates grammatical concepts to the principles of plain language.

The digital edition consolidates information from the sixth edition and highlights the basics aboutclauses. It takes a different approach to the sixth edition by breaking related topics into specific subject areas like 'phrases' and 'types of words'.

The Content Guide did not have any in-depth information on grammatical concepts.

About this page

Altenberg EP and Vago RM (2010)English grammar: understanding the basics, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019a)Course notes and exercises: English grammar for writers, editors and policymakers, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019b)Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

European Commission (2020)English style guide: a handbook for authors and translators in the European Commission, European Commission.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Strunk W and White EB (2000)The elements of style, 4th edn, Longman, New York.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

This page was updated Thursday 22 December 2022.

Punctuation and capitalisation

Punctuation and capitalisation have rules for correct use. Use minimal punctuation and capitalisation to make content more readable.

Use minimal punctuation to make meaning clear

Minimal punctuation doesn't mean removing all punctuation marks from a sentence. It means removing unnecessary punctuation.

Only use punctuation that makes the sentence grammatically correct and the meaning clear.

Too much punctuation makes text crowded and difficult to read. If a sentence has a lot of punctuation marks, it might be a sign that the sentence is too long or complex. Try to rewrite intoshorter, clearer sentences.

To use minimal punctuation:
- Don't add full stops to the ends of headings, page headers, footers or captions.
- Don't use a semicolon at the end of each item in a bullet list.
- Unless each item is a full sentence or the last item in a list, don't use a full stop foritems in bullet lists.
- Don't use full stops between letters in anacronym or initialism.
- Don't use a full stop at the end of mostabbreviations.

Minimal punctuation helps users understand your content.

Screen readers work best with minimal punctuation

Some screen readers will announce punctuation marks. Some will change the modulation of the voice depending on the punctuation mark.

By default, screen readers that people who are blind or have low vision use, do not usually announce punctuation. They may pause briefly when they encounter a comma, full stop, or semicolon. They may also change inflection when they encounter a question mark.

Screen readers usually ignore most other punctuation unless verbosity is set high, or a person reads character by character.

Watch out for misplaced punctuation: it can change meaning

Use punctuation marks to:
- end sentences (full stops, exclamation marks and question marks)
- break up sentences and show the relationship between words and phrases (commas, colons, semicolons, dashes, forward slashes and ellipses)

- show possession and contractions (apostrophes)
- connect related words (hyphens and dashes).

Use the correct spacing around punctuation marks

Check the relevant topic in this manual for advice onhow to treat each punctuation mark.

There are different rules for putting spaces around punctuation marks. For example, some punctuation marks have no spaces around them. Some have a space on either side.

Include a single space after a punctuation mark at the end of a sentence. Never use double spaces. Check each document for double and multiple spaces and delete them.

Capitalise the first word in a sentence and in headings

Capitalise the first word in a sentence. Use lower case for all other words, unless those words include proper nouns. This is called 'sentence case'.

Use sentence case for:
- opening quoted speech within a sentence
- headings.

Do not use all capitals for headings, unless the visual design for the content meets WCAG in all respects.

Use sentence case with italics for titles ofworks mentioned in the content. This applies even when the reference is included in a heading within the content.

Minimise capitals for common nouns and adjectives

Proper nouns generally have an initial capital letter for each word in the noun.

Common nouns and adjectives don't use initial capitals, with few exceptions. For example, adjectives often have capitals when they refer to anational, religious or linguistic group.

Differences between proper and common names

This manual containsguidance for names and terms by topic. Always check a dictionary if in doubt.

Shortened forms

Use shortened forms only when thischoice supports plain English.

Rules for capitalisation and punctuation differ from rules for terms spelt out in full. The rules depend on where the terms are in the sentence.

The spelt-out form might not need initial capitals, even if an acronym or initialism has them. Use normal capitalisation practices for proper and common nouns. If in doubt, check a dictionary.

If the shortened form represents a proper noun, start each word with a capital letter.

'NSW' is written out as 'New South Wales'.

If the shortened form represents a common noun, do not begin each word of the full form with a capital letter.

'EIS' is written out as 'environmental impact statement'.

'TB' is written out as 'tuberculosis'.

Only use capitals when the style is standardised or specified in regulations, for symbols ofunits of measurement.

Follow the guidance on capitals for titles and government terms

Follow conventions for using capitals fortitles, honours and forms of address. Use capitals when an official title precedes the name of the office holder. This includes titles for executives specified in legislation.

Unless advised in this manual, avoid using capitals in body text for a particular position or role within an organisation. This practice goes against readability and does not support clarity.

You do not need to use capitals when the title is an organisational name given to an office holder. Deference for positions within an organisation might follow house style. Do not use house style outside of the organisational context. Detail any special use of capitals in astyle sheet.

Preferences for capitals when the terms 'traditional owner', 'elder' and 'custodian' are used as titles should come directly from the relevantFirst Nations community.

Write this

Chief Defence Scientist Tanya Monro presented the award ...

Not this

The Senior Policy Adviser offered their view ...

Follow the rules ofcapitalisation for government terms, for example:

- government programs and agreements
- mentions of parliament
- references to states and territories.

Legal material has its own conventions for capitalisation. Content that has a legislative focus might use complementary sources to theguidance on citing legal material in this manual.

Legal documents often use initial capitals to show terms with a defined meaning (such as 'Department', 'Schedule', 'Vendor' and 'Recipient'). In these cases, use the form of the name as it is written in the legislation.

The digital edition gives a brief overview of the main rules of punctuation. It gives the user the main points and provides links to detailed guidance in the manual.

The sixth edition had comprehensive information about punctuation dealt with under 2 main sections: spelling and word punctuation and sentence punctuation.

The Content Guide covered punctuation symbols as individual topics, but did not give an overview.

The digital edition is consistent with the Content Guide, which used 'sentence case' and 'title case' as terms for capitalisation style. This is a departure from the sixth edition in terminology for capitalisation styles.

The sixth edition used 'maximal capitalisation', not 'title case'. The sixth edition used 'minimal capitalisation' for 'sentence case', which refers to the style for publication titles and headings in the digital edition.

The digital edition uses 'minimal capitalisation' to refer to a principle, rather than a capitalisation style. Minimal capitalisation is the principle of writing with the minimum amount of capitalisation required to make the context understood. It is paired with the principle or convention of minimal punctuation.

Consistent with the sixth edition, an 'initial capital' means that the first letter of a word is capitalised. It is a descriptive phrase, not a capitalisation style. The Content Guide did not use this phrase.

About this page

Australian House of Representatives (1965)Debates, HR18:5.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019)Course notes and exercises: editing and proofreading for the workplace, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Selk A (2018) 'One space or two spaces after a full stop? Scientists have finally found the answer',Independent, accessed 5 March 2020.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Stone A and Ford R (2017) 'Chasing after a century of punctuation',Procedia Computer Science, 118:15–21, doi:0.1016/j.procs.2017.11.144.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

This page was updated Friday 15 December 2023.

Apostrophes

Apostrophes show possession and contractions. Don't use them in descriptive phrases or to make nouns and shortened forms plural.

Apostrophes show possession

When the first of 2 consecutivenounshas an apostrophe, it means those nouns have a relationship. If the first noun in anoun phrasehas an apostrophe, it means the noun is related to the other words in the phrase.

The type of relationship shown by the apostrophe differs, but all are known collectively as 'possessives' and sometimes as 'genitives'.

On this page, 'possession' or 'possessive' means any relationship between nouns – or between words in a noun phrase – that is shown by an apostrophe.

Example

- This is Ariah's desk.
- We enjoy Adelaide's music festivals.
- They are the minister's chief of staff.
- It was a winter's morning.

Follow the possession rules for different types of nouns

To correctly show possession by using an apostrophe, first ask, 'Who or what is doing the possessing?'

The apostrophe goes straight after the noun that is the answer.

There are possession rules for using an apostrophe, according to thetype of noun.

Noun possession rules

Descriptive phrases don't need an apostrophe

Some nouns are descriptive rather than possessive. In a descriptive noun phrase, the first noun modifies the second noun by operating as adefinitive adjective.

Don't use an apostrophe for these nouns.

The first noun is essential to the meaning of the second noun. For this reason, never separate the nouns in a descriptive phrase.

Example

- workerscompensation [A type of insurance]
- visitorsbook [A type of book]
- driverslicence [A type of licence]

Only add an apostrophe when showing possession.

Example

- They signed thevisitorsbook. [Descriptive: a type of book]
- Hervisitor'sbook was lying on the table. [Possessive: the book her visitor owns]
- She attended adirectorsmeeting. [Descriptive: a type of meeting]
- Thedirector'smeetings don't have an agenda. [Possessive: the meetings of the director]
- You must hold a validdriverslicence to drive on Australian roads. [Descriptive: a type of licence]
- The officer asked to see thedriver'slicence. [Possessive: the licence owned by the driver]
- Each state and territory has its own regulator to administerworkerscompensation. [Descriptive: a type of compensation insurance]
- Under the award, ourworkers'compensation for working overtime is time off in lieu. [Possessive: a form of compensation to workers for doing overtime]

In the last 2 examples, the distinction between descriptive and possessive is subtle.

The Style Manual recognises 'workers compensation' in the first example as a descriptive phrase.

Although not recommended style, we acknowledge that the house styles of some government agencies require an apostrophe when using the phrase in this way.

Add an apostrophe and 's' to form possessive shortened forms

There are 4 types of shortened forms:abbreviations,contractions,acronyms and initialisms.

Only use shortened forms if users will understand them. Make sure they are appropriate for your content's context, purpose and tone.

Add an apostrophe and 's' to show possession forshortened forms.

Example

- Enjoy hassle-free travel with Tassie'snew permit system! [Abbreviation]
- The fire destroyed some of ASIO'sfiles. [Acronym]
- The provisions of the bill are based on the Cth'sAct. [Contraction]
- The review approved ABS'swork plan. [Initialism]

Consider whether the possessive form is necessary or can be replaced by a descriptive phrase.

Example

- ASIOfiles are stored securely.
- Qantasaircraft have an excellent safety record.
- We read severalUSdata use agreements.
- Consultation with stakeholders is integral toABSwork plans.

Add 's' to make a plural shortened form – not apostrophe and 's'

Add an 's' to form the plural of shortened forms such asacronyms and initialisms. Don't write an apostrophe before the 's'. The same rule applies whenmaking nouns plural.

- MPs
- LGAs
- PCs
- MP's
- LGA's
- PC's

Add an apostrophe to plural shortened forms to show possession.

- MPs'entitlements
- POWs'repatriation

Don't use a possessive when defining a shortened form

Define a shortened form the first time you use it (unless you're certain users will understand it without a definition). Follow the spelt-out term with its shortened form in parentheses.

Avoid using a possessive apostrophe when you do this. It can be difficult to decide where to put the apostrophe and the sentence is often harder to read.

Use the shortened form rather than the full term if you mention the term again.

- The Department of Veterans' Affairs(DVA)has information about veteran support officers on its website. DVA supports …
- Use the Moneysmart savings goal calculator from the Australian Securities and Investments Commission(ASIC). ASIC created Moneysmart to …
- Find information about veteran support officers on the Department of Veterans' Affairs'(DVA's)website. DVA supports …
- Use the Australian Securities and Investments Commission's(ASIC's)Moneysmart savings goal calculator. ASIC created Moneysmart to …

Possessive pronouns don't need an apostrophe

Don't add an apostrophe to possessivepronouns.

Although the term 'possessive pronoun' is commonly used, it's more accurate to divide these pronouns into possessive pronouns anddeterminers(also called 'possessive determiners').

If a pronoun appears before the noun, it is a determiner. If a pronoun appears in place of the noun, it is a possessive pronoun.

Don't use an apostrophe for either type of pronoun.

Example

- This isyouroffice. That istheirs. ['your' is a determiner, 'theirs' is a possessive pronoun]
- The fault isours. ['ours' is a possessive pronoun]
- Put the report initsplace. ['its' is a determiner]
- It wasmyidea notyours! ['my' is a determiner, 'yours' is a possessive pronoun]

Don't use an apostrophe for Australian place names

Don't use an apostrophe forAustralian place namesinvolving possessives.
- Kings Cross
- Mrs Macquaries Chair

Don't use an apostrophe for periods of time

Noun phrases about plural time periods don't need apostrophes because they're usually descriptive, not possessive.

In phrases such as '6 months retired' or '5 months pregnant', the time periods are clearly adjectival. They don't show possession.

Other noun phrases aren't possessive because they are conversational shorthand for an 'of' phrase. For example, 'in 4 days time' is shorthand for 'in 4 days of time'.

Some styles use an apostrophe to stand for the word 'of' and don't use it for descriptive phrases. For many years, the Style Manual has recommended the simple rule of no apostrophe for either use.

Example

- 6 weeks time
- 3 months wages

When the time reference is in the singular, use an apostrophe to show that the noun is singular.

Example

- a day's work
- the year's cycle

Apostrophes show contractions

Apostrophes show that you have omitted letters incontractions.

Example

- I haven't seen the report.
- It's a busy day at the office.

Don't confuse 'it's' (the contraction of 'it is' or 'it has') with 'its' (showing that 'it' owns something).

If you can divide 'it's' into 'it is' or 'it has', then you need to use an apostrophe. 'Its' is a determiner and doesn't have an apostrophe.

Example

- It'stime to give the committeeitsterms of reference.

Don't use an apostrophe to make a noun plural

No apostrophe is needed for theplural form of a noun. This type of error is known as the 'greengrocer's apostrophe'.

Correct

- the 2020s
- committee reports
- newer 747s
- fresh avocados

Incorrect

- the 2020's
- committee report's
- newer 747's
- fresh avocado's

Plural words and phrases that are not usually nouns

Don't use an apostrophe for nouns and noun phrases formed by pluralising (and sometimes hyphenating) words that aren't usually nouns. Two examples are 'whys and wherefores' and 'what-ifs'.

The Style Manual follows the style for pluralising nouns – no apostrophe. We also prefer to use the minimal punctuation needed to make meaning clear.

If you're unsure, check your preferred dictionary. Many popular phrases appear as entries.

- The website included a list ofdos and don'ts.
- Noifs, ands or butsabout it!
- Ums and ahslittered every speech.
- They made theirthank-yousthen left.
- The website included a list ofdo's and don't's.
- Noif's, and's or but'sabout it!
- Um's and ah'slittered every speech.
- They made theirthank-you'sthen left.

Single letter and digit plurals

Use an apostrophe before the 's' for plurals of single letters and single-digit numbers. They are exceptions to the rule of not using an apostrophe for the plural form of a noun.

The apostrophe ensures that letter plurals are easier to understand.

Don't italicise these plurals or place them in quotation marks.

- Binary code uses 0's and 1's.
- Dot your i's and cross your t's when you edit the report.
- This tongue twister has too many s's!

Apostrophes can stand in for sounds

Apostrophes show sounds in words from other languages.

This occurs when words in certain languages are 'transliterated', that is, when words in other languages are written using letters of the English alphabet.

In our examples, the apostrophe is a transliteration of a letter with a diacritic mark that represents the sound of a glottal stop.

If you're unsure whether an apostrophe is needed, consult your dictionary for the preferred spelling.

Example

- She was reading the Qur'an.
- Ge'ez is an ancient language from Ethiopia.

Some official names have apostrophes

An apostrophe can form part of the officialname of an organisation (or entity). Use an apostrophe if the organisation does.

To find the spelling an organisation prefers, check its correct name by usingreliable sources.

Example

- National Farmers' Federation
- Australian Workers Union
- Energy Ministers' Meeting
- Education Ministers Meeting
- Infrastructure and Transport Senior Officials' Committee
- Basin Officials Committee

The digital edition consolidates information about apostrophes and provides more examples to help users understand correct usage. New guidance includes: shortened forms, determiners, plurals that are not usually nouns (noun coinage) and apostrophes that stand in for sounds.

The sixth edition had information about apostrophes in several sections.

The Content Guide had brief advice about using apostrophes.

About this page

Evidence

Oxford University Press (2016) '4.2.2: Plurals',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

University of Chicago (2017) '7.14: Plurals of noun coinages',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Australian Government (n.d.)Directory, directory.gov.au, accessed 5 September 2021.

Cambridge University (2021) 'Pronouns: possessive (my, mine, your, yours, etc.)',Cambridge dictionary, dictionary.cambridge.org, accessed 22 October 2021.

Davies WM (n.d.)Apostrophes[PDF 192 KB], Helpsheet: Giblin Eunson Library, University of Melbourne website [cached resource], accessed 2 September 2021.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019)Course notes and exercises: editing and proofreading for the workplace, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Fogarty M (2019) 'Apostrophe catastrophe (part one)', Grammar Girl, Quick and Dirty Tips website, accessed 6 September 2021.

Macquarie Dictionary (2021) 'Punctuation guide', Resources, macquariedictionary.com.au, accessed 6 September 2021.

Merriam-Webster (2021)Why do we use apostrophes to show possession?, Merriam-Webster website, accessed 7 September 2021.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edition, Lacuna, 2014.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford Paperback Reference.

Strunk W and White EB (2000)The elements of style, 4th edn, Longman, New York.

University of Chicago (2017) '6.115: ''smart'' apostrophes',Chicago manual of style,17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Brackets and parentheses

Brackets can help users scan text more easily. Only use brackets if you can remove the enclosed text and the meaning does not change.

Use brackets for text users can skip over

Brackets can help you break up information. They enclose parts of the sentence that aren't essential to the meaning. Sentences must be grammatically correct if you remove the text in brackets.

The most commonly used brackets are:

- parentheses
- square brackets.

Use brackets sparingly for:

- non-essential information
- shortened forms
- references
- insertions.

Use brackets only where they make content clearer to people. For example, always use brackets inauthor–date citations.

Too many brackets, or badly used brackets, can make a sentence more complex and difficult to understand. You can usually rewrite a sentence so the content in brackets can be its own sentence or can even be removed.

Other types of brackets, such as curly brackets and slant brackets, are used in fields such as mathematics and linguistics. These are specialist uses, so don't use them in most content.

Put extra information in parentheses

Information in parentheses is less important than information that is betweenspaced en dashesor pairs ofcommas.

Used well, parentheses can improve meaning and make content easy to scan.

Definitions

Parentheses enclose definitions.

Medicare(Australia's universal health insurance scheme)guarantees all Australians access to a wide range of health and hospital services.

Shortened forms

Parentheses introduce a shortened form after it has been spelt out in full. You can then use the shortened form through the rest of the page or publication.

The National Health and Medical Research Council(NHMRC)is responsible for research funding and health guidelines.

Cross-references

Parentheses enclose cross-references to other parts of the content.

Australia's population increased by 350,000 people last year(Table 1).

Citations

Parentheses enclose citations in the author–date system of referencing.

China is Australia's largest trading partner(Smith 2019).

Extra detail

Parentheses enclose extra detail.

Our 2 biggest exports are iron ore($61.4 billion)and coal($60.4 billion).

The winning tenderer(which was a local company)signed the contract on Tuesday.

Clarification and asides

Parentheses enclose text that doesn't have a grammatical relationship to the rest of the sentence. This type of text includes extra information, clarifications and asides.

The department was in a heritage-listed building.(The building was designed by award-winning architect Enrico Taglietti.)

Whitlam's comments on the steps of Parliament House('Well may we say ...')are still widely quoted.

Avoid using square brackets in parentheses

Reword the text to avoid square brackets inside of parentheses wherever possible.

Example

Australia's Parliament House opened on 9 May 1988. The architects were Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp(New York).

Don't use sets of parentheses inside each other. Instead, use square brackets if you must put parenthetical information within parentheses.

Like this

Australia's Parliament House(architects Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp[New York])opened on 9 May 1988.

Not this

Australia's Parliament House(architects Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp(New York))opened on 9 May 1988.

Use square brackets to show insertions in quotes

Use square brackets inquoted materialto show that you have:

- paraphrased the original content
- inserted text that was not in the original content.

Example

He wrote in the report, 'The department's executive moved into new offices in Barton[Canberra]last year.'

'The High Court[in Canberra]is the highest court in the land,' she said.

You can also use square brackets to clarify quoted material.

Example

The manager reported, 'Smith was furious with Jackson because he[Smith]wanted all the credit.'

Square brackets with an italicised 'sic' show that the error in the text is from the original writer.

Example

Written late at night, the report began, 'The office was previously in Melberne[sic].'

Follow normal punctuation rules for content in brackets

Punctuation in brackets depends on what is inside the brackets. Punctuate content in brackets as you would if it were outside the brackets.

Example

Whitlam's comments on the steps of Parliament House('Well may we say ...')are still widely quoted.

A comma follows a closing bracket only if you would have used a comma if there were no brackets.

Correct

The winning tenderer (a local company) signed the contract on Tuesday.

Incorrect

The winning tenderer (a local company),signed the contract on Tuesday.

If the content inside the brackets is a full sentence, include the end punctuation inside the brackets.

Example

The department was in a heritage-listed building.(The building was designed by award-winning architect Enrico Taglietti.)

Don't use brackets to enclose a sentence within a sentence. Rewrite the text instead.

Correct

The winning tenderer signed the contract on Tuesday. They were a local company.

The winning tenderer(a local company)signed the contract on Tuesday.

Incorrect

The winning tenderer(They were a local company.)signed the contract on Tuesday.

Write brackets in the same type as the surrounding text

Brackets should be in the same type (roman, italics, bold) as the text around the brackets. This is regardless of the type of the text inside the brackets.

This is the same rule as forquotation marks.

Correct

The most recent review of defence policy(2016 Defence white paper)set the direction for the next 10 years. [In this example, the parentheses are not in italics because the surrounding text is not in italics.]

Incorrect

The most recent review of defence policy(2016 Defence white paper)set the direction for the next 10 years.

The digital edition consolidates information about brackets and parentheses from the sixth edition.

It omits the information about angle brackets that was included in the sixth edition. Angle brackets were used to enclose URLs and this practice is no longer followed. Sources cited as evidence support this departure.

The Content Guide did not include guidance on brackets or parentheses.

About this page

Evidence

Btb Translation Bureau (n.d.) 'Punctuation',The Canadian style, Btb Translation Bureau website, accessed 4 May 2020.

Content Design London (2019) 'Top findings',Content Design London readability guidelines, Content Design London website, accessed 30 March 2020.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019)Course notes and exercises: Editing and proofreading for the workplace, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edition, Lacuna, 2014.

Perlman M (2017) 'How to properly use [sic]',Columbia Journalism Review,viewed 19 December 2019,

Perlman M (2017) 'Pardon my parentheticals',Columbia Journalism Review,viewed 19 December 2019,

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford Paperback Reference.

Stilman S (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, 2004; revised and updated, 2010.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London, 2003.

U.S. Government Publishing Office (2016) '8: punctuation',Government Publishing Office style manual, U.S. Government Publishing Office, accessed 13 May 2020.

This page was updated Tuesday 19 October 2021.

Colons

Colons draw attention to the text that follows. Only add colons that are essential. Use them to introduce examples, contrasts, lists and block quotes.

Limit colon use

Use a colon only if you are sure it is needed. Incorrect use creates confusion for users.

Introduce examples and contrasts with colons

Use a colon to:

- introduce a word, phrase or clause that provides more detail
- introduce a question
- give an example
- summarise or contrast with what comes before it.

Example

- Use correct spelling:check a dictionary if you need to.
- Our work is about answering this simple question:how?
- We'll have to use a stronger tool:sanctions.
- This is the guiding principle for our workplace:collaboration.
- The committee found there was only one possible explanation:fraud.

A sentence fragment can come before the colon if the fragment can stand alone or if it's introducing a bulleted list.

Example

Warning:strong winds forecast for Sydney today.

Start lists with a colon

Use a colon to introduce a list of words, phrases or clauses.

Example

Pick any 2 of the 3:low price, high speed, high quality.

The position has these requirements:strong communication skills and experience across content management platforms.

We need to:
- check Appendix A of the report
- ask Mary about the final chapter of her book
- rewrite our introduction.

Don't include a colon when the list flows on as part of a full sentence. This is a common error.

Correct

Pick any 2 of low price, high speed and high quality.

The requirements for the position are strong communication skills and experience across content management platforms.

Incorrect

Pick any 2 of:low price, high speed and high quality.

The requirements for the position are:strong communication skills and experience across content management platforms.

Include the colon to restructure content intobulleted lists.

Example

The requirements for the position are:

- strong communication skills
- experience across content management platforms.

Use lower case following a colon in most cases

Start the word after the colon with a lower case letter unless:

- the word that follows the colon is aproper noun
- the text after the colon is a question that is a complete sentence.

Correct

We had to write 66 reports:it took months.

The commander was confident:Special Air Service Regiment had enough ammunition.

Incorrect

We had to write many reports:It took months.

The commander was confident:special air service regiment had enough ammunition.

After a colon, capitalise the first word of questions that are complete sentences. This makes it clear that the question mark applies only to the text after the colon.

Like this

The election was fought on a simple question:Which party had the best economic credentials?

Not this

The election was fought on a simple question:which party had the best economic credentials?

If the colon introduces a series of sentences or questions, use a lead-in and colon to introduce them in abulleted or numbered list.

Example

They answered the question:

- They wrote 23 reports.
- Each report took 11 days to write.

Start subtitles of books and articles with a colon

Use a colon before the subtitle of a book or article. Follow the colon with a lower case letter, unless it's a proper noun.

Example

Teaching in Australia:a deep dive into the education system

Stanovich KE (1986) 'Matthew effects in reading:some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy',Reading Research Quarterly, 21(4):360–407.

Do this when writing about a book or article and also whenreferencing one.

Introduce block quotes with colons

Use a colon to introduce a block quote. Block quotes should also be coded with the HTML element.

Example

For example, Manthorpe (2019) stated:

Short sentences are easier to read because they limit the scope of an idea. But most readers like the variety and rhythm of a mixture of sentence lengths. For most readers, aim for an average sentence length of 15 words per sentence.

Write mathematical ratios with a colon

Use a colon to give amathematical ratio. Don't put a space after the colon.

Example

The government proposes a 50:50 split.

The cost-benefit ratio will be 7.5:1.

The digital edition consolidates information about colons that appeared in different parts of the sixth edition.

The digital edition excludes advice about colons in multi-level lists as it does not recommend using them in the digital environment.

The digital edition recommendsusing a colon for a precise reference to time. The use of a colon as the separator reflects a shift in contemporary Australian usage. Sources cited as evidence on that topic support this change.

The Content Guide had advice about colons in relation to lists only.

About this page

American Psychological Association (2020) 'Mechanics of style',Publication manual of the American Psychological Association,7th edn, American Psychological Association, Washington DC.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019)Course notes and exercises: Editing and proofreading for the workplace, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

European Commission (2020) '2: Punctuation',English style guide: a handbook for authors and translators in the European Commission, European Commission.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edition, Lacuna, 2014.

Oxford University Press (2016) 'Punctuation',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford Paperback Reference.

Stilman S (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, 2004; revised and updated, 2010.

University of Chicago (2017) 'Punctuation',Chicago manual of style,17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Commas

Commas separate parts of a sentence so the meaning is clear. Sentence structure determines their correct use.

Separate introductory words, phrases and clauses with a comma

A comma separates introductory words, phrases and clauses from the main clause of the sentence.

Many introductory phrases can be moved to the end of sentences without changing the meaning. In these cases, you don't need a comma before the phrase. This simpler structure can be easier to read.

Example

- During the meeting, we discussed Item 9.
- We discussed Item 9during the meeting.

Place a comma after adverbs and other introductory words

Use a comma after introductory words, such as greetings and adverbs, or when addressing someone. Using an introductory word gives it emphasis.

- Yes,they went to the estimates hearing. [Affirmative emphasis]
- Goodnight,and good luck. [Greeting]
- Actually,that's an interesting point. [Adverb]
- Excuse me,should I come with you? [Addressing someone]

You don't need a comma after an introductory word if the sentence is very short. This minimises punctuation in very short sentences.

Today I went to work.

Use a comma after phrases and clauses that change the whole sentence

Use commas afteradverbial phrasesandadverbial clauses. Adverbs – such as 'first' and 'during' – modify verbs, adjectives and other adverbs.

- During the meeting, we discussed item 9. [Adverbial phrase]
- Although they were shaking and sweating, the firefighters were relieved to feel the first drops of a downpour. [Adverbial clause]

Conditional clauses are adverbial clauses (for example, beginning with 'if', 'unless' or 'until'). They should also have a comma after them if they start the sentence.

Unless the consultation starts early, it will not finish on time. [A conditional adverbial clause]

Avoid beginning a sentence with a string of numbers and dates

Use a comma after an introductory phrase that ends with a numeral and is immediately followed by another numeral. It doesn't matter how short the sentence is.

Avoid this type of sentence structure because the string of numbers can be confusing.

There were16.5 millionpeople enrolled to vote in Australian elections on18 April 2019.

[This structure avoids stringing a number together with a date.]

On18 April 2019, 16.5 millionpeople were enrolled to vote in Australian elections.

[This is grammatically correct but less readable.]

Mark out non■essential information within a sentence

Commas isolate information in a sentence when it isn't essential to:

- meaning
- grammatical structure.

Within a sentence, use a pair of commas to separate non-essential or supplementary information. Always check for the second comma where there should be a pair.

Generally, if you can take out part of the sentence and it is still grammatically correct, it should be between a pair of commas.

Check carefully. Using comma pairs can completely change the meaning of a sentence.

Example

The committee,said the secretary,was incompetent. [The committee was incompetent.]

The committee said the secretary was incompetent. [The secretary was incompetent.]

Elements that function as supplementary information include:

- non-essential clauses
- nouns that define the same thing
- question tags.

Set off non-essential clauses

Use commas around clauses that add information but aren't essential to the meaning of the sentence.

Don't use commas if the clause is essential for meaning.

If you can remove the clause and your sentence means the same thing, it's non-essential and should go between commas.

Non-essential clauses are also called 'non-restrictive' or 'non-defining'clauses.

The business report,which the manager had edited, explained the agency's strategy.

[The main message is 'The business report explained the agency's strategy'. The clause 'which the manager had edited' gives more information, adding to the meaning. It doesn't change the meaning.]

Introduced pests,such as varroa mite,threaten Australian honey production.

[All introduced pests threaten honey production. The varroa mite is just an example.]

The reportthat the manager had editedexplained the agency's strategy.

[The clause 'that the manager had edited' is essential to the meaning because there is no other information in the sentence to identify what report is being referred to.]

Introduced pestsfrom South Asiathreaten Australian honey production.

[Only pests from South Asia threaten honey production. Other introduced pests don't affect honey production.]

Each of these examples separates agrammatical subject from its verb. This is a problem when the subject is overburdened with non-essential information.

Check if you can rephrase the information to make it easier to follow. It is easier for people to read shorter sentences.

The report was tabled last week. It is about demographic changes in rural areas in Western Australia.

The report,detailing demographic changes in rural areas in Western Australia,was tabled last week.

Place commas around nouns that define the same thing they follow

Use a pair of commas when you have 2 noun phrases next to each other that define the same thing.

The strike took place in Whyalla,South Australia,in June 2014.

[The noun phrase 'South Australia' is between 2 commas because it is non-essential information. 'South Australia' adds to the meaning but doesn't change the meaning.]

The strike took place inWhyalla, South Australiain June 2014.

You should be able to take out the noun phrase between the comma pair and still have a grammatically correct sentence.

- My colleague,Mx Lesley May,will exercise my proxy vote.
- My colleague will exercise my proxy vote.

The sentence loses detail without the second noun phrase (Mx Lesley May), but it is still a full sentence.

Separate questions tagged onto a sentence

Questions can be tagged onto the end of sentences. Use a comma before a question that is part of the sentence.

- They're not here,are they?

- We'll be reporting back,won't we?

Use commas with the phrase 'for example'

Generally, use a comma before and after the phrase 'for example' in a sentence.

Some colours,for example,are difficult for people with colour blindness to distinguish.

If 'for example' begins a sentence, it is anintroductory phrase. Follow it with a comma.

For example,some colours are difficult for people with colour blindness to distinguish.

If you're introducing a bullet list after 'for example', use a colon.

Some colours are difficult for people with colour blindness to distinguish,for example:
- red
- green
- orange
- brown
- blue
- purple.

Don't use commas with Latin shortened forms

If you useLatin shortened forms, such as 'e.g.' and 'i.e.', don't follow them with a comma.

Exports of rare earths (e.g.lithium, europium) have soared.

Exports of rare earths (e.g.,lithium and europium) have soared.

Place commas between principal clauses joined together with a conjunction

Use commas to connect 2 or moreprincipal clausesjoined by acoordinating conjunction('and', 'or', 'but', 'so').

If they have different subjects, use a comma before the coordinating conjunction.

Do not use this rule to create a sentence of more than 25 words. Shorter sentences are easier to read.

Example

The Senate debated the Bill at length,butthe party whips eventually called for a vote.

['But' is the coordinating conjunction. 'The Senate' and 'the party whips' are each the subjects of a principal clause.]

If 2 clauses share the same subject, you don't need to repeat the subject or insert a comma before the conjunction.

Example

The company closed its Perth office and sacked the chief financial officer.

['The company' closed an office and sacked an executive officer. 'The company' is the subject of both clauses, joined using 'and'.]

The exception to this rule is when you have joined more than 2 principal clauses with the same subject.

Example

The company closed its Perth office, sacked the chief financial officer, and opened a branch in Singapore.

[The verbs 'closed', 'sacked' and 'opened' each complement the same subject: 'the company'. Each complement completes a principal clause.]

Don't use commas to 'splice' sentences

Don't use a comma to link 2 stand-alone sentences unless you use a coordinating conjunction. This kind of error is called a 'comma splice'.

The report was finished last week, but the minister has not approved its release.

The report was finished last week, the minister has not approved its release.

Punctuate sentence lists and strings of adjectives

Separate items in lists of nouns or adjectives with commas

Use commas between items in a sentence list. Avoid using a comma before the last item in the list.

This rule applies to sentence lists and sentence fragments in bullet lists. Do not punctuate the end of a list item with a comma if it is in a bullet list.

- The delegation visited Brisbane, Canberra and Adelaide.
- The consultation involved businesses, sole traders and not-for-profits.
- The applicant was willing to learn, eager to work and well prepared.

Restrict the use of the Oxford comma

If the last item combines 2 words or phrases with the word 'and', use a comma before that final item. This use of the comma is known as the 'Oxford comma' or 'serial comma'.

The industries most affected are retail trade, wholesale trade, and accommodationand food services.

['Accommodation and food services' is listed as a single industry category. It is set off in the list with an Oxford comma.]

The Oxford comma can prevent ambiguity in complex sentence lists. For example, use the Oxford comma before the last item if you're using a defining phrase applicable only to that final item.

A defining phrase is essential to the meaning of the sentence. The following examples show how the Oxford comma can affect meaning, using the defining phrase 'for stockfeed'.

The analysis outlined demand forbarley, wheat and hay for stockfeed. [All crops are for stockfeed.]

The analysis outlined demand for barley, wheat,and hay for stockfeed. [Only the hay is for stockfeed.]

Separate adjectives of the same type

When writing strings of adjectives, use a set order –evaluative, descriptive, then definitive.

Use commas in strings of adjectives of the same type (for example, a string of descriptive adjectives).

- This is anethical,profitable,efficientorganisation. [Descriptive adjectives]
- They were ahappy,caring,devotedworkforce. [Evaluative adjectives]

Don't use commas in strings of adjectives of different types.

- Mynew black felt-tip pensplattered ink everywhere.
- We found someused French tennis ballsleft over from a training day.

Use commas in numbers with 4 or more digits

Numbers with 4 or more digits (starting from 1,000) need a comma. Use commas for numerals in text and in tables.

You need to use a combination of words and numerals forlarge rounded numbers over a million. Large rounded numbers are punctuated with adecimal point.

Example

- The total cost of refurbishment was nearly $367,000.

- This budget year will see a surplus of $7.1 billion, equal to 0.4 per cent of GDP.

Don't use a space between the digits, because screen readers can read them as separate numbers.

Correct

The agency handles around6,500complaints each year.

Incorrect

The agency handles around6 500complaints each year. [This can be read as the number 6 followed by the number 500.]

When you are using numbers of 1,000 or more, use commas to separate the numerals into groups of 3 (working right to left).

Example

- 1,000
- 17,275
- 505,607,400

Commas are not used to the right of a decimal point.

Example

- 808.12345
- 1,279.0044

Don't use commas in postcodes ordates.

Example

- The year was2020.
- The office was in postcode area6500.

Show direct speech or quoted material using commas

Introduce directly quoted speech with a comma. Use the comma in combination with quotation marks.

Example

- She said, 'It's time to start work.'
- The Prime Minister said, 'I'm calling a half-Senate election.'

If an attribution comes after a quotation, use a comma at the end of the quotation and before thequotation mark.

Example

- 'It's time to start work,' she said.
- 'I'm calling a half-Senate election for Saturday 15 August,' the Prime Minister said.

If the quotation is broken into 2 parts, the second part should follow a full stop rather than a comma.

Example

- 'It's time to start work,' she said. 'We have a lot to do.'
- 'I'm calling a half-Senate election,' the Prime Minister said. 'It will be held on Saturday 15 August.'

If the quotation ends the sentence, end it with the original punctuation of the quotation.

Example

- She said, 'It's time to start work.'
- She asked, 'Is it time to start work?'

The digital edition consolidates information from the sixth edition.

It departs from advice in the sixth edition about the position of commas and quotation marks in sentences interrupted by expressions like 'she said'. The sixth edition recommended the comma be outside the quotation mark. The digital edition recommends the comma be inside thequotation mark.

The digital edition recommends using a comma in numbers with 4 or more digits. This recommendation is based on accessibility advice. The sixth edition recommended using a thin space in numbers with 5 or more digits and no space in numbers with 4 digits.

The Content Guide had brief information about using a comma in sentences and with numbers. It had basic information on using quotation marks. It advised against using Oxford commas.

About this page

Evidence

Oxford University Press (2016) '9.2 Layout of quoted text',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

University of Chicago (2017) '6.40 Commas with quotations',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019)Course notes and exercises: editing and proofreading for the workplace,Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman S (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London, 2003.

Dashes

Dashes show a relationship. Generally, en dashes for spans are less accessible for users than a phrase. Use spaced en dashes to set off non-essential information in sentences.

Use the correct symbols for en dash and minus sign

En dashes are half the width of the font height. Use them as a type of punctuation.

Don't use an en dash instead of a minus sign. Screen readers will read dashes as dashes, not as the minus sign.

In Unicode, the en dash is U+2013.

To make sure screen readers read the minus sign, use the mathematical symbol for minus. In Unicode, this is U+2212.

Don't confuse the dash or the minus symbol for ahyphen.

Use a phrase instead of an en dash for most spans of numbers

En dashes show a span when used with numerals, such as in a financial year, a range of values or span of time. En dashes sometimes appear in a span of words, such as in a span of days of the week.

Avoid using an en dash in most content.

Dashes can affect readability unless a user changes their screen reader's default settings (punctuation verbosity settings). Screen readers generally won't read out dashes by default. This can affect people's ability to quickly understand spans.

That is why, in general content, it's better to use phrases for most spans of numbers. You can use en dashes in technical content, particularly if it contains a lot of spans.

Spans in general content

Avoid using en dashes for spans in body text and headings. Instead, use the phrases:

- 'from' paired with 'to' – for example, 'from 57 to 65 years'
- 'between' paired with 'and' – for example, 'between Monday and Friday'.

Never mix 'from' or 'between' with an en dash.

- She workedfrom10to28 January.
- All seminars runfrom10:30 amto11:30 am.
- Annual rainfallbetween2017and2019 was lower than the long-term average.
- The help desk operatesbetween9 amand4 pm daily.
- She workedfrom10–28 January.
- All seminars runfrom10:30–11:30 am.
- Annual rainfallbetween2017–2019 was lower than the long-term average.

Follow exceptions to the general rule

There are exceptions to the rule of using phrases for spans in general content. The exceptions are for particular date spans and time spans.

Use an en dash for date spans in:

- financial years
- calendar years
- the titles of publications and programs
- citations containing a title that has an en dash
- terms of office
- lifespans (birth and death)
- when there is limited space.

Date spans in titles and headings should follow the general rule, except when:

- the heading contains a title that has an en dash
- using words would push the character count over 70 characters (including spaces).

Only use an en dash for time spans when you have limited space.

Date spans in titles and headings should follow the general rule, except when:

- phrases would push the character count over 70 characters (including spaces)
- the dash is part of an existing heading or title that you are citing as a reference.

Use an en dash for financial years

For financial years, use 4 digits for the first number and only 2 digits for the second. Join them with an unspaced en dash. This will not create any issue for users who rely on screen readers.

Use the phrases 'financial year' and 'financial years' at first mention, unless the context makes the meaning clear.

- The2019–20budget [The financial year starting in July 2019 and finishing in June 2020]
- The department recently published a list of gifts received by officials during the 2022–23financial year. A list of gifts received during 2023–24 will be published in September 2024.

For financial years that cross centuries, use 4 digits on either side of the en dash.

- The1999–2000budget [The financial year starting in July 1999 and finishing in June 2000]
- The department recently published a list of gifts received by officials during the1999–2000 financial year. A list of gifts received during2001–02will be published in September 2002.

Use an en dash for calendar years

For calendar years, use 4 digits for the first number and either 4 or 2 digits for the second number. Join them with an unspaced en dash.

Use the phrases 'calendar year' and 'calendar years' at first mention, unless the context makes the meaning clear.

- We provide indicative statistics at the halfway point of each 4-yearly reporting cycle. The following indicative statistics cover the2023–24 calendar years. You can find indicative statistics for2021–22on our website.

Use an en dash for date spans in titles of publications and programs

Date spans often appear in the titles of government publications and programs. When you create a title, use 4 digits for the first year and 2 digits for the second year. If you cross the century, always use 4 digits for both years.

Use 4 digits on both sides of the span for these titles if that is your organisation's house style.

When you refer to an existing title, follow the style that was originally used for year spans.

- The diversity strategy 2020–25
- The Lake Eyre basin plan 1999–2004
- The state government has opened the 2023–24 Skilled Migration Visa Nomination Program.
- They found the statistics inThe year book of international trade 1922–23.
- 'Headway' is my favourite poem from the collection titledTryptych: selected poems 1956–1962.
- TheMilk for school children scheme 1951–74provided free milk to Australian primary schools.
- You can find more about milestones in our Wellbeing Action Plan 2005–2008.

Reproduce titles with dashes when you cite them as a reference.

- 1Department of Business Measures (DBM), 'Business statistics 1990–91',Australian Business Series 5, DBM, Australian Government, 1991. [Footnote or endnote]

Use an en dash for terms of office

A person's term of office usually appears in parentheses after the person's name. Always use 4 digits for both dates, joined by an unspaced en dash.

Australia's prime minister at the start of the Depression was James Scullin(1929–1932).

Australia's prime minister at the start of the Depression was James Scullin(1929–32).

Use an en dash for a person's lifespan

Dates of birth and death usually appear in parentheses after the person's name. Always use 4 digits for both dates, joined by an unspaced en dash.

Caroline Chisholm(1808–1877)

Caroline Chisholm(1808–77)

Use an en dash for date spans when space is limited

Follow the general rule and use words for date spans unless you have limited space. This could be in display text, tables, lists or in social media posts.

Use the following style for en dashes in spans of days and months:
- The en dash is spaced when the day and month appear on both sides of the span.
- The en dash is unspaced when the month appears only at the end of the span.

Restrict the use of en dashes for date spans in headings

Only use en dashes for date spans in headings when:
- your heading includes a title that contains en dashes
- using words pushes the character count above 70 characters (including spaces).

In all other cases, write date spans in headings with words. Use the phrases 'from … to' and 'between … and'.
- Publication of theInternational engagement strategy 2023–26[Heading in a document. The heading contains a publication title.]
- Background to theStrategic plan 2021–23[Heading contains a publication title]
- Human trafficking and slavery in Australia from 2015 to 2019 [Heading with 'from … to'; 60 characters with spaces]

- Overview of human trafficking and slavery in Australia 2015–2019 [Heading with en dash; 64 characters with spaces, but 71 characters if had used 'from … to']

Only use an en dash for time spans when space is limited

Follow the general rule and use words for time spans unless you only have limited space. This could be in display text, tables, lists or in social media posts.

The spacing of the en dash depends on the position of elements in the span.

Use a spaced en dash when:

- 'am' or 'pm' appears on both sides of the span
- the time is in the 24-hour clock format.

Use an unspaced en dash when:

- the 'am' or 'pm' appears only at the end of the span
- 'noon', 'midday' or 'midnight' appears in the span.
- Free events this monthGood work design in practiceMonday 4 April1.30–2.30 pmOur changing demographics: policy implicationsThursday 18 April11:15 am – 12 midday#OurAPS #apsacademy #AustralianGovernment

Use an en dash for spans in technical content

In technical content where there are many numbers, you can use en dashes for number, date and page spans. Don't combine en dashes with 'from' or 'to' in the spans.

Don't use spaces either side of these en dashes if they include a numeral on each side.

- There were25–30head of cattle in quarantine in June and50–60in July. [Number span]
- Air quality declined during the2003–2006reporting period. [Date span]
- This same result was reported in Smith and Jones (2020:5–15). [Page span]

Join nouns with en dashes to show equal relationships

Use en dashes between 2 nouns that both retain their original meaning. These are called 'coordinate nouns'.

When describing something, coordinate nouns can function asadjectives.

Example

- TheMurray–DarlingBasin [The Murray River and the Darling River combine to form the basin river system.]
- A Sydney–Melbourne flight [Sydney and Melbourne combine to form a single travel route.]

If you used a hyphen instead, you create a compound noun. These cannot stand in for coordinate nouns.

Example

- student-teacher[A compound noun, meaning a teacher who is also a student, uses a hyphen.]
- student–teacher ratio[A coordinate noun, describing the ratio of students to teachers, uses an en dash.]

If one part of a coordinate noun is made up of more than one word, use a space either side of the en dash. Otherwise, do not include spaces around en dashes for coordinate nouns.

Example

Australia–New Zealandrelations [The relationship is between Australia and New Zealand, not 'Australia' and 'New'.]

Rewrite to avoid joining prefixes with an en dash

A hyphen normally attaches a prefix to an adjectival phrase. An en dash is correct in some cases, not a hyphen.

If the phrase is not hyphenated, such as in a proper adjectival phrase, you can use an en dash between the prefix and the first word.

The capitalisation of the proper adjectival phrase and the en dash show that the prefix applies to all the words.

Example

pre–Cold Warpolicies

In these cases, if you can, reword the phrase so that it doesn't include the prefix.

Example

policies from before the Cold War

Space en dashes in sentences to set off non-essential information

Spaced en dashes create a pause in a sentence to add extra meaning, similar to commas and brackets.

Use them rarely to use them effectively – for example, to draw attention to a new and important detail for your main idea. As a rule,don't make your sentences complex or long.

En dashes inside a sentence

Spaced en dashes draw attention because they aren't as common as other punctuation marks. They help some people scan content by showing that information is non-essential or parenthetical.

Spaced en dashes can separate a clarification, an interruption, a correction, a short list or a summary from the rest of the text.

Always space punctuating en dashes with a single space on either side of the dash. Spaces allow automatic line breaks in front of or after the dash.

Often, you need a pair of en dashes.

Three rivers –the Murray, Darling and Murrumbidgee– were discussed in the report.

If the parenthetical information is at the beginning or end of the sentence, you can use one dash.

There was no time to plan –a shortcoming that would later cost millions.

Make sure the rest of the sentence makes sense.

If you remove the content between the en dashes, the rest of the sentence must be a complete sentence.

- The allies –the USA, Australia and New Zealand– signed the pact in 1951.
- The allies signed the pact in 1951.

In a sentence with one en dash, one side of the dash must be a complete sentence.

Solar, wind, hydro and tidal power –all are viable options for renewable energy. ['All are viable options for renewable energy' is a complete sentence.]

Solar, wind, hydro and tidal power –are viable options for renewable energy. [The en dash is not correct here. Neither side of the en dash is a complete sentence.]

Em dashes

Em dashes are the same width as the font height.

Various style guides treat dashes differently. Some styles use unspaced em dashes instead of spaced en dashes.

Both dashes are grammatically correct and can be used to show:

- additional, amplifying and parenthetical material
- an abrupt change.

Never use both types of dashes for the same purpose.

Spaced en dashes are Australian government style and should be used in digital content.

Follow this style convention unless a different style reference applies. For example, you might submit a journal article and need to follow the publisher's style, which uses unspaced em dashes. Follow one style: apply it throughout.

In Unicode, the em dash is U+2014.

If you are using em dashes in your content, don't space them. The spaced em dash creates too great a gap in text. This is a typographical concern and interrupts reading flow.

An unspaced em dash won't automatically break over a line. This will mean you need to force a line break on either side of the dash. It can either end or begin a line of text.

Use 2 em dashes for some quoted speech and deliberate omissions in text

To show a sudden interruption in quotations and reported speech, use 2 em dashes in a row. The 2 em dashes follow a space.

Ellipses cannot be used for this purpose, as they show the writer has deliberately left out quoted speech. Read related guidance onellipses.

Example

'Any more questions before ——' [The double em dashes show an interruption in a quotation.]

Two em dashes also show when a name or other information is omitted in body text in general content. This can be useful when something needs to be withheld for privacy or other legal reasons, for example.

Use a space if the em dashes replace a whole word, but don't include a space between the dashes and part of the word.

Example

The deed, signed by ——, was legally binding.

S—— signed the deed in 2017.

The digital edition revises guidance about use of dashes.

It recommends using a spaced en dash (as well as commas, colons and brackets) to show additional, amplifying and parenthetical material. The en dash also signifies an abrupt change. The sixth edition recommended an unspaced em dash for these purposes.

The shift from em dash to en dash reflects contemporary writing practice and the new focus on digital content. The en dash is spaced so screen readers don't mistake an unspaced en for a hyphen.

The digital edition also recommends using words instead of an en rule to link spans of numbers in some cases. Expert advice has informed this change. The change reflects accessibility considerations and style for numbers in contemporary digital content.

The digital edition has been updated to ensure consistency with the 2024 updates to 'Dates and time'.

The sixth edition recommends a full span of dates for terms of office, consistent with the treatment of dates of birth and death. Although the sixth edition included examples of spans of years, it did not mention terms of office explicitly.

The sixth edition included information about using en dashes in formatting. This is less relevant in a digital environment.

The digital edition departs from the Content Guide, which recommended a spaced em rule. The Content Guide recommended not using an en dash.

About this page

Evidence

Btb Translation Bureau (n.d.) 'En dash',Writing tips, Btb Translation Bureau website.

Butcher J, Drake C and Leach M (2006) '6.12.1: en rules',Butcher's copy-editing: the Cambridge handbook for editors, copy-editors and proofreaders, 4th edn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Centre for Information Design Research (2016) 'Number sequences',The GOV.UK content principles: conventions and research, report prepared by University of Reading, UK Government, accessed 23 January 2020.

Content Design London (2020) 'Hyphens and dashes',Content Design London readability guidelines, Content Design London website.

European Commission (2020) '2.16: dashes',English style guide: a handbook for authors and translators in the European Commission, European Commission.

European Commission (2020) '3.31: ranges',English style guide: a handbook for authors and translators in the European Commission, European Commission

European Commission (2020) '6.21: time spans',English style guide: a handbook for authors and translators in the European Commission, European Commission.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014) '7.6: Dash',Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Oxford University Press (2016) '4.11.1: en rule',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Oxford University Press (2016) '11.1.4: number ranges',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

University of Chicago (2017) '6.83: en dash as em dash',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Bohman P (20 January 2014) 'Why don't screen readers always read what's on the screen? Part 1: punctuation and typographic symbols',deque Blog, accessed 21 January 2020.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019)Course notes and exercises: English grammar for writers, editors and policymakers, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Microsoft Corporation (2019)Keyboard shortcuts in Word: insert international characters, Microsoft website, accessed 1 December 2019.

Owen M (2018)How to type accented letters in macOS three different ways, appleinsider website, accessed 4 December 2019.

Oxford University Press (2016) 'Punctuation',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

Watson L (8 February 2017) 'How to create content that works well with screen readers',Accessibility in Government Blog, accessed 7 January 2020.

WebAIM (2017)Designing for screen reader compatibility, WebAIM website, accessed 23 January 2020.

The Unicode Consortium (2019)Unicode, Unicode website, accessed 2 December 2019.

This page was updated Friday 21 June 2024.

Ellipses

Ellipses show users that ideas or words are missing from a sentence or a quote. Don't use ellipses to change the intent of the original source.

Show missing words or ideas with ellipses

The ellipsis (plural 'ellipses') is a character of exactly 3 dots.

Use the ellipsis:
- if you omit words in quoted text
- to mark an unfinishedphrase, clause or sentence.

Example

- The report is well written, but it needs a thorough review…There is an obvious need for more work.
- Whitlam's speech on the steps of Parliament House ('Well may we say…') is still widely quoted.

If there is an ellipsis in the original text you're quoting, add the phrase 'ellipsis in original' in square brackets after the quote. Use the same font as the surrounding text.

Example

The minister wrote, 'The policy settings were…comprehensive' [ellipsis in original].

Don't use a full stop, comma or semicolon after an ellipsis.

Example

The review clarified that the Army might have to fight on home ground…To be properly equipped, the Army needs a new troop carrier.

You can use a question mark or exclamation mark after an ellipsis if necessary.

Example

I've written hundreds of reports: annual reports, white papers…!

If a paragraph or more is omitted from ablock quotation, you can place the ellipsis on a line of its own.

Example

The review clarified that the Army might have to fight on home ground.

…

During exercises, ADF personnel were tasked with tracking down enemy troops from the mythical nation of Musoria.

Do not use a string of full stops

Use the symbol for the ellipsis. Don't use a string of full stops. Insert it using:
- the unicode character U+2026
- the HTML code <…>
- in many software applications, Alt+Ctrl+. or Option;.

Add spaces around ellipses

Use a single space before and after each ellipsis.

Correct

The evaluation concluded, 'The report is well written, but it needs…more work.'

Incorrect

The evaluation concluded, 'The report is well written, but it needs…more work.'

Correct

The evaluation concluded, 'The report is well written, but…'

Incorrect

The evaluation concluded, 'The report is well written, but…'

The exception to this rule is if the quote ends in an exclamation mark or question mark. Include the final punctuation mark after the ellipsis. Don't include a space between the punctuation and the ellipsis.

Example

He asked,'What does the Army do during exercises…?'

Don't change the original intent of quoted material

Use ellipses sparingly. Overusing ellipses can lead to a suspicion that you are misquoting. Don't leave out important details or change the original intent of the quoted material.

Write this

The report is well written, but it needs rewriting now circumstances have changed…There is now an obvious need for more work.

Not this

The report…needs rewriting…obvious need for more work.

[This version omits a key piece of information: the reason for the work.]

The digital edition expands on advice from the Content Guide.

The sixth edition had advice on using ellipsis points to show indecision and incompleteness. This is not included in the digital edition as it's not relevant to government writing.

The Content Guide had basic advice on using ellipsis points.

About this page

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019)Course notes and exercises: Editing and proofreading for the workplace, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Microsoft Corporation (2019)Keyboard shortcuts in Word: insert international characters, Microsoft website, accessed 1 December 2019

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edition, Lacuna, 2014.

Owen M (2018)How to type accented letters in macOS three different ways, appleinsider website, accessed 4 December 2019.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford Paperback Reference.

Stilman S (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, 2004; revised and updated, 2010.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London, 2003.

The Unicode Consortium (2019)Unicode, Unicode website, accessed 2 December 2019.

This page was updated Tuesday 19 October 2021.

Exclamation marks

Exclamation marks show emphasis and convey emotion. Only use them in informal content.

Don't use exclamation marks in general

Exclamation marks aren't part ofgovernment voice. Don't use exclamation marks in formal content, such as government reports or briefings.

In general use, exclamation marks can emphasise:

- statements
- emotions

- greetings
- commands
- rhetorical questions.

Example

- That can't be true!
- Stand at ease!

Use them sparingly in less formal content such as promotional material and social media posts. Be aware that exclamation marks can create a sense of panic or stress.

Like this

Congratulations to our 2020 Australia Day Award recipients!

Happy international mother language day!#ourAPS believes in the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity (CALD) for a sustainable and harmonious Australian society.

Not this

A state of emergency has been declared for all areas of the ACT!

Exclamation marks often appear 'as themselves' in instructions to users of government services.

Example

Your password can have any of the following characters:!@ # $ % ^ & *

Write one exclamation mark: don't overuse them

Don't use exclamation marks too often. Exclamation marks can lose their emphasis if you use too many.

At the end of each sentence you want to emphasise, use only one exclamation mark.

Write this

Were you born overseas or have a parent who was? Nearly half of Australians do!

Not this

Were you born overseas or have a parent who was? Nearly half of Australians do!!!

Some people use multiple exclamation marks insocial media. This is not suitable for government content.

The digital edition has the same advice as the sixth edition about exclamation marks. The only addition is a reminder to use only one exclamation mark instead of several.

The sixth edition had a brief section of exclamation marks in the chapter on sentence punctuation.

The Content Guide recommended against the use of exclamation marks for government content.

About this page

Australian Government (n.d.)Help, myGov, accessed 27 February 2020.

Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (12 February 2020) 'What do these two places have in common? They're both…' [Facebook post], Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, accessed 16 May 2020.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019)Course notes and exercises: Editing and proofreading for the workplace, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edition, Lacuna, 2014.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford Paperback Reference.

Stilman S (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, 2004; revised and updated, 2010.

The Australian Public Service (20 February 2020) 'Happy international mother language day! #ourAPS believes in the importance of …' [Facebook post], The Australian Public Service, accessed 27 February 2020.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London, 2003.

This page was updated Tuesday 19 October 2021.

Forward slashes

Forward slashes are useful in a small number of situations. Users are familiar with them in mathematical expressions, dates, web addresses and in some shortened forms.

Limit the forward slash to specific uses

The forward slash is also known as the 'solidus' or just the 'slash'.

Use forward slashes:

- in some shortened forms

- in mathematical expressions
- to present lines of poetry in body text
- instead of 'per', 'an' or 'a' when abbreviating units of measurement
- in web addresses
- in dates if you can't write them out – for example, in tables
- in some place names.

Example

- c/- [for 'care of' in postal addresses]
- n/a [for 'not applicable']
- (x + y)/(a + b)
- http://www.abc.net.au/foreign
- 04/12/2020

Don't add spaces around most forward slashes

There is no need to include a space on either side of a forward slash.

The exceptions are for:
- official dual place names
- lines of poetry in body text – use forward slashes with spaces around them to show the line breaks.

Example

truwana/Cape Barren Island [Official dual place name]

Print considerations

As far as possible, avoid using forward slashes either side of a line break.

If you must, include the slash before the line break so that the reader anticipates it as they read the next line.

Write shortened units of measurement with a forward slash

Don't use forward slashes when spelling outunits of measurement.

Correct

- 60 km/h
- 60 kilometres per hour

Incorrect

60 kilometres/hour

Use an en dash for financial years, not a slash

Don't use a forward slash as a replacement for an en dash in financial years.

Correct

2019–20

Incorrect

2019/20

Write 'or' instead of a slash for alternatives

When showing alternatives, use 'or' instead of a forward slash. This is easier for people to understand.

Write this

a yes or no question

Not this

a yes/no question

Do not use 'and/or'in text. It could mean either 'and' or 'or', which confuses many users. Rewrite the sentence to make the meaning clear.

Don't join words with a slash

Don't use a forward slash between words that retain their separate identities. Instead, either use an en dash or reword the sentence. Forward slashes can make it look like you mean to show an

alternative.

Write this

- a Sydney–Brisbane flight
- a Sydney to Brisbane flight

Not this

a Sydney/Brisbane flight

The digital edition consolidates information about when and how to use the forward slash.

The sixth edition included information about the forward slash in the section on sentence punctuation. It was also mentioned in the section on numbers.

The Content Guide did not have guidance on the forward slash.

About this page

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019)Course notes and exercises: Editing and proofreading for the workplace, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman S (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London, 2003.

This page was updated Wednesday 24 July 2024.

Full stops

Full stops mark the end of sentences which aren't questions or exclamations. Users need them to scan text and to recognise decimal values.

Complete a sentence with a full stop

Full stops mark the end of a sentence that is not a question or an exclamation.

Following the same rule, use full stops at the end of the last item in alist that's made up of sentence fragments.

Example

The committee met yesterday. It discussed:

- office space
- working hours
- managers' salaries.

Use thefinal full stop because this type of list is a sentence presented as points to make it easier to read.

Use full stops with some numbers and shortened forms

Also use full stops:

- as the decimal point in numbers and currency – for example, '$3.55'
- in numbering subsections and paragraphs in a document – for example, 'Section 7.3'
- in someLatin shortened formsandshortened forms used in referencing.

Don't use full stops withcontractionsor mostabbreviations.

Don't end web or email addresses with full stops

Do not use a full stop after a web or email address if it's part of a sentence fragment or on a line by itself.

Example

Website:department.gov.auEmail:example@department.gov.au

Write full stops in email and web addresses when you use the full form rather than link text (for example, 'dfat.gov.au' instead of linking 'the DFAT website').

Ensure link text doesn't include a full stop

Use full stops at the end of sentences with link text, but don't include the full stop in the link itself.

Correct

The People team manages theadd a new employee form.

Incorrect

The People team manages theadd a new employee form.

Write headings, measurements and captions without full stops

Don't use full stops in:
- headings
- stand-alone lists(stand-alone lists have a heading without a colon)
- page headers or footers.

Full stops do not go after:
- symbols orunits of measurement(unless the symbol or unit is also at the end of a sentence)
- captions and titles.

Don't add a full stop after hashtags, emojis or handles

Use correct punctuation in governmentsocial media. You don't need a full stop if your post ends in:
- a web address (URL)
- a tag or handle
- a hashtag
- an emoji
- a sentence fragment.

Punctuate text messages (SMS) correctly

In government text messages, use correct punctuation and grammar to avoid ambiguity. Correct writing shows people that the text is authoritative and trustworthy.

Include a full stop at the end of a text message if it finishes with a sentence. Don't include a full stop if the message ends with a fragment or sign off.

Example

Warning: there is a high probability of hail in your area.Please take appropriate precautions and stay safe.Time sent: 4:30 pm AEST

The digital edition consolidates information on full stops with a focus on online content. It removes the requirement to use full stops with abbreviations. Evidence from Australian corpora supports this change. It is consistent with guidance to use minimal punctuation.

The sixth edition mentions full stops in several sections including punctuation, abbreviations, numbers and citations.

The Content Guide had brief information about the full stop in several sections. It advised against using a full stop after an email address or bare URL to end a sentence. The digital edition advises to omit a full stop when the email address or bare URL is a fragment or on a line by itself (such as in an email signature block).

About this page

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019)Course notes and exercises: Editing and proofreading for the workplace, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Crystal D (11 June 2016) 'On the reported death of the full-stop / period',DCblog, accessed 20 December 2019.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (15 March 2020) 'A slice of paradise. When visiting islands and cays, tread …' [Facebook post], Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, accessed 16 May 2020.

Gunraj DN, Drumm-Hewitt AM, Dashow EM, Upadhyay SSN and Klin C (2016) 'Texting insincerely: the role of the period in text messaging',Computers in Human Behavior, 55(B):1067–1075, doi:10.1016/j.chb.2015.11.003.

Houghton KJ, Upadhyay SSN and Klin C (2018) 'Punctuation in text messages may convey abruptness. Period',Computers in Human Behavior, 80(C):112–121, doi:10.1016/j.chb.2017.10.044.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Stone A and Ford R (2017) 'Chasing after a century of punctuation',Procedia Computer Science, 118:15–21, doi:0.1016/j.procs.2017.11.144.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

Wright EM (2019)Pragmatic functionality of punctuation on Twitter[master's thesis], University of Kentucky, accessed 21 December 2020.

This page was updated Tuesday 19 October 2021.

Hyphens

Hyphens connect words and prefixes so meaning is clear. Refer to your organisation's preferred dictionary when you are not sure if you need to use a hyphen for spelling.

Follow hyphenation rules in the dictionary your organisation uses

Hyphens clarify meaning by connecting words and parts of words into a single unit of meaning. Use hyphens to avoid ambiguity.

Example

- 'a little used office', but 'a little-used office'
- 'a unionised workforce', but 'an un-ionised particle'

There are few firm rules about using hyphens, and dictionaries do not always agree.

Use the dictionary your organisation recommends and follow its hyphenation practices.

Follow the accepted naming conventions forcompass points,names of peopleandnames of places.

Print considerations

Don't break short words over a line, especially:

- words of fewer than 6 letters
- one-syllable words
- 2-syllable words.

Break words between syllables so that the hyphen:

- is between 2 components of a compound word (for example, 'data-base')
- is between the base word and the suffix or prefix (for example, 'neat-ness')
- comes before a consonant (for example, write 'fic-tion' not 'fict-ion') unless this is misleading (for example, write 'draw-ings' not 'dra-wings').

Don't include extra hyphens if you need to break up URLs or email addresses. People could read them as part of the address.

Use the part of the word before the hyphen to suggest the rest of the word. Consider the vowels and consonants when breaking words over a line.

Write certain prefixes with a hyphen

Hyphens are useful in some sets of words formed with prefixes such as:

- 'anti-'
- 'auto-'
- 'counter-'
- 'extra-'
- 'intra-'
- 're-'
- 'sub-'.

They're especially useful for:

- doubled-up vowels
- clarifying new words that could be confused with existing ones.

A hyphen is used in some words with prefixes to distinguish them from words that would otherwise look the same.

Example

- 're-cover' [cover again], but 'recover' [retrieve or regain]
- 're-creation' [create anew], but 'recreation' [leisure-related activity]
- 're-signed' [signed again], but 'resigned' [stepped down or acquiescent]

Sometimes a prefix such as 'non-', 'pre-' or 'anti-' acts on more than one word. If the phrase is already hyphenated, use a second hyphen to link the prefix to all words in the phrase.

Example

- non-English-speaking countries
- an anti-harm-minimisation stance

Doubled-up vowels

Use a hyphen when the last letter of a single-syllable prefix is a vowel and the word that follows begins with the same vowel.

- de-emphasise
- pre-eminent
- re-enter
- deemphasise
- preeminent
- reenter

This practice is less important if a word is well known. Check a dictionary if you are unsure.

- coordinate
- cooperate
- co-ordinate
- co-operate

Double letters

Hyphens link a prefix or suffix to a word to avoid a double letter or prevent a misunderstanding.

- 'multi-item', but 'multilateral'

- 're-sign' [sign again], but 'resign' [leave a job]

Capital letters

Hyphens link a prefix to a word that starts with a capital letter.

- un-Australian activities
- pro-European

Vowel combinations

Don't use hyphens if the 2 words end and start with different vowels. The combined word doesn't place the same vowel together.

- prearrange
- reallocate
- triennial

Use a hyphen, however, if the prefix is attached to a single-syllable word beginning with a vowel. This punctuation means the vowels aren't read as one sound.

de-ice

Two-syllable prefixes ending in a vowel other than 'o' and followed by another vowel are often hyphenated. If the base word begins with a consonant, the term is usually written as one word.

- anti-aircraft, antisocial
- semi-official, semicircular

Two-syllable prefixes ending in 'o' are often attached without a hyphen, regardless of what the base word starts with.

- macroeconomics, macrobiotic
- monoamine, monocultural
- radioactive, radiotherapy
- retroactive, retrograde

Consonants

Two-syllable prefixes ending in a consonant are rarely followed by a hyphen.

- hyperlink, hyperrealism
- interactive, interrelated

'Co-' and 'ex-' prefixes

Regardless of whether the rest of the word starts with a vowel:

- Many words with the prefix 'co-', meaning 'joint', have hyphens after the 'co'.
- All words formed with 'ex-', meaning 'former', are hyphenated.
- co-author, co-worker
- ex-councillor, ex-president

Follow the spelling in your preferred dictionary.

Numbers and italics with prefixes

Use a hyphen if a prefix is followed by a number or an expression that's in italics.
- post-1960
- the PNG Government's anti-*raskol* measures

Write most suffixes without hyphens

Suffixes are normally attached directly to the base word without any hyphen. The commonest suffixes include:
- -able
- -ate
- -ation
- -fold
- -ful
- -ise
- -ish
- -ly
- -ment
- -ness
- -y.

Example

readable

colourful

costly

A hyphen precedes '-fold' when that suffix is used with a numeral, but not a spelled out number.

Example

- 300-fold
- threefold

Always use a hyphen with the suffix '-odd', whether it's with a word or numeral.

Example

There were 150-oddcompetitors.

Hyphenate some but not all compound words

A compound word consists of 2 or more words that carry a new meaning when used together.

Hyphens link elements of compound words as a phrase, but usually only when they are used before a noun asadjectives. Don't use hyphens when the phrase is after the noun in thesentence structure.

Example

- 'the up-to-date accounts', but 'the accounts are up to date'
- 'small-business owners', but 'owners of small businesses'
- 'an 11-year-old child, but 'a child who is 11 years old'

Don't confuse hyphens withdashes.

Compound nouns

Compound nouns make up the largest group of compound words. They can be made up of:
- a verb and an adverb
- a verb and a noun
- a noun and a noun
- an adjective and a noun.

Most compound nouns don't need hyphens because people already understand what the words mean together.

Use a hyphen in compound nouns made up of a verb plus an adverb. This shows that the adverb is part of the compound rather than modifying other elements of the sentence.
- a shake-out
- some make-up
- the go-ahead for the project

For adverb–verb combinations, you don't need a hyphen.
- bypass

- downpour

- uproar

- input

Only a few compound nouns made up of a verb and a noun need hyphens. The following table has some examples, but use a dictionary if you are not sure.

Use of hyphens in noun-plus-noun compounds varies, even from dictionary to dictionary. These types usually have hyphens:

- expressions in which each element has equal status, which describe one thing

- expressions in which the elements rhyme

- noun compounds involving prepositional phrases.

- owner-driver, city-state

- hocus-pocus

- editor-at-large, mother-in-law

Compound nouns consisting of an adjective followed by a noun are usually written as 2 words.

- red tape

- free will

Compound adjectives

Compound adjectives need hyphens if they are made up of either:

- 2 adjectives

- a noun and an adjective.

- bitter-sweet, icy-cold, red-hot [Two adjectives]

- accident-prone, colour-blind, disease-free [Noun plus adjective]

It doesn't matter whether the compound adjective comes before or after the noun it's describing.

Hyphenate adjectival compounds made up of adverbial phrases when they come before the nouns, but not after.

It was adusk-to-dawncurfew. [The curfew lasted from dusk to dawn.]

Don't hyphenate adverbial phrases when they play an adverbial role.

- a newly discovered plant species

- a happily married couple

Never use a hyphen for a compound modified by words such as 'very', 'particularly', 'least' or 'most'.

- a very well known diplomat

- a better known

- a particularly diligent team member

- the most advanced students

Sometimes, you might need to use a hyphen for clarification.

The parents lobbied for more experienced staff. [Parents were asking for more staff who were also experienced.]

The parents lobbied formore-experiencedstaff. [Parents were asking for staff who were more experienced to replace the less experienced staff.]

Compound adjectives that are set phrases consisting of a noun plus a noun or an adjective plus a noun are not usually hyphenated.

- a tax office ruling
- the stock exchange report
- an equal opportunity employer

If the phrase is further modified, use a hyphen to prevent ambiguity.

- a retrospectivetax-officeruling
- the Tokyostock-exchangereport
- a renownedequal-opportunityemployer

Compound adjectives with present or past participles usually have a hyphen. Some of these well-established compounds are single words. They will be listed in a dictionary.

- agovernment-ownedfacility
- aheart-rendingimage
- airborne
- everlasting
- widespread

Hyphenate compound adjectives consisting of a participle or an adjective.

- awell-knownbook
- afast-flowingriver

Don't hyphenate a compound adjective made up of an adverb–verb combination if the adverb ends in '-ly'.

- an elegantly executed manoeuvre
- a finely honed argument

Use hyphens for compound adjectives involvingnumerals, spelt-out numbersandordinal numbers.

- a4-partseries
- a21-gunsalute
- athird-storeyoffice

If you need to write out numbers as words rather than numerals, use hyphens to link numbers from 21 to 99.

- twenty-one
- two hundred and thirty-four
- ninety-nine

Hyphens link parts of afraction.

- 'one-half', but 'a half'
- 'one-quarter', but 'a quarter'

Compound adjectives containing capital letters, italics or quotation marks are not usually hyphenated.

- a High Court decision
- anin situinspection
- a 'do or die' attitude

Compound verbs

Hyphenate compound verbs made up of an adjective plus a noun or a noun plus a verb.

- tocold-shoulder
- togift-wrap

Don't hyphenate compound verbs made up of an adverb plus a verb. Write them as one word.

- to bypass
- to overreact
- to undergo

Compound adverbs

Write compound adverbs as one word.

- barefoot
- downstream
- overboard

Repeat words instead of using a hanging hyphen

Hanging (or floating) hyphens connect 2 words to a base word or a number that they share.

Example

- 3-or4-partharmony
- pre-orpost-1945
- full-andpart-timepositions

This can be difficult to follow, so it's clearer to repeat the words.

Example

full-timeandpart-timepositions

Don't hyphenate '-ing' and '-ed' verbs or most '-ly' adverbs

Don't use a hyphen in most compounds consisting of anadverbending in '-ly' and a participle (a part of averbending in '-ing' or '-ed').

Correct

- a fully loaded truck
- his rapidly declining health
- a partly read book

Incorrect

- a fully-loaded truck
- his rapidly-declining health
- a partly-read book

The only exceptions are 2 formations using the adverb 'fully':

- 'fully-fashioned'
- 'fully-fledged'.

The digital edition consolidates information in the Content Guide and the sixth edition. It provides examples of correct and incorrect use.

The sixth edition had information about hyphens, concentrated in the 'spelling and word punctuation' section.

The Content Guide had brief information about hyphens, including in relation to spelling for particular terms.

About this page

American Psychological Association (2020) 'Mechanics of style',Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edn, American Psychological Association, Washington DC.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019) Course notes and exercises: editing and proofreading for the workplace, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

European Commission (2020)English style guide: a handbook for authors and translators in the European Commission, European Commission.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014) Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Oxford University Press (2016) 'Punctuation',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman A (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

University of Chicago (2017) 'Punctuation',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Question marks

Users expect direct questions and requests to end with a question mark. Indirect questions, commands and rhetorical questions can take other punctuation.

Question marks usually go after the last letter in a sentence

Like other punctuation marks, question marks stay with the text they refer to. Usually, this is immediately after the last letter of the last word of the sentence.

Brackets and quotation marks change the position of question marks

For brackets and quotation marks, place the question mark:

- before a closing bracket or quotation mark if the question is part of the text in the brackets or quotation marks
- after the closing bracket or quotation mark if the question is part of the surrounding text.

She asked, 'Is the report due on Tuesday?'

They decided (and why wouldn't they?) to cancel the program.

What did she mean by 'the report is due ASAP'?

Did they decide to cancel the program (the EDTA program)?

Inserted question marks can show uncertainty

Question marks can express doubt and uncertainty about dates or other specific details.

John Limeburner (?1743–1785) was a convict who arrived in Australia on the First Fleet.

Pery Baylee (1784–?) was commandant of Macquarie Harbour penal station in Van Diemen's Land from 1831 to 1833.

Direct questions and requests end in a question mark

Direct questions end with a question mark. Most begin with one of these words:

- 'who', what', 'when', 'where', 'why', how', 'which', 'whose'
- 'are', 'is', 'was', 'were'
- 'has', have'
- 'did', 'do', 'does'
- 'can', 'will', 'could', 'would', 'should', 'might'.

These types of questions are called interrogative sentences.

Example

- Who will attend the meeting next week?
- Whose turn is it to take the minutes?
- Are you ready to start the meeting?
- Have they finished voting?
- Did you attend the meeting?
- Will the new government deliver a budget surplus?
- Could you please make your changes by tomorrow?

Some sentences don't start with one of the words such as 'who', 'could' and 'does' but still end with a question mark.

Example

That's your proposal?

Sometimes questions are tagged on to the end of another clause.

Example

They would say that, wouldn't they?

Requests are often framed as questions. Requests suggest that people have the option of saying 'no'.

Example

- Can you consider who your future colleagues might be?
- Can you please upload your edits?

Indirect questions and commands don't use a question mark

Indirect questions don't end with question marks, even if they include a word such as 'who' or 'does'.

Example

He asked who will attend the meeting next week.

Indirect questions are often used in headings.

Example

- Who we are [Heading]
- How to submit a claim [Heading]

To turn indirect questions into direct questions you can:
- rearrange the words so the verb comes before the subject
- introduce a word such as 'can' or 'why' – but make sure there is a subject.

Example

- Who are we?
- How do I submit a claim?

Guidance in this manual recommends toavoid questions as headings, except forEasy Read materials.

Spellcheckers often recommend that you change indirect questions to end with a question mark. This isn't always correct. It depends on whether youareasking a question.

Instructions and commands aren't framed as questions. They don't start with words such as 'what', 'are' or 'does',and don't end with a question mark.

Commands and instructions don't suggest that people have a choice.

Example

- Consider who your future colleagues might be.
- Please upload your edits.

Rhetorical questions end in a question mark or exclamation mark

Depending on the context, a rhetorical question can end in a question mark or an exclamation mark. Exclamation marks add emphasis – this can make a rhetorical question sound blunt.

Example

- Will you ever stop asking questions?
- Will you ever stop asking questions!

The digital edition has targeted advice on how to use a question mark. It has the same information as the sixth edition but provides more examples to help users.

The Content Guide had no specific guidance about question marks.

About this page

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019)Course notes and exercises: editing and proofreading for the workplace, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edition, Lacuna, Westgate.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman S (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London.

Quotation marks

Quotation marks draw attention to words and reference certain kinds of titles. Write most direct speech in single quote marks. For long quotes, use block quotes without quotation marks.

Quote direct speech in single quote marks

Single quotation marks are also known as 'quote marks', 'quotes', 'speech marks' or 'inverted commas'.

Use them to:

- show direct speech and the quoted work of other writers
- enclose the title of certain works
- draw attention to a word you're defining.

Double quotation marks aren't Australian Government style. Use them only for quotations within quotations.

Short quotations of direct speech are enclosed in single quotation marks.

Example

- 'Yes, that's all that happened,'she replied.
- The opposition leader asked,'But where's the money going to come from?'

Don't use quotation marks for long quotations. Instead, use block quotes.

Quotes within quotes

For quotations within quotations, use double quotation marks inside single ones.

He also wrote,'The decisions of the department for"major procurement"were always political choices.'

Omissions in direct speech

When quoting direct speech, take great care to be accurate. Writers and publishers have been sued for inaccurate quotations attributed as direct speech.

If you use ellipses for omitted words, ensure that the omission won't mislead readers about the content or tone of the source you're quoting.

- He said,'I don't agree with the proposal because we need to do more research.'
- He said,'I don't agree with the proposal…'
- He said,'I don't agree with the proposal.'
- He said,'I…agree with the proposal.'

If the quotation needs the information for context, add specific detail insquare brackets. You must be sure that the specific detail is correct and that it retains the meaning intended by the original speaker.

'The[Queensland]government agrees.'

If you paraphrase omitted material, place the paraphrasing in square brackets.

'They all listened to[the new manager's]speech.'

Errors in quoted material

Quoted material sometimes contains a spelling or grammatical error.

To show the error is in the original, insert an italicised 'sic' in non-italicised square brackets after the error. This shows the reader that the error comes from the original.

The email read,'At the time, the population of Sydney was much higher than Melberne[sic].'

Non-Australian English quotes

In quoted material use the original spelling of the quoted material, even if it uses US spellings such as 'color'. The capitalisation of words must also be the same as in the original.

If the US material uses the US conventions for quotation marks, you can update them to the Australian convention.

The President said,'The Prime Minister told me"No", so I'm working on an updated plan.'

The President said,"The Prime Minister told me'No,'so I'm working on an updated plan."

Format long quotes as block quotes with no quotation marks

Quotations that are longer than about 30 words are:
- usually indented from the text margin
- sometimes set in a smaller font size or a different font.

When they are set like this, they are called'block quotations'.

Don't use quotation marks to identify the quoted material – the formatting does that instead. Block quotes should also be coded with the HTML element.

Example

As Templeton (2019) writes:

According to the ACT Auditor-General, the transport benefits from the project are projected to be lower than the costs. She noted other benefits that had been included by the ACT Government to justify the project.

To include several paragraphs of quoted speech without the attribution tag, such as in a media release, use a quotation mark:
- at the beginning of each paragraph
- at the end of the last paragraph only.

Example

- Dr Nicoll said,'My experience as a public servant helped me learn how to run workshops.
- 'My experience also helps me make my workshops practical.'

Write speech in transcripts and plays with no quotation marks

Quotation marks are unnecessary in transcripts and plays if the name of the speaker comes before the direct speech.

Example

- Senator MARCELLUS: Look at the latest report. These results aren't great.
- Dr BERNARDO: I've seen this happen before. It looks like we might be over budget.

The same applies for questions and answers (Q&As).

Example

Q. Have you ever been convicted of an offence, other than a parking or speeding offence?

A. No.

Refer to certain kinds of titles using quotation marks

When referring to these titles, use quotation marks in references and citations:

- a chapter in a book or report
- an article in a periodical
- an essay
- a lecture
- a poem
- a song.

Example

Read the chapter titled 'Number and natural language' in The innate mind: structure and contents. It describes how people learn to recognise numbers.

Draw attention to words using quotation marks

You can use quotation marks instead of italics to make words stand out from your sentence. Examples include:

- a technical term on its first mention in a non-technical document
- a word or phrase that has been coined or that you're using in a specific sense
- colloquial words, nicknames, slang, or ironic or humorous words and phrases, in formal writing.

You don't usually need to repeat the quotation marks the next time you use the word. They might be useful if the next mention is a long way from the first.

Another use of quotation marks is for words introduced by expressions such as 'titled', 'marked', 'the term' and 'defined as'.

Example

- The papers were marked'Five Eyes only'.
- Can anyone here define'entropion'?
- The survey used the term'companion animal'to describe assistance dogs in workplaces.
- He said the new policy was'obviously a great success'and then explained its many failings.

Keep quoted punctuation marks in the quote

Punctuation in and after quotation marks depends on the punctuation of the quoted text and how it is used in the content.

If the punctuation mark is part of the quoted text, place the punctuation mark before the closing quotation mark.

Example

- 'Is it okay to ask a colleague out for a coffee?'I asked the HR section.
- He asked,'Has it arrived?'

The same rule applies for directly quoted speech followed by the attribution.

Example

- 'It has arrived,'said the manager.
- 'Has it arrived?'asked the manager.

If the punctuation mark is part of the sentence outside the quoted text, it follows the closing quotation mark.

Example

- She said that it was'time to start work'.
- Many things have been called'the new black', but they usually fade to grey.
- Did the complainant at any time ask you to'Please turn down the noise'?

Quoted material can appear as parenthetical information, enclosed inparentheses,dashesorcommas. In these cases, place the quotation marks inside the sentence punctuation.

Example

- His stirring speech ('We shall never surrender') galvanised the UK and its allies.
- His stirring speech –'We shall never surrender'– galvanised the UK and its allies.
- His stirring speech,'We shall never surrender', galvanised the UK and its allies.

If the quotation ends a sentence or is a sentence in its own right, place the final full stop before the final quotation mark.

Example

- She said,'It's time to start work.'
- 'When we get the final figures,' the manager said,'we'll know how it will affect our bottom line.'
- 'I have the final figures,' the manager said.'This will ruin our bottom line.'

Sometimes, there are 2 punctuation marks – one for the quotation and one for the sentence. Decide which is stronger and use it. Don't use both punctuation marks.

Correct

- The Speaker called 'Order!'
- Did you hear him say, 'That's unlikely'?

Incorrect

- The Speaker called 'Order!'.
- Did you hear him say, 'That's unlikely.'?

The surrounding text determines the font (roman, italic, or bold) of the quotation marks. If the content inside the quotation marks is in italics, but the sentence is in roman, use roman for the quotation marks.

Example

- She described it as'weird'. [The quotation marks are in roman even though 'weird' is in italics.]
- 'Wow,'he said. [Both the quote marks and the quote are in roman type.]

The digital edition revises advice about punctuation used with quotation marks. It departs from advice in the sixth edition about the position of punctuation and quotation marks in sentences interrupted by expressions, such as 'they said'.

The sixth edition recommended the comma be placed outside the quotation mark, before the expression.The digital edition recommends the comma be placed inside the quotation mark: the quotation mark comes directly before the expression.

The Content Guide had advice on the use of single and double quotation marks, with which the digital edition is consistent.

About this page

Evidence

Oxford University Press (2016) '9.2 Layout of quoted text',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

University of Chicago (2017) '6.40 Commas with quotations',Chicago manual of style,17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019)Course notes and exercises: editing and proofreading for the workplace, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Houston K (2015)The long and fascinating history of quotation marks',Slate, accessed 20 February 2020.

Microsoft Corporation (2019)Keyboard shortcuts in Word: insert international characters, Microsoft website, accessed 1 December 2019.

Mozilla (n.d.) ': The Block Quotation element',HTML elements, MDN Web Docs website, accessed 3 December 2020.

Murphy EM and Cadman H (2014)Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, 2014.

Owen M (2018)How to type accented letters in macOS three different ways, appleinsider website, accessed 4 December 2019.

Oxford University Press (2016) 'Quotations and direct speech',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman S (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London, 2003.

The Unicode Consortium (2019)Unicode, Unicode website, accessed 2 December 2019.

University of Chicago (2017) '6.115: "Smart" quotation marks',Chicago manual of style,17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

World Wide Web Consortium (W3C (n.d.) 'HTML tag', W3CSchools website, accessed 3 December 2020.

Whitbread D (2009)Design manual,2nd edn, UNSW Press, Sydney, Australia.

This page was updated Monday 24 October 2022.

Semicolons

Semicolons link sentences. They complicate sentences for users if overused. Do not use them at the end of bullet and numbered list items.

Avoid using a semicolon to link sentences

Short, simple sentences are easier to read. Overusing semicolons makes writing more difficult to understand.

Semicolons can create a break that is stronger than a comma but weaker than a full stop. They can link 2 sentences that share or develop an idea. The information must be closely related.

Example

- He wrote a report for each group. The red report was for one group;the blue report was for the other.
- Sometimes it's optional;sometimes it's compulsory.

Instead of a semicolon, it's usually best to use either:

- a full stop followed by a new sentence
- a comma before the last item, followed by aconjunction.

Sentences should be in plain language and no longer than 25 words. Don't use a semicolon if all it does is make your sentence longer.

Write this

Find out if it's optional or compulsory before you start. Ask someone to help you if you don't know the difference.

Not this

Find out if it's optional or compulsory before you start;ask someone to help you if you don't know the difference.

Too much punctuation makes text crowded and difficult to read. If a sentence has a lot of punctuation marks, it might be a sign that the sentence is too long or complex. Try to rewrite intoshorter, clearer sentences.

If you have to use a semicolon, on both sides of the semicolon writefull sentences. Other than in some sentence lists, it's incorrect to have a sentence fragment on one side of the semicolon.

Correct

Staff can leave at any time;they don't need a work schedule.

Incorrect

Staff can leave at any time;no work schedule.

Don't end bullet and numbered list items with semicolons

You don't need a semicolon at the end of each list item for bullet and numberedlists. It clutters the list and makes it hard to read.

Like this

The successful applicant will demonstrate:
- integrity, persistence and good judgement
- experience in projects of this type
- a sound understanding of interdepartmental relationships.

Not this

The successful applicant will demonstrate:
- integrity, persistence and good judgement;
- experience in projects of this type;and
- a sound understanding of interdepartmental relationships.

Separate in-text references with semicolons

Use a semicolon between each reference when you have more than one in-textreference in brackets.

Example

Effective leaders are adaptable (Nicoll 2019;Taylor 2018;Weir 2020).

Use a bullet or numbered list instead of semicolons in a complex sentence

Complex lists in sentences can be hard to read. If you can't use a bullet or numbered list, separate list items with:

- commas if the list is simple, such as a list of single words
- semicolons if the list is complex, such as a list of items that already contain commas or conjunctions.

In complex lists, you need semicolons to show what goes with what.

It is almost always better to break a complex list into a bullet or numbered list to make it easier to read.

Example

The successful applicant will demonstrate integrity, persistence and confidence. [No semicolon is needed, as each item is a single word or phrase with no other punctuation.]

The successful applicant will demonstrate integrity, persistence and confidence;experience in projects of this type;and a sound understanding of interdepartmental relationships. [Semicolons are needed, as some list items have a comma in them.]

The project will go ahead in Tasmania, Queensland and Victoria. [No semicolon is needed, as each item is a single word.]

The project will go ahead in Rose Bay, Tasmania;West End, Queensland;and Fitzroy North, Victoria. [Semicolons are needed, as some list items have a comma in them.]

The digital edition is consistent with the sixth edition in its advice on semicolons. A minor change is that it promotes use of other punctuation marks instead.

The Content Guide recommended avoiding semicolons. Sources cited as evidence support the uses explained in the digital edition.

About this page

Evidence

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2020) 'Punctuation: semicolon',The ABC style guide, ABC website, accessed 21 January 2020.

American Psychological Association (2020) '6.4 Semicolon',Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edn, American Psychological Association, Washington DC.

Murphy EM with Cadman H (2014) '7.4: semicolon',Effective writing: plain English at work, 2nd edn, Lacuna, Westgate.

Oxford University Press (2016) '4.4 Semicolon',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

University of Chicago (2017) '6.56 Use of the semicolon',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019)Course notes and exercises: editing and proofreading for the workplace, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

Seely J (2001)Oxford everyday grammar, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stilman S (2004)Grammatically correct, Writer's Digest Books, Ohio.

Strunk W and White EB (2000)The elements of style, 4th edn, Longman, New York.

Truss L (2003)Eats, shoots and leaves: the zero-tolerance approach to punctuation, Profile Books, London, 2003.

This page was updated Tuesday 19 October 2021.

Common misspellings and word confusion

When words sound similar or the same, people can confuse their spelling. If you're not sure about the spelling of a word, check a dictionary.

Check for words that are easily confused or misspelt

The spelling of some words is variable. Sometimes it's difficult to know which spelling or word to use because:

- Australian, American and British English have different ways of spelling a word
- a word might sound similar to another, so people can mishear it and write the wrong word.

Follow one dictionary for consistency and use it to check variablespellings.

Choose the right word and spell it correctly

Correct word use makes content readable and clear to users. Getting words wrong risks losing users' engagement with, and trust of, your content.

This alphabetical list contains some of the words that people get wrong in government writing. Check your dictionary for the full set of meanings of each word.

accept/except

The verb 'to accept' means 'to agree' or 'to receive'.

The verb 'to except' means 'to exclude'.

She willaccepttheir apology for the delay and agree to a later deadline.

I can meet most days,exceptTuesday morning.

affect/effect

The word 'affect' means 'to produce an effect on'.

The word 'effect' means 'the result of an action' or, as a verb, 'to bring about or make something happen'.

The Cancer Council looks at the ways canceraffectsAustralians and how to support them.

Oneeffectof the 'Quit smoking' campaign was the overall decline of the number of smokers by 12%.

The manager wanted toeffectchange in the team.

allusion/illusion

The word 'allusion' means 'a reference'. It is often followed by 'to'.

The word 'illusion' means 'a mistaken belief'.

In his speech, the minister made anallusionto a policy the department is developing.

At a glance, it seemed the colour was black rather than grey, but that was just anillusion.

ascent/assent

The word 'ascent' means 'upward movement'.

The word 'assent' means 'to agree'. It is often followed by 'to'.

Bill told us about hisascentto the top of Mount Kosciuszko on horseback a few years ago.

There is no guarantee the manager willassentto postpone delivery.

complement/compliment

The noun 'complement' means 'something that completes something else' or, as a verb, 'to complete something'.

The noun 'compliment' means 'an expression of praise' or, as a verb, 'to praise'.

I enjoy working with my team members. Our skillscomplementone another perfectly.

It is important tocomplimentthe team when they meet a deadline.

council/counsel

The word 'council' means 'a formal advisory body of people'.

The word 'counsel' means 'advice' and 'to advise'. It also refers to a barrister or other 'legal adviser'.

At the recent meeting, thecouncilvoted in favour of raising rates by 5%.

If I had followed theircounselI would have achieved a better outcome.

Our legalcounseladvised seeking an out-of-court settlement.

conscience/conscious

The word 'conscience' means 'a moral sense of right and wrong'.

The word 'conscious' means 'awake and aware of one's surroundings and identity'.

Hisconsciencestopped him from accepting their hospitality.

They wereconsciousof the time and soon returned to their desks.

dependant/dependent

A 'dependant' is a person who relies on another, especially for financial support.

The word 'dependent' is usually followed by 'on', and means 'conditional' or 'subordinate'.

Please fill out this request for subsidy on behalf of yourdependant.

The expansion of the program isdependenton funding.

discreet/discrete

The word 'discreet' means 'careful' or 'prudent'.

The word 'discrete' means 'distinct'.

She trusted him with the information because he was alwaysdiscreet.

The requirements of the different projects meant the branch recruited managers withdiscreteskill sets.

disinterested/uninterested

The word 'disinterested' means 'impartial' and 'unbiased by personal interest'.

The word 'uninterested' means 'not interested', 'indifferent' or 'unconcerned'.

'Disinterested' is often used to mean 'uninterested', but this use is not correct.

The judge's deliberation was disinterested and considered.

The invitation to the concert was wasted on me because I'm uninterested in jazz music.

dived/dove

The verb 'to dive' means 'to descend' or 'to plunge into or under'.

In Australian English, write 'dived' to use the past tense of the verb 'to dive'.

The word 'dove' is the past tense of 'dive' in American English.

Bystanders dived into the creek to help the drowning swimmer.

drank/drunk

The verb 'drank' is the past tense of 'to drink'.

The verb 'drunk' is a participle and is used with 'has', 'have' or 'had'.

The adjective 'drunk' means 'intoxicated by alcohol'.

Yesterday, the graduates drank the soft drinks from the staff fridge.

I arrived after they had drunk all the coffee.

The police released a campaign warning people not to drive while they are drunk.

elicit/illicit

The word 'elicit' is a verb meaning 'to draw out', 'to cause' or 'to evoke'.

The word 'illicit' is an adjective meaning unlawful.

The questions in the survey were designed to elicit helpful responses.

Alcohol was once considered an illicit substance.

immanent/imminent

The word 'immanent' means 'part of something's intrinsic nature' or 'remaining or operating within'.

The word 'imminent' means 'impending' or 'about to happen'.

The search for meaning is immanent in human nature.

Emergency Services advised residents that evacuation was imminent.

for all intents and purposes/for all intensive purposes

The correct expression is 'for all intents and purposes', meaning 'in every practical sense'.

The paperwork may take a few weeks to come through but,for all intents and purposes, you are hired.

foreword/forward

The noun 'foreword' means 'the introductory comments at the beginning of a book'.

The word 'forward' is usually an adjective or adverb. It means 'in advance (of time)', 'ahead' or 'onward'.

The report is almost ready. All I need to do is write theforeword.

The publication date was broughtforward.The report will now be released in June, and not October as initially stated.

judgement/judgment

Write 'judgement' rather than 'judgment'.

The exception is a court decision; write this as 'judgment'.

You can speak to one of our counsellors without fearingjudgement.

Please cite the High Court's most recentjudgmentin the issues paper.

lead/led

The word 'lead' is a noun meaning 'leadership' or 'principal'; a verb meaning 'to go before', 'to conduct'; or an adjective meaning 'in front'. 'Led' is the past tense of 'lead'.

'Lead' (not led) means a base metal and is pronounced as 'led'.

They followed mylead.

She was theleadnegotiator.

He took theleadin the race.

The deputy secretaryledthe discussion.

The chemical symbol forleadis 'Pb'.

licence/license

The word 'licence' is a noun. It means 'a document from an authority giving formal permission'.

The word 'license' is a verb. It means 'to obtain or grant a licence'.

The state and territory websites have information about getting and renewing your driverslicence.

Visit our website if you would like tolicenseyour pet.

lose/loose

The verb 'to lose' means 'be deprived of' or 'cease to have'.

The word 'loose' is usually an adjective, but is also a noun, adverb or verb. Two of the meanings as an adjective are 'not held by bonds or restraint' and 'not held together'.

If we don't meet the deadline, we maylosethe bonus payment.

Some of the screws on his desk werelooseso he worried about workplace health and safety.

master degree/masters degree/master's degree

A common confusion is how to write about master level degrees. Common spellings include 'master', 'master's' and 'masters'.

Use 'master degree'. When referring to a specific qualification, use 'Master of [area of study]'.

He completed hismaster degreelast year.

Having aMaster of Artshelped her gain the promotion.

The university offered severalmasterdegrees to postgraduate students.

passed/past

The word 'passed' means 'moved onwards', 'overtook' or 'handed over'.

The word 'past' can be a noun meaning 'previous time', an adjective meaning 'gone by in time' or an adverb meaning 'beyond'.

While driving yesterday, Ipassedthe department's new offices.

In thepast, staff would have to book a room to have a meeting. We have movedpastthat; now we meet online.

practice/practise

The word 'practice' is a noun. It means 'a repeated activity' or 'a habit'. It also refers to the 'business of a professional', for example, of a lawyer or doctor.

The word 'practise' is a verb. It means 'to repeat an activity', 'to undertake a pattern of behaviour' or 'to pursue a profession'.

It's not good practice to use long sentences.

The new law graduate landed an internship at his lecturer's practice.

Practise your speech until it is perfect.

She hopes to practise medicine.

precede/proceed

The verb 'to precede' means 'to come or go before in time, order or importance'.

The verb 'to proceed' means 'to go about something (in a particular way)' or 'to go forward or on further'.

The manager tends to precede staff meetings with an anecdote to put people at ease.

Given the circumstances, it is best to proceed cautiously.

The director managed to proceed with the next point on the agenda, despite the interruption.

principal/principle

The word 'principal' is a noun or an adjective. It means 'first in rank or importance' or 'chief'.

The word 'principle' is usually a noun. It means 'a fundamental truth or law as the basis of reasoning or action'. It also means a 'personal code of right conduct' (often plural).

The principal of the school made a compelling appeal for funding.

Equal rights and self-determination of people is a principle of international law.

They refused to sacrifice their principles for financial gain.

program/programme

Use 'program' rather than 'programme', including for computer programs.

Use 'program' for the titles of new programs based on government policy. Use 'programme' only when it is part of the formal name of an existing program.

One of the most challenging aspects of our work is designing programs that can be implemented quickly.

The Prescription Shopping Programme lets medical practitioners check their patients' prescription histories.

regardless/irregardless

Always use 'regardless'. It means 'without regard', 'independent of' or 'anyway'. It is often followed by 'of'.

'Irregardless' is likely a combination of the words 'irrespective' and 'regardless'. It is not accepted as standard Australian English.

Our aim is for all staff to have access to this training,regardlessof location.

The following instructions will workregardlessof which mobile platform you use.

These are interesting times but we must carry onregardless.

stationary/stationery

The word 'stationary' means 'not moving'.

The word 'stationery' means 'writing and office equipment' such as paper, pens and paper clips.

The truck collided with astationarycar.

The notebooks are in thestationerycupboard.

that/which

The words 'that' and 'which' are both relative pronouns.

They should not be used interchangeably. Your choice can alter the meaning of your sentence.

To make your writing clear, use:
- 'that' for essential information
- 'which', with punctuation, for non-essential information.

For examples, refer toguidance about pronouns.

their/there/they're

The word 'their' is the possessive form of 'they'. It shows ownership.

The word 'there' means 'in or at a position or location'. It is also used to introduce sentences.

'They're' is the contraction of the pronoun 'they' and the verb 'are'.

Theirmanager bought a cake for morning tea.

If you're leaving for the conference now, I'll have to meet youtherelater.

Thereis a problem we need to manage.

They'reall in a meeting until 2 pm.

would have/would of

Sometimes people mishear the verb form 'would have' as 'would of'. Always write 'would have' or the contracted form 'would've'. 'Would of' is incorrect.

If I had known we were over budget, Iwould havechanged the scope of the contract.

Thiswould'vespared us a lot of stress

At the very least, wewould ofavoided the overspend.

The digital edition builds on information from the sixth edition about 'variable spellings'.

The Content Guide had information on 'preferred spellings'.

About this page

Little W, Fowler HW and Coulson J (1973)Shorter Oxford English dictionary on historical principles, Oxford University Press, New York.

Oxford University Press (2017)Australian concise Oxford dictionary, 6th edn, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

This page was updated Monday 14 August 2023.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are shortened words. They can hinder people's understanding, so they have limited uses.

Limit the use of abbreviations

Abbreviations contain the first single letter or first few letters of a word. They don't include the last letter of a word.

Example

- appfor 'appendix'
- volfor 'volume'
- contfor 'continued'
- pfor 'page'
- parafor 'paragraph'

Abbreviations are generally not good for readability and can be misunderstood. Avoid using them in general content where possible.

Like this

Thank you for your email about errors in the thirdparagraphof the webpageHow to apply for a special use permit.

Not this

Thank you for your email about errors in the thirdparaof the webpageHow to apply for a special use permit.

Abbreviations are useful in very limited circumstances:

- in a table or chart, where space is unavailable for the full form of the word – provide a note under the table or chart giving the full form
- when using 'cont' to show continuing text in another part of content (for example, on another page of a print newsletter) – the full form of the word is more helpful where space allows.

Semi-formal and informal content uses abbreviations more often. Use abbreviations only if users will understand what they mean. If there's any doubt, define the abbreviation on first use.

Avoid using abbreviations in any public-facing content.

Accessibility requirements

Avoid (or explain) unusual words, phrases, idioms and so on.

WCAG quick reference:
- 3.1.3 Unusual words – level AAA
- 3.1.4 Abbreviations – level AAA

Don't put a full stop after most abbreviations

Don't place a full stop after an abbreviation.

There are exceptions:
- when the abbreviation ends a sentence and isn't followed by another punctuation mark
- for abbreviations of scientific names forplants and animals
- for the abbreviation 'n.d.'(meaning 'no date') for the year of publication in references.

Example
- It's listed as a container of 'miscgoods'. [No full stop after the abbreviation]

- The full name of the company is Sizzling Outback ToursInc.[A full stop after the abbreviation ends the sentence]
- Have you reviewed the relevantpara?[No full stop after the abbreviation: another punctuation mark ends the sentence]
- Xanthorrhoea glaucasubsp.angustifolia[Full stop in the abbreviation for 'subspecies']
- Office of Parliamentary Counsel(n.d.)Glossary, Federal Register of Legislation website, accessed 12 January 2020. [No date of publication on this webpage]

Capitalise the same way as the spelt-out version

Use the same capitalisation as for the unabbreviated word.

Example

- miscfor 'miscellaneous'
- Decfor 'December'

Don't abbreviate the first word in a sentence

Write out the abbreviated term in full.

Example

- Appendix B explains this further. [Not 'App B']

Add 's' to create plural abbreviations

Add an 's'. One exception is 'pp'(pages), which is used when referring to multiple pages.

Example

- I've sent you someparasto check.
- Refer topp58–64.

The digital edition recommends avoiding use of abbreviations in general content, and in any public-facing content. It follows the Content Guide's advice to avoid using Latin shortened forms.

The digital edition lists common shortened forms and provides advice on the limited circumstances where they could be used and how to punctuate them.

This is a departure from advice in the sixth edition, which listed 'thoroughly anglicised' shortened forms used regularly in publications. It did not explicitly warn against their use. The sixth edition recommended against using 'i.e.', 'e.g.' and 'etc.' in paragraph text and in formal content.

The digital edition removes the sixth edition requirement to use full stops with non-Latin abbreviations. Exceptions to this rule are:

- Latin shortened forms(including for the formal names ofplants and animals)
- the abbreviation for 'no date' (n.d.) used inreferencing and citation.

The new general rule is supported by corpus information checked with the Australian National Dictionary Centre. It is consistent with the recommendation to use minimal punctuation. The removal of full stops affects style for abbreviations of:

- Australian place names
- organisation names
- months and days of the week.

About this page

Btb Translation Bureau (n.d.) '1: abbreviations',The Canadian style, Btb Translation Bureau website, accessed 4 May 2020.

Content Design London (2019) 'Abbreviations and acronyms',Content Design London readability guidelines, Content Design London website, accessed 30 March 2020.

GOV.UK (2016) 'A-to-Z: abbreviations and acronyms',Style guide, GOV.UK, accessed 9 September 2020.

Hales A, Williams K and Rector J (February 2017) 'Alienating the audience: how abbreviations hamper scientific communication',Association for Psychological Science, accessed 7 January 2020.

Lieberman C (17 January 2006) 'Accessibility hat trick: getting abbreviations right',A List Apart, accessed 7 January 2020.

Sehl K (24 April 2019) 'The ultimate list of social media acronyms and abbreviations',Hootsuite Blog, accessed 8 January 2020.

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) '4.4: abbreviations and acronyms',Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca, accessed 4 May 2020.

United States Government (n.d.) 'Minimize abbreviations',Plain language guidelines, plainlanguage.gov.

W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) (n.d.) 'G102: providing the expansion or explanation of an abbreviation',Techniques for WCAG 2.0, W3C website, accessed 7 January 2020.

W3C (n.d.) 'H28: providing definitions for abbreviations by using the abbr element',Techniques for WCAG 2.0, W3C website, accessed 7 January 2020.

W3C (n.d.) 'PDF8: Providing definitions for abbreviations via an E entry for a structure element',Techniques for WCAG 2.0, W3C website, accessed 7 January 2020.

W3C (n.d.) 'Understanding Success Criterion 3.1.4: abbreviations',Understanding WCAG 2.1, W3C website, accessed 5 May 2020.

This page was updated Thursday 6 June 2024.

Acronyms and initialisms

Acronyms and initialisms are shortened forms. They replace full names and special terms in text. Use them only if people recognise and understand them.

Choose acronyms and initialisms people will recognise

Acronyms comprise the initial letters (and sometimes syllables) of the words in a term and are pronounced as a word.

Example

- Qantas
- Anzac
- TAFE
- modem

Initialisms comprise the initial letters (or sounds) of the words in a term and are pronounced as letters, not as a word.

Example

- ABC
- GST
- NDIS
- XML

Some shortened forms are a combination of an initialism and an acronym.

Example

- DFAT
- EPIRB
- CPAP
- JPEG

Acronyms and initialisms are common in formal content. If understood by users, they can make content easier to use. They communicate terms in as few letters as possible to make content easier and faster to read.

Example

- CSIROfor 'Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation'
- HTMLfor 'hypertext markup language'

When preparing content for well-established publications, such as professional journals, look at the author guidelines and examples of the content. This will show whether using acronyms and initialisms is appropriate and, if so, which shortened forms are used.

Explain acronyms and initialisms to all users

People unfamiliar with certain terms might not understand their shortened forms. Acronyms and initialisms might also be misread by screen readers.

To make sure all shortened forms are accessible:

- Define them the first time you use them in content (unless you're certain all users will understand them without a definition – consult a dictionary first).
- Include them with their spelt-out forms in the glossary. This is particularly important if the content contains many specialist shortened forms.

Spell out most acronyms on first use

If there's a chance users won't know the meaning of an acronym or initialism, define it at first mention. Write the term in full first and follow with the acronym or initialism in parentheses. Use the shortened form rather than the full term for later mentions.

Example

- TheDepartment of Social Services(DSS)manages a range of benefits and payments for eligible Australians.DSShelps support communities through a number of programs and services.

Write well-known acronyms or initialisms first and follow with the full term in parentheses.

Example

- All living organisms haveDNA(deoxyribonucleic acid)within their cells.DNAtells cells what proteins to make.

You don't need to define some acronyms and initialisms on first use. These include:

- some place names (NT, ACT)
- time of day (am, pm)
- some organisational names (BHP, Qantas)
- terms that began as acronyms but are now words in their own right (radar, scuba, sonar).

Repeat the full term if the user needs it

If you use the shortened form only a few times in long-form content, consider writing out the full term more than once.

People could come across the shortened form without reading the text where it is first defined. For example, a user might click straight to a section that only includes the shortened form.

Check the correct shortened form for government organisations

The names of government departments are often shortened, but not always in the same way.

Example

- DVA (Department of Veterans' Affairs)
- Home Affairs (Department of Home Affairs)

Rather than using acronyms or initialisms, it can be easier for people if you:

- spell out the agency's name in full the first time you use it
- then use the generic name ('department', 'agency', 'bureau') afterwards.

This is usually more useful to non-specialist users.

Example

- TheBureau of Meteorologyprepares Australia's official weather forecasts. Thebureauprovides its forecasts on its website.
- TheDepartment of Financeis in Canberra. Thedepartmentsupports government financial management.

Include a list if content relies on many acronyms and initialisms

For content with many specialised acronyms and initialisms, provide a glossary – a list of terms and their meaning that users can refer to.

Include the glossary at the end of the content or on a separate webpage. Use a hyperlink in the text to help people access the glossary.

You don't need to include a glossary if:

- there are only a few unfamiliar shortened forms
- each one is only in a very limited section of text
- each one is spelt out when first mentioned.

Print considerations

The glossary usually appears before the references (with the endmatter).

Don't end acronyms and initialisms with a full stop

Don't place a full stop after the acronym or initialism.

The exception is if the shortened form ends a sentence and isn't followed by another punctuation mark.

Example

- Will you be attendingCOAGthis month? [No full stop after the acronym]
- I'm working on aB2Bproject at the moment. [No full stop after the initialism]
- She's now working inFOI.[A full stop after the initialism that ends the sentence]
- Is the company being investigated byASIC? [No full stop after the acronym because another punctuation mark ends the sentence]

Use capitals for most acronyms and initialisms

Acronyms are usually all capitals, but use lower case for some familiar acronyms (taser, captcha, laser). Use an initial capital for familiar acronyms that are proper nouns (Qantas, Anzac).

Initialisms are often all upper case (VOIP, FOI) but there are exceptions (bpm). Consult a dictionary if you're unsure of the capitalisation.

If the acronym or initialism represents common nouns, don't begin each word of the full form with a capital letter.

Example

- EISfor 'environmental impact statement'
- TBfor 'tuberculosis'

If the acronym or initialism represents a proper noun, start each word with a capital letter (excluding words such as 'of' and 'and').

Example

- ASIO [Australian Security Intelligence Organisation]
- OPC [Office of Parliamentary Counsel]
- NSW [New South Wales]
- ILSC [Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation]

Avoid plural and possessive forms on the first use

Avoid using the plural or possessive of an acronym or initialism when you define it. This makes it easy for users to recognise the shortened form in later content.

Example

- It's compulsory for certain businesses to have an Australian Business Number(ABN). The Australian Business Register manages applications forABNs. [There's no need to use an apostrophe before the 's' for ABNs as the term is plural, not possessive.]
- The Australian National University(ANU)has a new student policy. TheANU'spolicy is popular with its staff and students. [Use an apostrophe before the 's' to show that the ANU owns the policy.]

Quote acronyms and initialisms the same way as the speaker

When quoting an exact phrase, write exactly what the speaker said. If they used an acronym or initialism, quote it. Show the full term in square brackets if users might not recognise the term or if you haven't already explained it.

Example

- 'We're continuing to manage the number ofSES[Senior Executive Service]to ensure the Public Service isn't top heavy,' he said.

As well as the initial letters of words, definitions in the digital edition allow for initial syllables for acronyms and initial sounds for initialisms. The sixth edition included 'and sometimes other letters' in its definitions for acronyms and initialisms.

The digital edition updates punctuation style for shortened forms.

- It removes the requirement to use full stops withnon-Latin abbreviations.
- Consistent with what was Content Guide advice, it recommends avoiding the use ofLatin shortened forms.
- Consistent with the sixth edition, it does not use full stops with acronyms or initialisms, orcontractions.

The digital edition lists common shortened forms and provides advice on the limited circumstances where they could be used and how to punctuate them.

This is a departure from advice in the sixth edition, which listed 'thoroughly anglicised' shortened forms used regularly in publications. It did not explicitly warn against their use.

The Content Guide mentions shortened words and phrases but did not provide detailed advice. It advised to avoid using Latin shortened forms, in line with the guidance in this edition of the Style Manual.

About this page

Btb Translation Bureau (n.d.) '1: abbreviations',The Canadian style, Btb Translation Bureau website, accessed 4 May 2020.

Content Design London (2019) 'Abbreviations and acronyms',Content Design London readability guidelines, Content Design London website, accessed 30 March 2020.

GOV.UK (2016) 'A–Z: abbreviations and acronyms',Style guide, GOV.UK, accessed 4 May 2020.

Hales A, Williams K and Rector J (February 2017) 'Alienating the audience: how abbreviations hamper scientific communication',Association for Psychological Science, accessed 7 January 2020.

Narod S, Ahmed H and Akbari M (2016) 'Do acronyms belong in the medical literature?: a countercurrents series',Current Oncology,23(5):295–296, doi:10.3747/co.23.3122.

Oxford University Press (2016) '10: Abbreviations and symbols',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Sehl K (24 April 2019) 'The ultimate list of social media acronyms and abbreviations',Hootsuite Blog, accessed 8 January 2020.

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) '4.4: abbreviations and acronyms',Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca, accessed 4 May 2020.

University of Chicago (2017) '10.2: Acronyms, initialisms, contractions',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) (n.d.) 'G102: providing the expansion or explanation of an abbreviation',Techniques for WCAG 2.0, W3C website, accessed 7 January 2020.

W3C (n.d.) 'H28: providing definitions for abbreviations by using the abbr element',Techniques for WCAG 2.0, W3C website, accessed 7 January 2020.

W3C (n.d.) 'PDF8: Providing definitions for abbreviations via an E entry for a structure element',Techniques for WCAG 2.0, W3C website, accessed 7 January 2020.

W3C (n.d.) 'Understanding Success Criterion 3.1.4: abbreviations',Understanding WCAG 2.1, W3C website, accessed 5 May 2020

Watson L (8 February 2017) 'How to create content that works well with screen readers',Accessibility in government blog, accessed 7 January 2020.

Wright N (n.d.) 'Keep it jargon-free',Resources, plainlanguage.gov.

This page was updated Friday 7 July 2023.

Contractions

Contractions are shortened words. People will read and understand them depending on their context. Avoid them in formal content.

Shorten single words and grammatical phrases with care

Single-word contractions use the first and last letters of a word and sometimes other letters in between.

Example

- Cthfor 'Commonwealth'
- Drfor 'Doctor' [As a title]
- Ltdfor 'Limited' [As a legal status]

Grammatical contractions join 2 words. They use an apostrophe to show that there are missing letters.

Example

- aren't (are not)
- don't (do not)
- isn't (is not)
- it's (it is)

Legal documents and many specialist and professional publications use specific contractions. Look at examples of existing content to see whether you can use grammatical contractions. Don't use them if you're unsure.

Avoid using contractions of single words in more formal content such as high-level briefing and responses to official inquiries. The exceptions are contractions used in formal writing, such as 'Dr' and other titles.

Grammatical contractions are not generally used in formal content. You can use them in less formal content which aims to create:

- a conversational tone (for example, in a newsletter)
- a friendly or collaborative tone (for example, in brochures and manuals).

Example

- The departmenthas notbreached its staffing cap.[Formal high-level briefing or a response to a parliamentary question]
- The departmenthasn'tbreached its staffing cap. [Less formal briefing or other less formal communications]
- We appreciate that the new rulesweren'tadvertised widely.We'renow contacting everyone who might be affected. Pleasedon'thesitate to contact us if you have any questions. [Friendly and conversational content for users of a service]

Find out if the user will understand the contractions

Look at existing agency content to see whether grammatical contractions are appropriate.

If developing a new publication or communication channel, conductuser research. This will help you understand how people respond to grammatical contractions.

Some users might find grammatical contractions difficult to understand. They can add an extra cognitive load.

Don't end contractions with full stops

Don't place a full stop after contractions. The exception is when the contraction ends a sentence and isn't followed by another punctuation mark.

Example

- Tempo AustraliaLtdhired him last year. [No full stop after the contraction]
- He is currently working for Tempo AustraliaLtd.[A full stop after the contraction ends the sentence.]
- They said theycan't![No full stop after the contraction because another punctuation mark ends the sentence]

Australian practice differs from US English, which adds a full stop after a contraction (for example, 'Mr.', 'Ltd.').

Don't use an apostrophe to show missing letters in a contraction of a single word ('Dr', 'Ltd'). Grammatical contractions use only one apostrophe, even if the contraction leaves out letters from more than one place.

Correct

- shan't

Incorrect

- sha'n't

Capitalise contractions in the same way as the full word

Use the capitalisation that you would use for the uncontracted word. Capitalisation of the uncontracted word depends on the context.

Example

- TheCthGames [The contraction 'Cth' is capitalised because it refers to the name of a sporting event: the Commonwealth Games.]
- Acthis a term for a political community. [Here, 'cth' isn't capitalised because it's generic.]

Use the full word at start of the sentence (except for grammatical contractions)

Write out the contracted term in full unless it's a grammatical contraction.

Example

- Commonwealthresources are available. [The word begins a sentence, so it isn't contracted.]
- Don'tforget your notes for the meeting. [Grammatical contractions can start a sentence.]

Only use the contraction 'no' with numerals

The word 'number' is sometimes substituted with 'no'. This is a contraction of the wordnumero. The plural form of the contraction is 'nos'.

Only use the contraction 'no' when immediately followed by a numeral. In all other instances, write the word out in full so it isn't confused with the negation 'no'.

This contraction is not a standard symbol fornumbers expressed as units of measurement.

Like this

- Archive boxno 152has been found in the basement.
- I won't be able to get their manager'snumberuntil tomorrow.
- There are anumberof options available to us.

Not this

- I won't be able to get their manager'snountil tomorrow.
- There are anoof options available to us.

The digital edition updates punctuation style for shortened forms.

- It removes the requirement to use full stops withnon-Latin abbreviations.
- Consistent with what was Content Guide advice, it recommends avoiding the use ofLatin shortened forms.
- Consistent with the sixth edition, it does not use full stops withacronyms or initialisms.

It is consistent with the sixth edition requirement not to use full stops with contractions. It changes the recommendation to use a full stop with the contraction 'no' for the word 'number' (ornumero). This aligns the guidance with the general rule for shortened forms, and with the principle of minimal punctuation.

It prefers 'Cth' over 'Cwlth' as the contraction for 'Commonwealth'. This reflects a departure from the sixth edition based on a corpus check with the Australian National Dictionary Centre.

The digital edition follows the Content Guide's advice to avoid using Latin shortened forms. It lists common shortened forms and provides advice on the limited circumstances where they could be used and how to punctuate them.

This is a departure from advice in the sixth edition, which listed 'thoroughly anglicised' shortened forms used regularly in publications. It did not explicitly warn against their use. The sixth edition recommended against using 'i.e.', 'e.g.' and 'etc.' in body text and in formal content.

About this page

Castillo González MP (2007)Uncontracted negatives and negative contractions in contemporary English: a corpus-based study[doctoral thesis], University of Santiago de Compostela, accessed 19 June 2020.

Content Design London (2019) 'Contractions',Content Design London readability guidelines, Content Design London website, accessed 19 May 2020.

GOV.UK (2016) 'A-to-Z: contractions',Style guide, GOV.UK, accessed 4 May 2020.

Palacios C (1 August 2019) 'Using contractions in formal writing: acceptable or not?',bka Content, accessed 30 March 2020.

United States Government (n.d.) 'Use contractions',Plain language guidelines, plainlanguage.gov.

UK Department of Health and Social Care (2010)Making written information easier to understand for people with learning disabilities, GOV.UK, accessed 19 May 2020.

Watson L (8 February 2017) 'How to create content that works well with screen readers',Accessibility in government blog, accessed 7 January 2020.

This page was updated Wednesday 5 July 2023.

Latin shortened forms

Use English rather than Latin shortened forms, except in some cases. People will prefer the English equivalent unless the context requires special use.

Avoid using Latin shortened forms in most content

Use Latin forms only in limited situations–for example:

- where there's limited space, such as in tables
- in technical and specialist publications that use them.

Unlike other shortened forms, some Latin shortened forms have full stops.

The terms 'i.e.' and 'e.g.' need full stops after each letter. This helps screen readers announce them.

Don't follow 'e.g.' or 'i.e.' with a comma, regardless of whether you would use a comma in the sentence.

Use the English words where possible

Rather than using 'e.g.' or 'i.e.' write the English words out in full. Write 'for example' and 'that is' instead, particularly in more formal publications.

Like this

- They found some aspects of grammar confusing–for example, the different types of pronouns.

- The department has a major problem with its website–that is, users find pages are very slow to load.

Not this

- They found some aspects of grammar confusing,e.g.the different types of pronouns.

- The department has a major problem with its website,i.e.users find pages very slow to load.

Don't use the shortened form foret cetera. Use of 'etc.' is redundant in a list introduced by 'for example', 'such as' or 'including'. These expressions show that the list is incomplete.

If you think you need to include 'etc.' because there's more to say, include these ideas in your sentence instead.

Correct

- This funding is intended for upgrading roads in Gold Coast and Hinterland urban centres (for example, Surfers Paradise and Southport).

- This funding is for upgrading roads in the Gold Coast and Hinterland urban centres (Surfers Paradise, Southport, Upper Coomera and Robina). [All the places are listed, so 'for example' isn't needed.]

Incorrect

- This funding is for upgrading roads in Gold Coast and Hinterland urban centres (for example, Surfers Paradise, Southportetc.).

The digital edition follows the Content Guide's advice to avoid using Latin shortened forms. It lists common shortened forms and provides advice on the limited circumstances where they could be used and how to punctuate them.

This is a departure from advice in the sixth edition, which listed 'thoroughly anglicised' shortened forms used regularly in publications. It did not explicitly warn against their use. The sixth edition recommended against using 'i.e.', 'e.g.' and 'etc.' in body text and in formal content.

The digital edition updates punctuation style for shortened forms.

- It removes the requirement to use full stops withnon-Latin abbreviations.

- Consistent with the sixth edition, it does not use full stops withacronyms or initialisms, orcontractions.

The digital edition changes the recommendation to use a full stop with the contraction 'no' for the word 'number' (from the Latin,numero). This aligns the guidance with the general rule for shortened forms, and with the principle of minimal punctuation.

About this page

American Psychological Association (2020) '6.29: Latin abbreviations',Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edn, American Psychological Association, Washington DC.

Content Design London (2019) 'Words to avoid',Content Design London readability guidelines, Content Design London website, accessed 4 May 2020.

GOV.UK (2016) 'A-to-Z: eg, etc and ie',Style guide, GOV.UK, accessed 22 February 2020.

Oxford University Press (2016) '10.6: e.g., i.e., etc., et al.',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) '2.6: Use simple sentences',Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca, accessed 20 February 2020.

University of Chicago (2017) '10.42: scholarly abbreviations',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

This page was updated Monday 23 January 2023.

Choosing numerals or words

Numbers as numerals are generally easier for people to scan. Numbers as words remain a convention that people expect in some types of content.

Use numerals for 2 and above in text

In text, the general rule is:

- Use numerals for '2' and above.
- Write the numbers 'zero' and 'one' in words.

Follow the same rule for writing numbers inheadings and subheadings. Apply exceptions to this general rule in specific situations, explained on this page.

The numbers '0' and '1' are difficult for some users to read. Some typefaces make it difficult to see the difference between:

- the letter 'O' and numeral '0'
- the letters 'I' (capital 'i'), 'l' (lower-case 'L') and numeral '1'.

In some typefaces, the numeral '1' can also be confused with the numeral '7'.

Writing 'zero' and 'one' helps to ensure all users understand you are referring to the number.

Write this

- Onlyoneperson agreed to it.
- Their aim iszeronet emissions by 2050.
- They were open to discussing3options.

Not this

- Only1person agreed with it.
- Their aim is0net emissions by 2050.
- They were open to discussingthreeoptions.

Use words for 2 and above in these specific situations

There are exceptions to the general rule for using numerals in text.

Use words for numbers when:
- starting a sentence
- writing a fraction
- writing a proper noun that includes a number written as a word
- writing a publication title that includes a number written as a word
- quoting a figure of speech.

In addition, use words for numbers below 10 for government content that follows journalistic conventions (for example, media releases).

Starting a sentence with a number

Start sentences with words rather than numerals. If you must use a number at the start of a sentence, write it out in words.
- Twelvepeople from our group went to the rally.
- From our group,12people went to the rally.
- 12people from our group went to the rally.

It is sometimes better to rearrange the sentence.
- The board received621complaints.
- Six hundred and twenty-onecomplaints were received by the board.

Fractions

Write words in general text forfractions.

Use fractions when:
- an exact number is not important

- the user needs only a general idea of the values.

If the exact number and value is important, use decimals instead.

- Abouttwo-thirdsof staff attended last week's meeting.
- There were 270 candidates for the Legislative Council, an average of7.5candidates per vacancy.

Proper nouns, titles of publications and figures of speech

Write numbers as words if this is how they appear in a name or title.

The Treasurer wrote the terms of reference for the Review of theFourMajor Banks and Other Financial Institutions.

Private politics : a study offivepolitical outlooksby Alan Davies

Use words for figures of speech.

- Two'scompany andthree'sa crowd.
- Let's takefive.
- She feltten feettall.

Government content and other style conventions

Various style guides treat numbers differently. Media organisations generally use words for all numbers below 10 (or 11), and use numerals for the rest.

Content of the same type necessarily uses the same style, for example, in media releases.

Check youruser research. It might show a need to use words for numbers other than 'zero' and 'one', for example, in:

- longer works
- print publications containing very few numbers.

Be consistent. Once your style for numerals or words is settled, use the same style throughout the content or series of publications.

Write all numbers as numerals in these specific situations

There are exceptions to using words for 'zero' and 'one'.

Write all numbers as numerals:

- in units of measurement
- to show mathematical relationships – such as equations and ratios – and for decimals
- when you are comparing numbers
- in tables and charts

- for dates and times
- in a series of numbers
- in specific contexts – such as steps, instructions, age and school years
- in scientific content.

Units of measurement

Always use numerals to report a measurement (unless it is a large rounded number).

- 1 km
- 1 kilometre
- one kilometre

Mathematical formats, relationships and comparisons

Always use numerals:

- to show mathematical relationships (such as equations and ratios)
- in decimal numbers
- to compare numbers
- in tables, graphs and charts.

Use numerals when writing fractions in specialist content. Otherwise the general rule is words forfractions.

Use well-understood conventions to writemathematical relationships. Keep relationships together so they are easily understood. To do this use:

- numerals only
- the correct operator characters
- spacing between numerals and operators
- non-breaking spaces.
- a ratio of7■1
- 8 + 1 = 9

Use decimals when you need to be precise. Always write them as numerals.

- They had8.5full-time equivalent staff in the section.
- Innisfail averages3,547.8 mmof rainfall per year.

Compare numerals, not words and numerals. If one number is a decimal, the other must be a decimal and so on.

For those aged75 to 84, the rate was2.5times as high as the rate for the control group. This fell to1.1times as high for thoseaged 85and over.

For those aged75 to 84, the rate wasover twiceas high as the rate for the control group. This fell to1.1times as high for thoseaged 85and over.

Comparisons are sometimes hard for people, so make them clear. It may seem obvious, but comparisons are only useful if like is compared with like.

Lists or blocks of data must consist of numerals, or people will find them hard to understand. Always use numerals in graphs, charts andtables. Numerals save space and help people scan, find and compare values quickly.

Restrict data to key indicators and results. Keep the presentation of data as simple as possible, and use consistent units and magnitudes.

Date and times

Always use numerals fordates and time.

- Wednesday1 April2020
- She took the call at1 pm.

Series of numbers

In any document that contains a lot of numbers, it is always better to write numbers as numerals.

Always use numerals for:

- a related group of items
- a discussion of statistics.

This is regardless of the size of the numbers involved.

The anthology includes160poems by22 poets–14of whom were born in Australia,4in New Zealand,3in England and1in Austria.

The number of internet subscribers increased by3.6%. Fibre connections grew by22.4%and fibre growth for the year to June was69.8%.

If you have two series of numbers, for the sake of clarity you can use words for one series and numerals for the other.

Of the mothers of the 23 sets of triplets registered during the year,8 had no previous children,8 had one childand7 had two previous children.

[The first series uses numerals to break down the total number of triplets according to groups of mothers. The second series uses words for the number of children each group of mothers had already had.]

Lists of steps and instructions

Lists, points and instructions are easier to follow if written as numerals.

- 1.Write a list

- In point 2of the record of discussion ...
- Step 3: insert the audio cable into the left audio jack.

Age and school years

Always use numerals for age and school years.

- They're a close-knit group of12-year-olds.
- The siblings are inyear 1andyear 5.

In scientific content

You can use powers of 10 for large numbers in technical content, such as science and engineering publications. Don't use powers of 10 in general content.

$2.5 \times 10^6$is the same as2,500,000

Use commas in numbers with 4 or more digits

Numbers from 1,000 need acomma. Separate the digits into groups of 3 (working from right to left).

- 1,750
- 25,690
- 745,902,350

Don't use a space or non-breaking space instead of a comma. This is because screen readers can announce spaced digits as separate numbers.

- The government awards2,500grants to community projects annually.
- The government awards2 500grants to community projects annually.

Combine numerals and words for large rounded numbers

Numbers up to one million are easy to read as numerals. When you're using rounded numbers of 1,000 or more,use commas to separate numerals into groups of 3(working right to left).

Use a combination of numerals and words for large numbers over a million when they are rounded. It is easier to read '2.5 million' than '2,500,000'.

Example

- The budget allocated$50 billionto that initiative.
- The organisation announced$3 trillionin superannuation savings.

Billions, trillions and quadrillions:

- billion = 1,000 million (109)
- trillion = million × million (1012)
- quadrillion = thousand × million × million (1015).

Choose between numerals or words for currency

Use numerals and symbols for amounts ofmoney.

Example

- They self-declared a$0turnover.
- 50c
- $1
- US$20,000.

However, money can be written entirely in words for approximations and figures of speech.

Example

- The government's new policy will savethousands of dollars.
- That's mytwo cents worth.

The digital edition updates the rule for using words for numbers in body text.

It recommends using words only for zero and one, and using numerals for other numbers. Government content that follows journalistic conventions is treated as an exception.

Expert advice has informed this change from the sixth edition. The change reflects accessibility considerations and style for numbers in contemporary digital content.

The sixth edition recommended using words up to 100 (in general text) or words up to 9, and then numerals (in statistically oriented text). The digital edition retains the rule to start a sentence with a word rather than a numeral and lists some other exceptions to the new general rule, consistent with sixth edition guidance.

The digital edition recommends using a comma innumbers with 4 or more digits. This recommendation is based on accessibility advice. The sixth edition recommended using a thin space in numbers with 5 or more digits and no space in numbers with 4 digits.

The digital edition retains the sixth edition rule about using numerals in tables and technical content. It also retains the rules about using words for common expressions and to begin sentences. The sixth edition rule about using a mixture of words and numerals for large numbers also appears in the digital edition.

The Content Guide recommended numerals for all numbers, including zero and one, noting a few exceptions to the rule.

About this page

Evidence

Bohm T (2 December 2019)Letter and symbol misrecognition in highly legible typefaces for general, children, dyslexic, visually impaired and ageing readers,Typography, accessed 2 June 2020.

GOV.UK (2016)A-to-Z: numbers',Style guide, GOV.UK, accessed 2 June 2020.

American Psychological Association (2020) 'Numbers',Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edn, American Psychological Association, Washington DC.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2020) 'Numbers, measurements',The ABC style guide, ABC website, accessed 3 June 2020.

Btb Translation Bureau (2020) 'Numerical expressions',The Canadian style, Btb Translation Bureau website, accessed 3 June 2020.

Content Design London (2019) 'Grammar points: numbers',Content Design London readability guidelines, Content Design London website, accessed 3 June 2020.

European Commission (2020) '6: Numbers',English style guide: a handbook for authors and translators in the European Commission, European Commission.

General Services Administration (n.d) 'Numbers and percentages',18F content guide, 18F Content Guide website, accessed 3 June 2020.

Loranger H (23 March 2014) 'Break grammar rules on websites for clarity', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 3 June 2020.

New Zealand Government (2020) 'Numbers',Content design guidance, Digital.govt.nz, accessed 3 June 2020.

NSW Government (2022) 'Numbers, dates and times',Content style guide, Digital.NSW website, accessed 21 November 2022.

Oxford University Press (2016) '11.2.2: Figures or words?',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

TechCommNZ (May 2016) 'Five or 5? Words versus numerals...',TelecommNZ Newsletter, accessed 3 June 2020.

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2018) '4.6: Numbers',Canada.ca content style guide,Canada.ca, accessed 3 June 2020.

University of Chicago (2017) 'Numbers',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

US Government Publishing Office (2016) 'Numerals',Government Publishing Office style manual, U.S. Government Publishing Office, accessed 17 September 2021.

This page was updated Tuesday 9 July 2024.

Currency

Use the correct numbers, words and symbols for currency so people are clear about the amount.

Quantify an amount of money with a symbol and numeral

Write amounts using the relevant currency symbol followed by numerals. Don't put a space between the currency symbol and the numerals.

Example

- $27.99

For an amount less than $1, you can write it either as a whole number of cents or as a decimal value.

For the cents form:
- Use the letter 'c' for cents after the numerals.
- Don't add a space between the numerals and the 'c'.
- Don't use a full stop after the 'c' unless it's at the end of a sentence.

Example

- $0.50
- 50c

If the amount is a decimal number, always use 2 digits after the decimal point.

Example

- $0.80
- $0.78

If the amount is less than 10 cents, use a zero before the number of cents.

Correct

- $0.04

Incorrect

- $0.4

Clarify when you are using Australian dollars

Where content is clearly only referencing Australian dollars, use '$'.

Example

The minimum wage in Australia is$19.49 per hour.

If users could be confused about the currency being referenced, place 'A' before the '$'. Don't insert a space between them.

Example

The minimum wage in Australia isA$19.49 per hour. [Use of 'A' is appropriate if the content is intended for users outside Australia.]

The journalist was paidA$89 per hour during her posting in Hong Kong. [Use of 'A' helps users understand that the journalist was not paid in Hong Kong dollars].

Reference non-Australian currencies for accessibility

Non-Australian currency symbols may be inaccessible to people who access content using screen readers. Screen readers may be unable to interpret and describe the symbols. Avoid the use of non-Australian currency symbols where possible.

Options for referencing non-Australian currencies

Use the 3-letter International Bank Account Number(IBAN) currency codes– for example, THB, USD, VND. This is the preferred method because it doesn't use symbols and makes content more accessible.

When referencing 'dollar' currencies, use a country prefix followed by the '$' symbol – for example, A$, C$, NZ$, US$. If there is any chance of confusion, use the 3-letter IBAN codes.

Use the currency symbol only, for example '£' for the British pound, if you have evidence that it is the best way to meet a user need.

Using IBAN currency codes (preferred)

Use them for all currencies referenced in the content (including Australian dollars).

Don't place a space between the IBAN currency code and the numerals.

Use the same number of decimal places for all the currencies you refer to.

Minimum wages are currently:

- Australia –AUD19.49 per hour

- Thailand –THB313.00 per day
- Vanuatu –VUV220.00 per hour
- Vietnam –VND4.18 million per month (urban Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City).

If using foreign currency symbols:
- Explain them on first use unless they are very widely known (for example, US$).
- Place them before the numerals and don't insert a space.
- Don't also use the IBAN currency code.

The minimum wage in Japan is currently Japanese yen(¥)901 per hour. It was previously¥874 per hour. [The Japanese yen symbol isn't very widely known in Australia, so explain it at first mention unless you're writing for a specialist audience familiar with the symbol.]

The minimum wage in the United States is currentlyUS$7.25 per hour. [Because US$ is very widely known, don't explain it on first use.]

Former Australian currency units

Use words rather than symbols for former Australian currency.

Before 14 February 1966, pounds (£), shillings (s) and pence (d) were Australia's units of currency. Few people would recognise these symbols now, so write them out in full.

9 pounds, 8 shillings and 7 pence

£9 8s 7d

Some countries still use pounds as their currency. If there is any chance of confusion, state 'former Australian pounds' or use the symbol 'A£'.

Quantify large amounts of money

Use the level of precision needed for the content.

Example

- They spent more than$2.1 million. [Use in descriptive text.]
- Total expenditure was$2.195 million. [Use in a financial report.]
- $2.195m[Use in a table or chart. No space or full stop. Explain the shortened form 'm' in a note.]

Use words for inexact amounts

Use words for amounts of money that are an expression rather than an actual amount.

Example

- This approach is likely to savethousands of dollars.
- The contract was worthseveral million dollars.

The digital edition recommends using the dollar symbol and numerals most cases for Australian currency. It gives three options for citing foreign currencies supported by a search of Australian corpora. It recommends avoiding non-Australian currency symbols where possible and using words instead of symbols when referring to former Australian currency.

The sixth edition gave the option of using a combination of words and numbers for currency in descriptive and narrative prose.

The Content Guide did not have guidance on the style for currency.

About this page

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2020) 'Currency',The ABC style guide, ABC website, accessed 3 June 2020.

General Services Administration (n.d.) 'Numbers and percentages',18F content guide, 18F website, accessed 3 June 2020.

Reserve Bank of Australia (2019)Annual report 2019, Reserve Bank of Australia website, accessed 5 June 2020.

Reserve Bank of Australia (1994)International Comparisons of Bank Margins - August 1994: Table 1, Reserve Bank of Australia website, Australian Government, accessed 10 June 2020.

Reserve Bank of Australia (2020)International market operations: foreign exchange operations, Reserve Bank of Australia website, accessed 5 June 2020.

Royal Australian Mint (n.d.)Journey to an Australian currency[PDF 846KB], Royal Australian Mint website, accessed 5 June 2020.

Royal Australian Mint (2020)Mint Issue 126: February 2020[PDF 2.91MB], Royal Australian Mint website, accessed 5 June 2020.

The Unicode Consortium (2020) 'Currency symbols',Unicode 13.0 character code charts, Unicode website, accessed 4 June 2020.

University of Chicago (2017) '9.21: non-US currencies using the dollar symbol',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

University of Chicago (2017) '9.23: other currencies',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021.

Dates and time

Dates and expressions of time need to be readable and clear, particularly in content that contains detailed timelines. Write, abbreviate and punctuate dates and times consistently so people can understand your content. Follow international and Australian standards to write dates and times for data systems and international communication.

Follow Australian conventions for dates

There are Australian conventions for writing dates in words and numerals, and in numeric formats. These conventions include how to sequence elements of the date.

Use numerals and words for dates in most content. Use numeric dates when space is limited and in content types like tables.

Combine numerals and words for dates in body text

In Australia, the conventional sequence for dates is 'day month year'. Use this sequence when expressing dates in numerals and words.

For dates in body text, use numerals for the day and year and spell out the name of the month. Don't include a comma or any other punctuation.

Spell out the name of the day if it is being used, but don't include a comma after the day.

The names of months and days start with an initial capital because they areproper nouns.

Write this

- 31 December 2020
- Thursday 31 December 2020

Not this

- December 31,2020
- Thursday,31 December 2020

Insert anon-breaking spacebetween the day and the month so they stay together on one line. A non-breaking space means that a line break will split the date before the year.

Keeping the day and month together allows people to identify the information appearing before the line break as a date.

Write this

- Please find attached the new agenda for the extraordinary general meeting, 2 pm 8November 2022. [With a non-breaking space between '8' and 'November']

Not this

- Please find attached the draft minutes of the extraordinary general meeting held in Sydney, 8 November 2022. [With no non-breaking space between '8' and 'November']

Don't use anordinal number(12th, 21st etc.) when writing dates in body text.

Write this

- 1 May 1997
- Schedule 3 commences on the first 1 July after the bill receives Royal Assent. [Extract from an explanatory memorandum]

Not this

- 1stMay 1997
- Schedule 3 commences on the first 1stJuly after the bill receives Royal Assent.

Incomplete dates

Follow the general rules above when writing incomplete dates. Spell out the month in words if you need to leave out either the day or the year.

- The winning yacht usually reaches Hobart on 27December.
- More than 1,700 jobs have been created sinceJanuary2018.

There is an exception to the general rule for writing dates in body text. If you refer to the day but not the month, use anordinal number.

Don't put the ordinal suffix ('st', 'nd', 'rd' or 'th') in superscript. Superscript can cause problems for people who use screen readers.

- She will leave by the 20th.
- She will leave by the 20th.

If you refer to the year only, use the full numerical year. Don't abbreviate it.

- 1945
- '45
- 45

Use shortened forms for dates when space is limited

Only use abbreviations if space is limited – for example, in tables, illustrations, charts and notes. Ensure that it is obvious to users which days of the week or months you are referring to.

The standard abbreviations for the days of the week are:

- Monday – 'Mon' or 'M'

- Tuesday – 'Tues' ('Tue') or 'Tu'
- Wednesday – 'Wed' or 'W'
- Thursday – 'Thurs' ('Thur','Thu') or 'Th'
- Friday – 'Fri' or 'F'
- Saturday – 'Sat' or 'Sa'
- Sunday – 'Sun' or 'Su'.

The abbreviations in parentheses are alternatives for the standard abbreviation they follow. Only use the alternatives when the context ensures their meaning is clear.

Note: Style Manual lists Monday as the first day of the week. This is consistent with the order of calendar days in a calendar week as defined in theinternational standard adopted by Australia.

The standard abbreviations for the months are:
- January – 'Jan'
- February – 'Feb'
- March – 'Mar'
- April – 'Apr'
- May – retain as 'May'
- June – retain as 'June' or shorten to 'Jun'
- July – retain as 'July' or shorten to 'Jul'
- August – 'Aug'
- September – 'Sept' or shorten to 'Sep'
- October – 'Oct'
- November – 'Nov'
- December – 'Dec'.

Only use the shortest form of days and months – 'F', 'M', 'N' and so on – in limited applications. An example is a time-series chart where the context and order allow users to understand the difference between each capital letter.

Don't use a full stop after shortened days and months. No full stop is the correct Australian Government style for allabbreviations,acronyms and initialismsandcontractions.

Don't abbreviate dates in body text

Avoid abbreviated words when writing dates in body text. Words written in full are usually easier to read and understand.

The Labor Party called an urgent conference onSaturday22December.

The Labor Party called an urgent conference onSat22Dec.

Don't write dates as numerals unless space is limited

Avoid writing dates entirely in numerals for general content. Use numeric dates only when space is limited (such as in tables).

Numeric dates can be confusing because their order and format differs between countries.

Use Australia's conventional order of 'day month year' unless you are writing for users in a country that uses a different style.

Use a forward slash in numeric dates

Separate the numbers in a numeric date with an unspaced forward slash, using the format 'day/month/year'. This format uses single digits for single-digit days and months.

- 4/6/2021 [Australia: d/m/yyyy]
- 7/12/2020
- 12/7/2020 [USA: m/d/yyyy]
- 2021-06-04 [Sweden: yyyy-mm-dd]

Numeric dates can have 2-digit elements

You can also use 2 digits for each element.

Only use this style for the year:

- in financial data
- if it is clear which century you are referring to
- if users understand the order of the elements ('day month year' for Australian users).
- 07/12/20
- 30/06/22

Whichever style you use for date formats, use it consistently.

Full stops in computer applications

Many computer systems and applications use a full stop in numeric dates. Use 2 digits for the day and month and 4 digits for the year:'dd.mm.yyyy'.

- 07.12.2020
- 10.09.2021

Don't use an apostrophe for decades

Write decades with an 's' on the end. Don't use anapostropheto show the plural.

- 2010s
- 1980s

- 2010's
- 1980's

In more casual writing, you can use expressions such as 'the eighties'. You can also use an apostrophe to show the missing numerals in a decade – for example, 'In the'80s, all my jackets had shoulder pads.'

Use words for spans of years in body text

As a general rule, write spans of years in words, using 'to', 'from … to' or 'between … and'. Write the years out in full, not as abbreviations.

Don't replace the word between the years with anen dash.

- the years 2015to2019
- from2015to2019
- between2015and2019
- the years 2015–2019
- from 2015–2019
- between 2015–2019

Use en dashes for particular types of year spans

Government content often includes spans of years. Some year spans are easier to read and understand if they contain an unspaced en dash rather than words.

This is particularly true in content that contains multiple spans of years. In this case, using en dashes makes the content easier to scan.

Use an unspaced en dash for a:

- financial year
- calendar year
- span of years in the titles of publications and programs
- span of years written in parentheses, such as for a term of office and the years of birth and death.

Always include the phrases 'financial year', 'financial years', 'calendar year' or 'calendar years' unless the context makes the meaning clear. You can also introduce the relevant phrase at first mention and just write the year span, without the phrase, in later mentions.

Finally, exercise your judgement. Consider using en dashes for year spans when using words makes the content harder to read.

Example

- This document includes expenditure and revenue estimates for the2021–22 financial year. For comparison, the attachment contains estimates for2020–21and2019–20.

- The agency measures injury hospitalisations and deaths over 2calendar years. Data showed a small increase in injury hospitalisations for2017–2018and2019–2020. Injury deaths declined over the earlier period, but showed a marked increase for2019–2020.
- The library holds a reference copy of theInclusion and diversity strategy 2022–24.
- Alfred Deakin was Prime Minister for much of Australia's 2nd Parliament (1903–1906).
- Sidney Nolan (1917–1992) had 3 younger siblings.

Always use unspaced en dashes in spans of years. Don't use forward slashes.

Write this

- National Road Safety Action Plan 2018–20
- Australia's energy consumption rose by 0.6% in 2018–19 and fell by 2.9% in 2019–20.

Not this

- National Road Safety Action Plan 2018/20
- Australia's energy consumption rose by 0.6% in 2018/19 and fell by 2.9% in 2019/20.

Use words for spans of days and months in body text

As a general rule, use 'from … to' and 'between … and' in spans of days and months.

If it's appropriate for your content, keep elements of the span together by insertingnon-breaking spacesbetween them.

When you include a year, insert a non-breaking space between the day and month. A non-breaking space keeps the day and month together while the line break splits the date before the year.

Example

- Parliament is scheduled to sitfrom3to21 December. [Non-breaking spaces between '3', 'to', '21' and 'December']
- We will do snap inspectionsbetween6and8 September. [Non-breaking spaces between '6', 'and', '8' and 'September']
- The exhibition will runfrom30 Novemberto23 February 2022. [Non-breaking space between '30' and 'November' and between '23' and 'February']

Use en dashes for spans of days and months when space is limited

Only use en dashes for spans of days and months if you have limited space. This could be in display text, tables, lists or in social media posts.

But also exercise your judgement – consider using en dashes if using words makes the content harder to read.

The en dash is spaced when the day and month appear on both sides of the span.

Example

The en dash is unspaced when the month only appears at the end of the span.

Example

- Symposium Series 2025Plain language: 3–5 MarchAccessible tables: 9–11 JuneContent design: 8–10 September

Plain language: 3–5 MarchAccessible tables: 9–11 JuneContent design: 8–10 September

Refer to specific days, events and periods with capitals

Treat specific days, public events and periods in history as proper nouns and use initial capitals. Use lower case for'the'and anyprepositions, unless they are capitalised as part of a proprietary name.

In body text, use lower case for generic terms like the names of seasons –'autumn' – and astronomical events such as 'equinox' and 'solstice'. Write 'century' and 'centuries' in lower case.

Holidays and events

Use initial capitals for all institutional holidays, religious days and public events. Follow the capitalisation of proprietary names.

- New Year's Day
- Good Friday
- Ramadan
- Yom Kippur
- the City2Surf
- the AFL Grand Final
- Labour Day
- the Adelaide Festival
- Party In The Paddock 2024
- Anzac Day ['Anzac' stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, but only takes an initial capital. The acronym appears in legislation with an initial capital and this has become the commonly-used form.]

Periods and events of historical importance

Use initial capitals for specific periods and events of historical importance, but not when you abbreviate them to a generic term.

- the Renaissance
- the Bronze Age
- the French Revolution, the revolution
- the Battle of Long Tan, the battle

World wars

There are 2 acceptable styles for referring to the world wars.

Use either style, but be consistent in your content.

- First World War, Second World War
- World War I, World War II [With roman numerals]

Use 2non-breaking spacesto keep each name together on one line of text.

Write 'World War I' and 'World War II' with roman numerals.

The accepted way to write most roman numerals is by typing letters of the alphabet. Use a capital 'i' – I – for the world wars.

The Style Manual acknowledges that the house styles of some government agencies require the use of the arabic numerals '1' and '2'. User research will always guide an agency's style choices. Our recommendation to use roman numerals comes from corpus evidence.

In content with many mentions of the world wars, you might decide to use a shortened form. Write the name of the war out in full the first time you use it. Include the shortened form in parentheses immediately afterwards and use the shortened form from then on.

Use roman numerals in the shortened form.

- The Second World War (WWII) started in 1939. Many Australians died inWWII.
- World War I (WWI) started in 1914. Many Australians enlisted for service inWWI.

Eras and periods

Use initial capitals for the actual name of a geological era or period but not for broad historical and cultural times.

- the Lower Jurassic period
- the Mesozoic era
- the colonial era
- baroque ornamentation

Centuries

Use numerals, not words, for centuries. This is an exception to the rule forordinal numbers.

Write 'century' and 'centuries' in lower case.

Don't use shortened forms, such as 18C or C18, unless you have limited space.

Don't use superscript for the ordinal suffix.

- the 18th century
- in the 2nd and 3rd centuries
- a 19th-century writer
- an 8th-century monastery
- theeighteenthcentury
- in2Cand3C
- anineteenth-century writer
- aneighth-century monastery
- an 8th-century monastery

Use CE and BCE to represent the common era (CE) and the time before the common era (BCE). There is no 'year 0' in this system. The years progress from 1 BCE to 1 CE.

Write 'CE' and 'BCE' without full stops and with anon-breaking spaceseparating them from the year or century.

- 44 BCE
- 1452 CE
- the 3rd century BCE
- the 3rd century CE

Seasons and seasonal events

Use lower case for the seasons and recurrent seasonal events.

- winter
- summer solstice

Use numerals for times of day

In most documents, numerals give a clearer expression of time. Write times of day using numerals, especially when you need to convey precise times.

Use a colon between the hours and minutes. The use of a colon as the separator, rather than a full stop, reflects a shift in contemporary Australian usage.

A colon ensures that the time isn't confused with a decimal number.

For example, '10.50' can be read as '10 and a half' as well as '50 minutes past 10'. Screen reader users will probably hear '10.50' as '10 point 5'.

Example

- The bus leaves at 8:22 am.
- The broadcast will run from 9:45 am to 11:45 am.

Times using 'am' and 'pm'

The initialisms 'am' and 'pm' come from the Latin phrasesante meridiem(before noon) andpost meridiem(after noon).

Write 'am' and 'pm' in lower case. Separate the numbers and the initialism with anon-breaking space.

Don't use 'am' and 'pm' with words that duplicate their meaning, for example 'morning' and 'afternoon'.

- Please respond by10 am tomorrow.
- Let's meet at6:30 pm.
- Please respond by 10 am tomorrowmorning.
- Let's meet at 6:30 pmin the evening.

You can use 2 zeros to show the full hour, but they aren't essential. Use 2 zeros if that is consistent with other expressions of time in your content, such as in running sheets.

- 9 pm
- 9:00 pm

Noon, midday and midnight

Use 'noon', 'midday' or 'midnight' instead of '12 am' or '12 pm'. This makes it easier for people to understand the time.

- We have extended the closing date tomidnightFriday 7 October 2022.
- We have extended the closing date to12 amFriday 7 October 2022.

Write 'o'clock' only when you quote someone directly or transcribe a recording. In these situations, use numerals and the word 'o'clock'.

- 'The minister is speaking at about10 o'clock,' they said.

The 24-hour clock

Use the 24-hour clock if it helps people understand your content. This is important when referring to times in these contexts:

- travel

- certain scientific fields
- the armed services
- content written for countries using the 24-hour clock.

The 24-hour clock is also useful in content where space is limited. This is because it uses fewer characters than times with 'am' and 'pm'. For this reason, it is often used in timetables and schedules.

This system numbers the hours from 00:00 hours (midnight) to 23:59. It always uses at least 4 digits. It can have 6 digits if seconds are included:

- The first 2 digits are the hours.
- The next 2 digits are the minutes.
- The last 2 digits are the seconds, if you include them.

Always use a 'leading zero' for hours under 10 – for example, write '05:30' not '5:30'.

Use a colon to separate the hours, minutes and seconds in the 24-hour clock.

- 00:45 [12:45 am]
- 07:38 [7:38 am]
- 23:18 [11:18 pm]
- 23:59:17 [11:59:17 pm – includes hours, minutes and seconds]

Don't add 'am' or 'pm' to times written in 24-hour clock format.

- 06:45
- 23:18
- 06:45am
- 23:18pm

Some government agencies that produce technical and scientific content don't use a colon for the 24-hour clock – for example, 2300 and 0430. This is the 'basic format' used forinternational communication.

If space is limited and you use the 24-hour clock in general content, we recommend inserting a colon for clarity. This is the 'extended format' used forinternational communication.

Time zones

You might need to define which time zone you are referring to.

Time zones are usually written with the 24-hour clock.

The main Australian zones are:

- ACST (Australian Central Standard Time)
- ACDT (Australian Central Daylight saving Time)
- AEST (Australian Eastern Standard Time)
- AEDT (Australian Eastern Daylight saving Time)

- AWST (Australian Western Standard Time)
- LHST (Lord Howe Standard Time)
- LHDT (Lord Howe Daylight Time).

Daylight saving time is not observed in the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia.

There are also time zones for some Australian external territories.

The meeting will commence at 15:30AEDTon 17 November 2022.

Coordinated Universal Time

Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) is a time standard used as the basis for regulating world timekeeping.

UTC expresses the unadjusted local time at 0° longitude. It is not adjusted for daylight saving. Local standard time at longitudes around the world is represented by an offset to UTC.

UTC is based on International Atomic Time (TAI), which is a weighted average of atomic clocks located around the world, including in Australia. TAI does not take into account changes in the earth's rotation, so leap seconds are occasionally added to UTC.

UTC is the standard and legal reference for times of day in Australia. The UTC(AUS) standard is maintained by the Australian Government'sNational Measurement Institute.

Time zones are written as positive or negative offsets to UTC.

Write the initialism 'UTC', followed by '+' or '−', followed by the time offset to UTC in 24-hour system format.

- During winter, the time in Sydney isUTC+10:00.
- São Paulo is in the Brasília Time Zone which isUTC−03:00.

Use en dashes for spans of time when space is limited

Only use en dashes for time spans if you have limited space. This could be in display text, tables, lists or in social media posts.

But also exercise your judgement – consider using en dashes if using words makes the content harder to read.

The spacing of the en dash depends on the elements of the span.

Use an unspaced en dash:

- if the 'am' or 'pm' appears only at the end of the span
- for spans of time in the 24-hour clock format.

Use a spaced en dash:

- when 'am' or 'pm' appears on both sides of the span
- if 'noon', 'midday' or 'midnight' appears in the span.

Example

- Soccer training this Sat: 8–9 am
- Available appointment times are:08:00–08:1513:30–13:4516:45–17:00
- Help desk opening hours:Monday to Thursday: 7 am–4 pmFriday: 9 am–midday

Don't combine words and the en dash.

Write this

- Closed 11 am – 2 pm.

Not this

- Closedbetween11 am–2 pm.

Follow the manual's number rules for duration

When expressing duration (lengths of time) in body text, follow Style Manual rules aboutchoosing words or numerals.

This means writing the words 'zero' and 'one' and using numerals for '2' and above. The rules also say to use the numerals '0' and '1' inspecific situations.

For duration, the specific situations are likely to be when:

- you compare numbers in a sentence
- a sentence contains a series of numbers.

Write the words 'zero' and 'one' in sentences that don't contain other numerals. Write the numerals '0' and '1' in sentences that contain numerals from 2 and above, or where all numbers show duration.

Spell out the units of time:'hours', 'minutes' and 'seconds'.

Example

- There are7 minutesand30 secondsremaining. [Numerals for 2 and above]
- The hearing adjourned for2 hours. [Numerals for 2 and above]
- The committee will break for lunch forone hour. [Words for zero and one]
- Although we allowed candidates1 minuteto answer each question, most took over2 minutes. [Numerals when comparing duration]
- I noted faults at these time stamps:0 minutes 45 seconds,1 minute 4 secondsand3 minutes 8 seconds. [Numerals for a series of numbers showing duration]

Use fractions written in words if users only need a general idea of values.

Only use decimal numbers if they are the best way to explain what people need to know. But be aware that some people might not understand the decimal's time value. For example, 1.25 hours is 1 hour 15 minutes, not 1 hour 25 minutes.

It is usually better to avoid decimals and include the number and unit of time.

Example

- The session finished abouta quarter of an hourearly. [Words for a fraction – gives a general idea of the duration]
- I clocked her at15 minutes and 12 seconds. [Easier to understand than 15.2 minutes]They broke the record by0.04 seconds. [Numeral – a decimal gives people the information that is appropriate in this context. But the words'…by4 hundredths of a second' might be clearer to some users.]

I clocked her at15 minutes and 12 seconds. [Easier to understand than 15.2 minutes]

They broke the record by0.04 seconds. [Numeral – a decimal gives people the information that is appropriate in this context. But the words'…by4 hundredths of a second' might be clearer to some users.]

Use shortened forms for units of time when space is limited

It is usually better to spell out the units that measure time. This is particularly so in general content. Only use short forms if space is limited and the short forms are easy to identify correctly.

If you need to abbreviate time, use the following units as shortened forms:
- second – s
- minute – min
- hour – h
- day – d
- week – wk
- month – mo
- year – y or yr (Choose one and use it consistently in your document.)

The International System of Units – SI – is the international standard for measurement. The unit for second – symbol 's' – is theSI base unit for time.

Other time measures are not SI units – but 'min', 'h' and 'd' are used with 's' and recognised as legal units of measurement in Australia. They are listed in Schedules 1 and 2 of theNational Measurement Regulations.

There are also commonly-used shortened forms for time measures – for example, 'wk' (week), 'mo' (month) and 'yr' or 'y' (year). These are not legal units of time, but are likely to be understood when used alongside other time units.

If your expression contains one time measure only, insert anon-breaking spacebetween the number and unit.

Never add an 's' to show a plural.

Write this

- 35 s
- 15 min
- 6 h
- 5 d
- 3 wk
- 8 mo
- 2 y or 2 yr
- [There are non-breaking spaces between numbers and units. There is no 's' to show plurals.]

Not this

- 35s
- 6hs
- 15mins
- 5d
- 3wks
- 8mo
- 2y or 2yr
- [There are no non-breaking spaces between numbers and units. There is an 's' after 'min', 'hr' and 'wk'.]

But don't space a number and its unit when your expression contains more than one time measure. Use anon-breaking spacebetween each time value instead.

Never add an 's' to show a plural.

Write this

- 11min 12s
- 7h 8min 30s
- [There is no space between a number and its unit. There is a non-breaking space between each time measure in the expression.]

Not this

- 11min12s [There is no (non-breaking) space between '11min' and '12s'.]
- 11min 12s [There is a non-breaking space between '11' and 'min' and between '12' and 's'.]
- 7hs8mins30s [There is an 's' after '7h' and '8min'.]

Data systems support specific (and usually several) shortened forms for units of time. For example, hours might be: h, hh, hr, hours, hrs. They might also be case-sensitive or case-insensitive. You will need to check system specifications.

Avoid using 'bi' to mean either 2 or twice

The prefix 'bi' can be confusing when used with expressions of time:

- 'Bimonthly' can mean either every 2 months or twice a month.
- 'Biannual' means twice a year.
- 'Biennial' means every 2 years.

Instead of using these words, be clear about the frequency and period of time you mean.

Write this

We meet onceevery 2 years.

Not this

We meetbiennially.

How to combine dates and times

There is no fixed rule about the order of dates and times when combining them in body text. You can choose whether the date or the time should come first. The order doesn't matter as long as the information is clear and the sentence flows logically.

But make sure that:

- you follow the style rules for each element
- the time doesn't come between the day and the date
- you use the same style throughout your document consistently.

Write this

- They will appear before the committee at3 pmonWednesday 7 August 2024.
- They will appear before the committee onWednesday 7 August 2024at3 pm.
- [There is a non-breaking space between '3' and 'pm', no comma after 'Wednesday', and a non-breaking space between '7' and 'August'.]

Not this

- They will appear before the committee at Wednesday3 pmon 7 August. [The time appears between day and date.]
- They will appear before the committee on Wednesday,7 August at 3 pm. [There is a comma between day and date.]

Combining dates and times when space is limited

Use the same approach to combine the date and time when you have limited space. This might be in a table,social media post, or in a display or presentation context (display text).

We always recommend using minimal punctuation, but exercise your judgement. A comma between the date and time can make information easier to scan if you haven't used a preposition like 'at' or 'on'.

You can also useshortened forms for the date. Only do this if you are sure users will understand what you mean.

- Lunch and Learn:Financial security in the 1980sFriday 1 March at 12 midday3rd floor seminar room
- Lunch and Learn:Financial security in the 1980s12 midday, Friday 1 March3rd floor seminar room
- Content MeetupTue23Aprat 4 pmAll welcome!

Meet standards for data systems and information interchange

Follow international standards when writing dates and time:

- for international communication
- to transfer data between systems.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) develops and publishes the international standard for dates and time format – theISO 8601series.

Australia and New Zealand have adopted the international standard. The Australia – New Zealand standard isDate and time: representations for information interchange. It is published as the AS/NZS ISO 8601 series in 2 parts:

- Part 1: basic rules
- Part 2: extensions

You can purchase copies of ISO 8601 and AS/NZS ISO 8601 fromStandards Australia.

Standards are voluntary

International and Australian – New Zealand standards on dates and time are voluntary.

The standards ensure that data systems and humans can exchange date and time information internationally and across time zones in a recognised format.

A description of all the dates and times standards is beyond the scope of the Style Manual.

We cover these standards fromPart 1: basic rules:

- calendar date
- ordinal date
- local time of day
- combined calendar date and local time of day.

We don't coverPart 2: extensions.

Basic and extended formats

There are 2 format options for each standard: 'basic format' and 'extended format'.

Basic format does not have separators between units of dates and time. Avoid using basic format in body text. It is easy for computers to read but harder for humans.

Extended format is also for computers, but it includes separators between units to make it easier for humans to read.

We show both formats in our examples.

Calendar date

The standard sets out a descending order of year (4 digits), month (2 digits) and day (2 digits) for a complete representation of calendar date.

The numbers can be unspaced (basic format) or separated by a hyphen (extended format).

20201207 [Calendar date, basic format]

2020-12-07 [Calendar date, extended format]

ISO format is becoming more common, especially in software.

Ordinal date

Ordinal dates are often used when transferring data between data systems. This is because they are easy for simple systems to read.

Ordinal dates are not the same asordinal numbers.

Ordinal dates have 7 digits:

- The first 4 digits represent the year.
- The next 3 digits represent the day.

This is the ISO standard. Some older systems might use 2 digits for the year, not 4.

Days are numbered from 1 to 365 (366 for a leap year). For example, 20 September is the 263rd day of the year (264th in a leap year) and its 3 digits are 263.

The ordinal date can be unspaced (basic format) or separated by a hyphen (extended format).

If you use dates in electronic data transfer, use basic format and don't separate the numbers.

If people, rather than a computer, will read the information, use extended format and insert a hyphen between the year and day.

Write 7 January 2023 as:

- 2023007 [The 4-digit form for the year, basic format]
- 23007 [The 2-digit form for the year, basic format].

Write 31 July 2020 as:

- 2020-213 [The 4-digit form for the (leap) year, extended format]
- 20-213 [The 2-digit form for the (leap) year, extended format].

Local time of day

The standard for a complete representation of local time of day starts with the letter 'T' followed by 2-digit numbers for the hour, minute and second.

The numbers can be unspaced (basic format) or separated by a colon (extended format).

You can omit the 'T' if there's no possibility of confusion.

A 'reduced precision' time of 15 minutes after 7 pm in basic format – '1915' – can easily be confused with the calendar year 1915. In these cases, it is better to write time of day as T1915 (basic format) or 19:15 (extended format).

Note: The format for local time of day doesn't allow for daylight saving. The format showing daylight saving includes the time shift between local time and Coordinated Universal Time. This is beyond the scope of the Style Manual.

- 153020 [Local time of day, basic format – 15h 30m 20s, that is 20 seconds after 3:30 pm]
- 15:30:20 [Local time of day, extended format]

Combined date and local time of day

Combine date and local time of day using the style standards set outabove.

Always use the letter 'T' between the date and time.

The basic format for international communication is unspaced. The extended format uses hyphens for the date and colons for the time of day.

- 20230811T121505 [Basic format – 11 August 2023 at 15 minutes and 5 seconds after midday.]
- 2023-08-11T12:15:05 [Extended format]

- 2023223T121505 [Ordinal date, basic format – same date and time as above]
- 2023-223T12:15:05 [Ordinal date, extended format]

Insert a non-breaking space correctly

You can insert a non-breaking space using the Unicode character U+00A0.

keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Shift+Spacebar in Word.

The digital edition adds new content including rules and examples for:

- date spans
- time spans and lengths
- shortened forms
- Coordinated Universal Time
- combined dates and times.

There is expanded guidance on standards for data systems and information interchange.

The digital edition changes the punctuation used with expressions of dates and time. There are no full stops for shortened forms of months and days of the week. This is consistent with the new general rule forabbreviations.

Unlike the sixth edition, but consistent with the Content Guide, the digital edition recommends using a colon rather than a full stop when expressing times.

The Latin shortened forms, 'am' and 'pm' do not have punctuation. This is consistent with the sixth edition and the Content Guide.

Consistent with the Content Guide, the digital edition recommends specifying noon or midnight for 12 o'clock (instead of using 'am' or 'pm').

The recommendation to express a date span using a phrase, rather than an en dash, aligns with the Content Guide.

Like the sixth edition, the digital edition recommends the use of non-breaking spaces between the day and month in dates. It differs from the sixth edition by recommending the use of a numeral with centuries. The digital edition recommends 2 acceptable styles for references to the world wars, while the sixth edition does not have an explicit rule.

The Content Guide illustrated guidance, but did not have explicit advice, on the use of spacing for dates and time. The use of a space between time and 'am' or 'pm' is consistent with the sixth edition, but a departure from examples given in the Content Guide.

About this page

Evidence

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2024) 'Wars',The ABC style guide, ABC website, accessed 14 March 2024.

Biotext Pty Ltd (2024) 'Date and time systems',Australian manual of style, AMOS website, accessed 4 January 2024.

Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM) (n.d.)SI base unit: second (s), BIPM website, accessed 4 October 2023.

Butterfield J (ed) (2015)Fowler's dictionary of modern English usage, 4th edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Joint Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand Committee IT-019 (2023)Date and time: representations for information exchange. Part 1: Basic rules, AS/NZS ISO 8601.1:2021 (at February 2023), Standards Australia Limited/Standards New Zealand.

National Measurement Regulations 1999 (Cth), Schedule 1.

Oxford University Press (2016) '5.7: Events',New Oxford style manual, Oxford.

Oxford University Press (2016) '11.3: Times of day',New Oxford style manual, Oxford

Peters P (2007) 'World war',The Cambridge Australian English style guide, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2024) 'Times',Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca, accessed 14 March 2024.

University of Chicago (2017) '8.113: Wars and revolutions',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

University of Chicago (2017) '9.37: Numerals versus words for time of day',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

University of Chicago (2017) '10.39: Abbreviations for months',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

University of Chicago (2017) '10.40: Abbreviations for days of the week',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

US Government Publishing Office (2017) '12.9.b. Clock time',Government Publishing Office style manual, US Government Publishing Office website, accessed 30 March 2022.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2024) 'Dates and times',The ABC style guide, ABC website, accessed 7 March 2024.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023)Injury in Australia, AIHW website, accessed 15 August 2023.

Beard R (2013) 'The past and future of Coordinated Universal Time [PDF 3.38 MB]',ITU News, 7:9–12, accessed 10 October 2023.

Bikos K and Buckle A (2024)What Is International Atomic Time (TAI)?, Time and Date AS website, accessed 14 March 2024.

British Broadcasting Corporation (2024) 'World war',News style guide, BBC website, accessed 14 March 2024.

Btb Translation Bureau (2022) 'Numerical expressions',The Canadian style, Btb Translation Bureau website, accessed 24 February 2023.

Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM) (n.d.)Annual reports, BIPM website, accessed 13 September 2023.

Bureau of Meteorology (2021)Daylight Saving Time and weather observations, Bureau of Meteorology website, accessed 13 September 2023.

Bureau of Meteorology (2014)Time conventions, Bureau of Meteorology website, accessed 7 April 2022.

Content Design London (2020) 'Grammar points: numbers',Content Design London readability guidelines, Content Design London website, accessed 24 February 2022.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) (2022) 'Australian energy update 2022',Australian Energy Statistics, DCCEEW, Australian Government, accessed 2 August 2023.

GOV.UK (2024) 'A to Z: dates',Style guide, GOV.UK, accessed 14 March 2024.

GOV.UK (2024) 'A to Z: times',Style guide, GOV.UK, accessed 14 March 2024.

GOV.UK (2024) 'A to Z: World War 1, World War 2',Style guide, GOV.UK, accessed 14 March 2024.

International Organization for Standardization (ISO) (n.d.)ISO 8601: date and time format, ISO website, accessed 9 August 2023.

International Telecommunication Union (2024)ITU radiocommunication sector, ITU website, accessed 14 March 2024.

Lyons G (2019)Which day do you consider the start of the week?, ABC News website, accessed 3 January 2024.

National Institute of Standards and Technology (2023)NIST time frequently asked questions (FAQ), NIST website, accessed 14 September 2023.

National Measurement Institute (n.d.)Time and frequency services, Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources website, accessed 30 March 2022.

New Zealand Government (2020) 'Numbers',Content design guidance, Digital.govt.nz, accessed 30 March 2022.

Oxford University Press (2016) '10.2.6: Upper- and lower-case abbreviations',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Oxford University Press (2016) '11.5: Date forms',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Parliamentary Library (2017) 'Anzac Day traditions and rituals: a quick guide',Research Papers 2016–2017, Parliament of Australia website, accessed 20 July 2022.

Tavella P (31 July 2023) 'Coordinated Universal Time: an overview',ITU News Magazine, ITU website, accessed 10 October 2023.

University of Chicago (2017) 'Dates',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

University of Chicago (2017) 'Time of day',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

This page was updated Tuesday 13 August 2024.

Fractions and decimals

Decimals are useful when people need a precise value. Fractions are useful when an exact value is not important.

Choose between a decimal value or fraction

You can express a less-than-whole number as a decimal or as a fraction.

In text, writedecimal values as numerals. Writefractions as words.

Example

- 0.5 [Decimal value]
- half [Fraction]

Use decimals when you need to be precise.

Example

- They had7.5full-time equivalent staff in the section.
- Australia received412.8mm of rainfall this year.

Use fractions when:
- an exact number is not important
- the user needs only a general idea of the values.

Example

- Abouttwo-thirdsof staff attended last week's meeting.
- The dam wasthree-quartersfull.

Use '0' before a decimal point for values less than one

Decimal values less than one have a '0' before the decimal point.

Correct

0.59

Incorrect

.59

Always use a full stop, not a comma, for the decimal point. This is the style for Australian content.

Correct

2.5687

Incorrect

2,5687

The digital edition updates guidance on fractions and decimals. It recommends using words for fractions in most cases. Decimals are expressed as numerals, consistent with the sixth edition. Decimals are also covered in guidance about currency.

The sixth edition makes a distinction between decimal and non-decimal fractions. The digital edition does not make this distinction. The sixth edition recommended using words when expressing imprecise non-decimal fractions (for example, 'three-quarters'). This is consistent with the digital edition guidance for fractions.

The Content Guide had no advice on the use of fractions and decimals.

About this page

American Psychological Association (2020) 'Numbers',Publication manual of the American Psychological Association,7th edn, American Psychological Association, Washington DC

BBC Academy (21 July 2013) 'Numbers',BBC Academy, accessed 4 June 2020.

Btb Translation Bureau (2020) 'Numerical expressions',The Canadian style, Btb Translation Bureau website, accessed 4 June 2020.

GOV.UK (2016) 'A-to-Z: numbers',Style guide, GOV.UK, accessed 4 June 2020.

Oxford University Press (2016) '11.1.6: Fractions and decimals',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

The Unicode Consortium (2020) 'Latin-1 punctuation',Unicode 13.0 character code chartsUnicode website, accessed 4 June 2020.

The Unicode Consortium (2020) 'Number forms',Unicode 13.0 character code charts, Unicode website, accessed 4 June 2020.

This page was updated Tuesday 23 August 2022.

Mathematical relationships

A mathematical relationship is the connection between sets of numbers or variables. In most content, the connection should be described in words. Only use symbols if there's a user need. Code symbols correctly to ensure they are accessible.

Use words instead of symbols to improve accessibility

In most content, explain mathematical relationships using words instead of symbols.

Many people will understand simple operations written with symbols (1 + 1 = 2). But other mathematical relationships are hard to understand unless they are written in words. Symbols might not be available in every font set and the default settings of screen readers might not read all symbols.

Remember that some users are unfamiliar with mathematical terminology. Make sure that you explain terms and concepts in plain language.

This rule applies to general content. If you're writing specialist mathematical and scientific content, follow your publisher's style.

In all mathematical expressions,write numbers as numerals. This applies even when you use words to explain a relationship between the numbers.

Write this

- The square root of 56 is greater than the square root of 26.
- We can prove that 0 does not equal 1.

Not this

- $\sqrt{56} > \sqrt{26}$.
- We can prove that 0 ≠ 1.
- We can prove that zero does not equal one.

Use symbols when user research supports their use

Only use mathematical symbols in general content if user research shows they are appropriate for your users and for the type of content.

Complicated mathematical relationships are difficult to express in words and are best written using symbols. These are more likely to appear in technical content, but user research might show it is

appropriate to reproduce them in general content.

If so, use the following guidance to write and space mathematical symbols correctly.

Use code for symbols, not punctuation

Always use the correct code for mathematical symbols, including:

- plus +
- minus −
- multiplication ✕
- division ÷
- greater than >
- less than <
- greater than or equal to ≥
- less than or equal to ≤.

The +, −, ✕, and ÷ symbols are called 'operators' because they carry out an operation on 2 elements of a mathematical expression. The >, <, ≥ and ≤ symbols are 'relations' because they show a relationship between 2 elements of a mathematical expression.

Don't use punctuation marks (such as a dash) instead of a symbol.

Not all the symbols on your keyboard are coded correctly. It is better to insert a symbol using its Unicode character or Word's Insert>Symbol command.

You will find other codes, such as HTML entities, in the table, 'Codes for mathematical symbols'.

- 8−0.5 [Using the Unicode character for minus; type '2212' then 'Alt+x']
- 8-0.5 [Using the hyphen on a keyboard]

Note on terminology

The Style Manual uses 'symbol' rather than 'sign' when referring to particular mathematical symbols. For example, when writing about the symbol '+', we use 'plus symbol' or 'plus' rather than 'plus sign'.

In mathematics, the 'sign' of a number generally means whether it is positive or negative.

In non-technical writing however, it is acceptable to use the terms 'plus sign', 'minus sign', 'multiplication sign' and so on. 'Sign' is commonly used in general content to mean a mathematical symbol.

Don't use a symbol or a space for ratios

Ratios don't use a symbol, unlike mathematical operators. Ratios use a punctuation mark instead: thecolon.

Ratios don't have a space around the colon.

5■1 [Ratio with no spaces around the colon]

5■1 [Ratio with non-breaking spaces around the colon]

Accessibility requirements

Mathematical expressions in technical content often contain symbols and superscript. Superscript is a number, letter or symbol placed above a character, for example, the '2' in 'x2'.

Unless they are coded correctly, symbols and superscript may be inaccessible for some people who:

- have low vision
- use screen readers to access content.

Insert symbols and superscript with tools such as:

- Unicode
- LaTeX
- Mathematical Markup Language(MathML).

These tools make mathematical equations and symbols accessible, including for screen readers.

Ensure both symbols and superscript can be enlarged without loss of content or functionality. Don't use images of symbols or superscript.

Note on coding:the Style Manual does not use MathML or LaTeX for this page. Agencies working with a lot of mathematical and scientific content will likely use these tools. Our aim is to help government writers of general content create accessible mathematical content using the codes in the table:Codes for Mathematical Symbols.

Resources:

- W3C math home
- Creating accessible math with MathML
- An introduction to LaTeX
- LaTeX & MathML

WCAG quick reference:1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A

Addition and positive numbers

Use the plus symbol (+) on your keyboard; it is coded correctly. You can also use Word's Insert>Symbol command or Unicode. The Unicode character is U+002B.

To show addition, usenon-breaking spacesaround the plus symbol.

To show a positive value, write the number after the plus symbol without a space. Here, the plus symbol is not working as an operator, it ismodifying the number.

2+10 [Addition with non-breaking spaces around the plus]

+3 [Positive value with no space after the plus]

2+10 [Addition with no non-breaking spaces around the plus]

+3 [Positive value with non-breaking space after the plus]

Subtraction and negative numbers

Use the mathematical symbol for minus (−).

Don't use:

- the minus symbol on the numerical keypad
- an en dash (–)
- a hyphen (-).

In Unicode, the symbol for minus is U+2212.

To show subtraction, usenon-breaking spacesaround the minus symbol.

To show a negative value, write the number after the minus symbol without a space.

Here, the minus sign is not working as an operator, it ismodifying the number.

12−4 [Subtraction with non-breaking spaces around the minus]

−5 [Negative value with no space after the minus]

12−4 [Subtraction with no non-breaking spaces around the minus]

−5 [Negative value with non-breaking space after the minus]

Division

Use the division symbol (÷) or the division slash (■). People sometimes use the forward slash (/) to show division as well.

Usenon-breaking spacesaround the division symbol.

Programming languages and Excel use the forward slash (/) for division.

In most cases, it's best to use the division symbol (÷). The division slash is easily confused with the forward slash which is also used to show alternatives.

In Unicode, the symbol for division is U+00F7 and the division slash is U+2215.

However, division slashes might appear in expressions you have to reproduce in your content – for example, in algebraic fractions.

The division slash is unspaced. This is a style convention in mathematics. But consider adding a narrow no-break space around the division slash to make the expression clearer. You can also use a thin space, but it will break across lines.

The Unicode characters are:

- division symbol – U+00F7
- division slash – U+2215
- narrow no-break space – U+202F
- thin space – U+2009.
- (a + b)÷(x + y) [Division symbol with non-breaking spaces]
- (a + b)■(x + y) [Division slash, unspaced]
- (a + b)■(x + y) [Division slash with narrow no-break spaces]
- (a + b)■(x + y) [Division slash with thin spaces]
- The letters in the examples are called 'variables'. A variable stands for an unknown number. Write variables in italics. Do not italicise other elements.

Multiplication

Use the mathematical symbol for the multiplication (×). Don't use the letter 'x'.

The 'dot operator' (Unicode U+22C5) is sometimes used to show multiplication in mathematical expressions – for example 'x · y '. This is done to avoid confusion in expressions that contain both the multiplication symbol '×' and a letter 'x' used as a variable.

Use the multiplication symbol in general content, not the dot operator. The multiplication symbol is understood more easily.

Usenon-breaking spacesaround the multiplication symbol.

In Unicode, the symbol for multiplication is U+00D7.

Programming languages and Excel use the asterisk (*) for multiplication. The asterisk has other meanings in algebra, so only use it for multiplication if users will understand what you mean.

- (a + b)×(x + y) [Multiplication symbol with non-breaking spaces]
- (a + b)·(x + y) [Multiplication dot]
- (a + b)*(x + y) [Asterisk]

'Greater than' and 'less than'

The 'greater than' (>) and 'less than' (<) symbols are relations used to compare values.

The symbols > and < can be confusing. Like all symbols, it is better to use words in general content. This helps users to understand the mathematical relationship you are writing about.

When research shows that users need the symbols, usenon-breaking spacesbetween the symbol and numbers.

Use your keyboard to insert these symbols; they are coded correctly. You can also use Word's Insert>Symbol command or Unicode.

The Unicode characters are:

- greater than – U+003E
- less than – U+003C.
- 0.7is less than0.9 [General content]
- 0.7<0.9 [Less than symbol with non-breaking spaces]

'Greater than or equal to' and 'less than or equal to'

The 'greater than or equal to' (≥) and 'less than' (≤) relations are commonly used in algebra.

When research shows that users need the symbols (and algebraic expressions), usenon-breaking spaces.

Use Word's Insert>Symbol command or Unicode to insert the symbols.

The Unicode characters are:

- greater than or equal to – U+2265
- less than or equal to – U+2264.

Like all symbols, it is better to use words in general content.

Programming languages use the symbols '>=' and '<=' for these relationships. Don't use them in your content, they are not mathematical notation.

- Our customer satisfaction target is 'greater than or equal to90 out of 100'. [Words in general content]
- x≥4 [Symbol in an algebraic expression]

Don't space >,<, ≥ and ≤ when they refer to a range of numbers

When there is no space between a relation and a number, the expressions shows a range of numbers. For example, '<6.74' refers to an infinitely large set of real numbers less than the number 6.74.

In most content, it is better to use words to avoid confusion: 'less than 6.74'.

- The authors removed an outlier based on a Body Mass Index ofless than13 andgreater than97.
- Only use petty cash for amountsless than$100.
- The authors removed an outlier based on a Body Mass Index of<13 and>97.
- Only use petty cash for amounts<$100.

Use a non-breaking space to keep characters and symbols together

Insert a non-breaking space between numbers, letters and the symbol for an operator or a relation. A non-breaking space means that line breaks won't separate a character from its symbol.

You can insert a non-breaking space using the Unicode character U+00A0.

In HTML, use the entity   to insert a non-breaking space. You can also use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Shift+Spacebar in Word.

Don't use a space if a symbol modifies a value

Symbols that modify a value rather than show an operation or a relationship, do not need a space.

Non-mathematical terms help to explain this.

When the symbol acts as a mathematical adjective, there is no space between the symbol and the character it modifies. An example is a positive or negative amount: +3 and −25.

When the symbol acts as a mathematical conjunction or verb, there are non-breaking spaces around the symbol. Examples are addition 6 + 6 = 12 and expressions that compare values such as 9 < 16. There are other examples in earlier sections on this page.

To avoid confusion in sentences, it is usually better to use words not symbols.

Write this

- The balance isminus$10.

Not this

- The balance is−$10.

Use the correct style for equations

An equation is a statement or question consisting of 2 mathematical expressions linked by an equals symbol (=).

Use equations if user research supports their inclusion.

The Unicode character for the equals symbol is U+003D.

Put anon-breaking spacearound the equals symbol and around all operators except for the division slash – it is unspaced. If you think the equation is clearer with a space around the division slash, use a narrow no-break space (U+202F) or thin space (U+2009).

There is no space between a character and its superscript or subscript.

- 10+1=11 [Equation with non-breaking spaces around plus and equals]
- xa×xb=xa+b[The index law of multiplication – no space between the variable and superscript exponent]
- xn=xn-1+xn-2[Fibonacci sequence written as a rule – no space between the variable and the subscripts showing the variable's sequence]
- 10+1=11 [With no non-breaking spaces around plus and equals]
- xa×xb=xa+b[Variable and superscripts are spaced]
- xn=xn-1+xn-2[Variable and subscripts are spaced]

Set equations as block quotes

An equation can be set 'inline' within a line of text or 'displayed' on a line of its own.

Displayed equations are indented, centred or left-aligned.

For general content, the Style Manual recommends using a displayed equation set as a block quote. Code the block quote with the HTML element.

Don't introduce the equation with a colon, but do use other sentence punctuation. For example, if the equation ends a sentence, follow the equation with a full stop.>

In geometrical optics, Newton's formula for focal length is

wherefis focal length,xis object distance andyis image distance.

Specialist mathematical publications often contain both inline and displayed equations. Follow the publisher's style if you write specialist content.

When writing mathematical expressions in Word documents, consider usingWord's equation editor(type 'Alt+=' or Insert>Equation). It has built-in style for elements such as position, non-breaking spaces, font, sizing, bold, italics and superscript.

The equation editor in the most recent versions of Word also allows you to create and editlinear format equations.

Codes for mathematical symbols

The digital edition revises guidance on the expression of mathematical relationships. It deviates from advice in the sixth edition in several instances.

The digital edition recommends using words rather than symbols as the default choice, but allows symbols for complex mathematical relationships and where there's a user need. The sixth edition advised words were an option for non-exact mathematical relationships.

Unlike the sixth edition, the digital edition advises against using the en dash for a minus symbol and includes advice about division symbols.

The digital edition expands on the sixth edition guidance about non-breaking spaces. It adds guidance about equations and their formatting and mentions Word's equation editor tool.

The digital edition includes coding and accessibility guidance and features a table showing codes for mathematical symbols.

The Content Guide did not cover mathematical relationships.

About this page

Evidence

American Psychological Association (2020) 'Statistical and mathematical copy',Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edn, American Psychological Association, Washington DC.

Barstow C and Rothberg M (2004) '1.11 Mathematics',IMS guidelines for developing accessible learning applications, IMS Global Learning Consortium website, accessed 25 March 2022.

Biotext Pty Ltd & Macquarie University (2021) 'Mathematical operators' [paywall],Australian manual of style, AMOS website, accessed 25 January 2023.

Oxford University Press (2016) '14.6: Mathematics',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

The Unicode Consortium (2023)Unicode 15.0 character code charts, Unicode website, accessed 28 February 2023.

University of Chicago (2017) '12.9: Mathematical characters',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

American Mathematical Society, LaTeX Project (2020)User's guide for the amsmath package (version 2.1)[PDF 443 KB], American Mathematical Society, LaTeX 3 Project, accessed 25 March 2022.

Ausbrooks R, Buswell S, Carlisle D, Chavchanidze G, Dalmas S, Devitt S, Diaz A, Dooley S, Hunter R, Ion P, Kohlhase M, Lazrek A, Libbrecht P, Miller B, Miner R, Rowley C, Sargent M, Smith B, Soiffer N, Sutor R and Watt S (2014) 'Mathematical Markup Language (MathML) version 3.0 2nd edition',W3C recommendation, W3C website, accessed 25 March 2022.

Biotext Pty Ltd & Macquarie University (2021) 'Symbols in mathematics' [paywall],Australian manual of style, AMOS website, accessed 23 March 2022.

Bohman P (20 January 2014) 'Why don't screen readers always read what's on the screen? Part 1: punctuation and typographic symbols',deque blog, accessed 25 March 2022.

Chris K (2022)HTML symbols: HTML icon and entity code list, freeCodeCamp website, accessed 3 August 2022.

GOV.UK (2016) 'A-to-Z: numbers',Style guide, GOV.UK, accessed 25 March 2022.

Hendrie G et al (2017) 'The CSIRO Healthy Diet Score: an online survey to estimate compliance with the Australian Dietary Guidelines',Nutrients, 9(1):47, doi:10.3390/nu9010047.

Microsoft Corporation (2023)Keyboard shortcuts in Word: insert international characters, Microsoft website, accessed 13 February 2023.

The Daisy Consortium (2023) 'MathML',Daisy accessible publishing knowledge base, The Daisy Consortium website, accessed 28 February 2023.

The LaTeX Project (n.d.)An introduction to LaTeX, The LaTeX Project website, accessed 25 January 2023.

The Unicode Consortium (2023) 'Fonts and keyboards',Frequently asked questions, Unicode website, accessed 28 January 2023.

Tuke H (2021) 'How special characters and symbols affect screen reader accessibility',Articles:accessibility, Scope website, accessed 25 March 2022.

University of Chicago (2017) '11.2: Unicode',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

W3Schools (2023) 'UTF-8 mathematical operators',HTML character sets, W3Schools website, accessed 20 February 2023.

WHATWG (Web Hypertext Application Technology Working Group) (2023) '4.8.15: MathML',HTML: living standard, WHATWG website, accessed 28 February 2023.

White JG (20 April 2020) 'The accessibility of mathematical notation on the web and beyond',Journal of Science Education For Students with Disabilities, 23(1):1–14, doi: 10.14448/jsesd.12.0013, accessed 20 February 2023.

This page was updated Tuesday 23 July 2024.

Measurement and units

Standard units of measurement support readability and accuracy. Express precise values for users by combining numerals with the correct unit symbol.

Use the standard units of measurement

Australia uses the metric system for most quantities:
- The modern form of the metric system is theInternational System of Units(SI).
- Australia also uses some non-SI legal units of measurement, which are listed inSchedules 1 and 2 of the National Measurement Regulations.

The National Measurement Institute overseesAustralian units of measurement.The governing legislation is theNational Measurement Act 1960.

Don't use the non-SI legal units of measurement for international content. The exception is when you have checked thatusers will understand and accept them.

Rules for units of measurement:
- Punctuation: don't place a full stop after a unit of measurement.
- Capitalisation: use capitals only if the unit represents a proper name.
- Plural and possessive: units don't have a plural or possessive form.

- Start of a sentence: write out the unit in full.
- Spacing: use a non-breaking space between the number and the unit.

Example

- 'm' for metre
- 'kg' for kilogram
- 'W' for watt

Accessibility requirements

Measurements and units can include:

- symbols (for example, 'μ' for 'micro')
- superscript (a number, letter or symbol placed above a line – for example, the '2' in 'km2').

Unless they are coded correctly, symbols and superscript may be inaccessible for some people who:

- have low vision
- use screen readers to access content.

Insert symbols and superscript with tools such as:

- Unicode
- LaTeX
- Mathematical Markup Language(MathML).

These tools make mathematical equations and symbols accessible, including for screen readers.

Ensure both symbols and superscript can be enlarged without loss of content or functionality. Don't use images of symbols or superscript.

Resources:

- W3C math home
- Creating accessible math with MathML
- An introduction to LaTeX
- LaTeX & MathML

WCAG quick reference:1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A

Write numerals with units of measurement

Use numerals, not words, for numbers when you are referring to a unit of measurement:

- Always use numerals next to a unit of measurement.
- Include a non-breaking space between the number and the unit.

Like this

- 5 t
- 5 tonnes

Not this

- five t
- five tonnes

Use symbols for common units of measurement

You don't need to spell out units of measurement, even for the first use, if they're well known and users will know what they mean.

Example

- 'mm' for millimetres
- 'cm' for centimetres
- 'km' for kilometres
- 'km/h' for kilometres per hour

Spell out units of measurement the first time you use them ifusers won't immediately understand them. After that, use the symbols.

Example

The noise from the building site was 120 decibels (dB). Workers in the nearby office preferred a limit of only 50 dB.

Don't combine symbols and words for units.

Like this

Queensland is 1,853 millionkm2in area.

Not this

Queensland is 1,853 million square km in area.

SI prefixes for large and small quantities

Internationally accepted prefixes and their symbols make it easier for users to read, understand and compare numbers. Use them in government content.

Table 1 details common prefixes and their symbols.

A complete list of prefixes and symbols is available atThe International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM).

Note: the International Bureau of Weights and Measures uses 'deca' but this is spelled 'deka' inSchedule 3 of the National Measurement Regulations.

- 63 megalitres is 63,000,000 litres
- 0.001 metre is 1 millimetre

Don't use non-standard units.

- There was 5 μg of active ingredient in each capsule.
- He measured 50 mL of water.
- There was 5 mcg of active ingredient in each capsule.
- He measured 5 dL of water.

Data storage and transfer

The prefixes for data storage and transfer work differently to those used for SI units. 'Byte' (B) is the unit of storage and data transfer speed. For this purpose, use:

- 'kilobyte' for 1,000 B
- 'megabyte' for 1,024 kB
- 'gigabyte' for 1,024 MB
- 'terabyte' for 1,024 GB.

Units of time

Days, years, hours and minutes measure time. These are not SI units. Spell them out in full – unless they're in a table, list or chart and are easy to understand.

- I have been working in the public service for 12 years.
- He started in the new department 20 days ago.
- They sent the report in the last 15 minutes.

Use symbols for units that are derived from time measurements, such as speed.

The speed limit for urban areas in NSW is 50 km/h.

Put a non-breaking space between numbers and units

People will read the number and its unit as a measurement only if the 2 components sit together. To do this, use a non-breaking space between numbers and their units of measurement.

Without a non-breaking space, a unit could reflow to the next line. This would separate it from the quantity, making it difficult for users to understand the information being presented.

Although this is important for all content, it's more likely to happen on smaller screens, such as those on mobile devices.

Like this

The post should be at least 1.5 m tall.

[The sentence has a inserted between '1.5' and 'm'.]

Not this

The post should be at least 1.5m tall.

[A bad line break between the measurement and its unit]

By convention, some industries don't have a space between the quantity and the unit. Many 750 mL bottles of wine, for example, have the volume 750mL printed on the label.

Check the preferred style if you are writing for a specialist application.

Don't add 's' for plural forms

Symbols for units of measurement represent both the singular and the plural forms. Don't use an 's' to show plural with the symbols for units.

Like this

56 km

Not this

56 kms

Compare measurements using the same units

Make it easy for users to compare quantities. Use the same:

- unit and prefix
- number of decimal places.

Like this

- The Green Wattle Creek fire burnt almost 3,000km2, of which more than 1,000km2was national park.
- The smaller jug held 1.5 L and the bigger jug held 2.0 L.
- The piece of wood was 140 mm by 1,320 mm by 20 mm.

Not this

- The Green Wattle Creek fire burnt almost 300,000 ha, of which more than 1,000km2was national park.
- The smaller jug held 1,500 mL and the bigger jug held 2 L.
- The piece of wood was 14 cm by 1.32 m by 20 mm.

Only use non-SI units if the user understands them

There are other units that are also Australian legal units of measurement but are not SI units. They're listed inSchedules 1 and 2 of the National Measurement Regulations.

These non-SI units are not all legally accepted in every country. Use them only if users will understand them. Some units, such as the nautical mile, are for use only in Australia. Table 2 details common examples of other legal Australian units.

Note: 'litre' can be represented as 'L' or 'l', depending on the type of content and who will be using it. Most government content should use 'L' as it's clearer to users ('l' can be confused with 'I' and '1').

Avoid imperial units

Don't use imperial units of measurement in Australia unless you have a specific reason, such as:

- in quotations from historical documents
- when writing for readers in countries (particularly the United States) where imperial measures, or elements of them, still apply.

Example

- gallons for volume of fuel
- barrels for volume of oil
- inches for the size of a screen
- feet for the altitude of a plane

It's good practice to also provide the equivalent quantity in SI units when that helps users.

Example

In the 1970s, the speed limit for highways in many states of Australia was set at 60 miles per hour (97 km/h).

The digital edition consolidates information from the sixth edition about measurement and units. It links to external sources for more detailed information.

The digital edition follows advice from the sixth edition about including a space between the number and unit of measurement.

This is contrary to the recommendation in the Content Guide, which recommended omitting the space between number and measure.

The Content Guide had no information about imperial units.

About this page

Evidence

BIPM (International Bureau of Weights and Measures) (n.d.)SI brochure: the international system of units (SI), BIPM website, accessed 4 June 2020.

Oxford University Press (2016) '14.1.4: units',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

University of Chicago (2017) '9.16: numbers with abbreviations and symbols',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

American Psychological Association (2020)Publication manual of the American Psychological Association,7th edn, American Psychological Association, Washington DC.

BIPM (n.d.)The international system of units (SI), International Bureau of Weights and Measures website, accessed 4 June 2020.

Harder DW and Devitt S (2003) 'Units in MathML',W3C working group note, W3C website, accessed 3 June 2020.

The LaTeX Project (n.d.)An introduction to LaTeX, The LaTeX Project website, accessed 4 June 2020.

The LaTeX Project (n.d.)LaTeX: a document preparation system, The LaTeX Project website, accessed 3 August 2022.

The Unicode Consortium (2022)Unicode 15.0 character code charts, Unicode website, accessed 3 November 2022.

This page was updated Wednesday 5 July 2023.

Ordinal numbers

Ordinal numbers, such as 'first', 'second' and 'third', show the order, position or importance of things in a list or sequence.

Use words for ordinals up to 'ninth' and numerals for '10th' and above

Spell out ordinal numbers from 'first' to 'ninth'. Use numerals for ordinals from '10th' onwards.

Ordinals written as numerals always have a suffix:

- '-st' ('first', '21st')
- '-nd' ('second', '32nd')
- '-rd' ('third', '103rd')
- '-th' ('fourth', '15th', '55th' and so on).

Don't write suffixes in superscript. Superscript may not be accessible to people who use screen readers.

Example

- Thefirstitem on the agenda was to confirm the agenda. Theseconditem was to review the minutes from the last meeting.
- In 2013, Canberra celebrated its100thanniversary.
- We pause to remember at the11thhour of the11thday of the11thmonth.
- This is the department's22ndgraduate intake.
- We expect to receive our1,000thvisitor today.
- They are the273rdimmigrant to join this group.

Exception to ordinals rule for centuries

Use numerals, not words, when writing ordinals withcenturies. This is an exception to the general rule to spell out 'first' to 'ninth' for ordinals.

Write 'century' and 'centuries' in lower case.

- In the1st century CE, Tiberius succeeded Augustus Caesar as Roman emperor.
- Vikings established a Norse kingdom around Dublin in the9th century.
- The gallery bought a15th-centurypainting.

Very large ordinals

People find very large rounded numbers easier to read inwords rather than numerals. This also applies to ordinal numbers. Spell out the number and include the relevant suffix.

- themillionthvisitor
- the 1,000,000thvisitor

Ordinals in reference lists

In reference lists, use numerals with a suffix for editions of a publication. This is an exception to the rule to use words for ordinal numbers up to ninth.

Brone AZ (2020)Towards a high-performing public service,2ndedn, Positive Publications, Canberra.

Ordinals in organisation names

If an organisation's name includes a numeral, write the name as the organisation does. This is an exception to the rule to use words for ordinal numbers up to ninth.

The1stAustralian Infantry Battalion arrived in Egypt on 2 December 1914.

MyHealth1stis a platform that connects patients with local health practitioners.

They searched forThirteenthHoldings Pty Ltd on the ASIC registers.

Create a list rather than use ordinals

Don't use ordinals to order points in general content. Reword the content so it doesn't need ordinals or use a numbered list instead. A list can make it easier for people to follow the sequence.

Always use numbered lists rather than ordinals when you're expressing a series of items or steps – for example, in recommendations or instructions.

Like this

To apply for the grant:
- complete the eligibility checklist
- submit a business case
- provide supporting documents.

Not this

If you want to apply for the grant,firstcomplete the eligibility checklist.Second, you must submit a business case; andthird, you must provide supporting documents.

Accessibility requirements

Code lists so they are understood correctly. Mark up ordered lists in HTML with the tag.

WCAG quick reference:1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A

Ordinals in journals and other publications

Ordinals, such as 'firstly' and 'secondly', are sometimes used in content written for government publications such as journals and reports. In this type of content, they order thoughts without interrupting the flow of the text.

'Firstly' and 'secondly' work as a pair. Don't use one without the other.

The committee responded in 2 ways.Firstly, they asked for an immediate adjournment of proceedings.Secondly, they sought clarification about their powers to subpoena witnesses.

The committee responded in 2 ways. They asked for an immediate adjournment of proceedings.Secondly, they sought clarification about their powers to subpoena witnesses.

Don't use 'thirdly'. Instead, omit ordinals and write the points as a run-on list in a sentence.

The committee took evidence from peak bodies, unions and the department.

The committee took evidence from,firstly, peak bodies;secondly, unions; andthirdly, the department.

Don't use ordinals in dates

Use numerals without a suffix for dates.

Write this

12 February 2020

Not this

12thFebruary 2020

Don't confuse ordinals with regnal numbers

Regnal numbers are upper case roman numerals that are used for the titles of monarchs and popes and in family names.

Even though you might pronounce regnals as ordinal numbers, don't write them like that.

Correct

Elizabeth I

Incorrect

Elizabeth Ist

Use a non-breaking space for names with regnal numbers

Put a non-breaking space between the name and the regnal number. A non-breaking space means that line breaks won't split up both elements of the name. The name and number will stay together on one line.

You can insert a non-breaking space using the Unicode character U+00A0.

In HTML, use the entity   to insert a non-breaking space. You can also use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Shift+Spacebar in Word.

Use a narrow no-break space between the name and the regnal number.

The narrow no-break space ensures that the:

- name and number stay together on one line
- spacing between name and number doesn't change when text is justified.

You can insert a narrow no-break space using the Unicode character U+202F.

The digital edition revises guidance on ordinal numbers.

There is now an exception to the rule 'Use words for ordinals up to 'ninth' and numerals for '10th' and above' for centuries. Usage evidence has informed this change. It shows the overwhelming use of numerals, not words, when writing ordinals under 10 with centuries.

It deviates from advice in the sixth edition by recommending that words be used for numbers up to the ninth. The sixth edition recommended words up to 100 and for large rounded numbers.

The digital edition excludes information in the sixth edition about using ordinal dates in data systems.

The Content Guide made only a brief mention of ordinal numbers.

About this page

Evidence

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2022) 'Numbers, measurements',The ABC style guide, ABC website, accessed 31 January 2022.

GOV.UK (2022) 'A to Z: numbers',Style guide, GOV.UK, accessed 31 January 2022.

New Zealand Government (2020) 'Numbers',Content design guidance, Digital.govt.nz, accessed 31 January 2022.

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) '4.6: numbers',Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca, accessed 31 January 2022.

U.S. Government Publishing Office (2016) '12.10: ordinal numbers',U.S. Government Publishing Office style manual, U.S. Government Publishing Office, accessed 31 January 2022.

American Psychological Association (2020)Publication manual of the American Psychological Association,7th edn, American Psychological Association, Washington DC.

Oxford University Press (2016)New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

The Unicode Consortium (2022) 'ASCII digits',Unicode 14.0 character code charts, Unicode website, accessed 31 January 2022.

The Unicode Consortium (2022) 'Number forms',Unicode 14.0 character code charts, Unicode website, accessed 31 January 2022.

University of Chicago (2017)Chicago manual of style,17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

This page was updated Friday 6 September 2024.

Percentages

Percentages help people compare things and understand proportions. Use numerals with the percentage sign. Be concise when you write about percentages.

Use numerals with the percentage sign

Use the percentage sign next to a numeral in text. Don't use a space between the number and the percentage sign.

Correct

15%

Incorrect

15%

Use decimals rather than fractions with the percentage sign.

Correct

The price of Tapis oil is up by0.25%.

Incorrect

The price of Tapis oil is up by1/4%.

As for any number, avoid starting a sentence with the percentage. Reword the sentence if possible, or write the percentage out in words. You can use everyday words if a precise amount is not needed.

Write this

Fifty-five per centof the council's revenue came from rates.

Rates accounted for55%of revenue.

Not this

55%of the council's revenue came from rates.

Use the correct form of the noun (percentage)

'Per cent' and 'percentage' aren't the same. The term 'per cent' is an adverb. The noun form is 'percentage'.

Correct

Statistics show thepercentageof Australians with university degrees is increasing.

Incorrect

Statistics show theper centof Australians with university degrees is increasing.

'Per cent' is written as 2 words in Australia. 'Percent' is not Australian spelling.

Don't use percentages to describe change

Avoid using percentages to describe changes.

Tell people what the actual increase or decrease is.

Like this

The application fee is now $70. This is a $20 increase from 1 January 2020.

Not this

The application fee increased by 40% from $50 to $70 on 1 January 2020.

Be concise when writing about percentages

When you use many percentages in body text, put the figures in brackets (parentheses) or use a list to simplify the text.

Like this

In 2019, population size increased in New South Wales (32%), Queensland (20%) and Victoria (19%).

Not this

In 2019, the largest sources of population growth were New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. New South Wales accounted for 32% of the population growth, Queensland 20%, and Victoria 19%.

The digital edition follows advice from the Content Guide and sixth edition by recommending using a number with the symbol for percentages.

The digital edition does not detail the option of using the words 'per cent' with numbers, as the sixth edition did.

About this page

BBC Academy (21 July 2013) 'Numbers', BBC Academy, accessed 3 June 2020.

GOV.UK (2016) 'A-en-Z: numbers', Style guide, GOV.UK, accessed 3 June 2020.

ONS (Office for National Statistics, UK) (n.d.) 'Percentages', Style.ONS: a guide to writing about statistics, ONS website, accessed 3 June 2020.

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) '4.3: symbols',Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca, accessed 3 June 2020.

The Unicode Consortium (2022) 'ASCII punctuation',Unicode 15.0 character code charts, Unicode website, accessed 3 November 2022.

This page was updated Wednesday 24 July 2024.

Telephone numbers

Write telephone numbers so people can read and use them easily. There are rules for grouping the numbers, using spacing and creating links.

Use 'chunks' of digits to help people read telephone numbers

Break telephone numbers into shorter blocks of digits or 'chunks'.

Telephone numbers are easier to read when their digits are chunked, rather than written in one large group.

Australian telephone numbers in general use have no more than 10 digits:

- Landlines – 2 digits for the area code followed by 8 digits for the rest of the telephone number.
- Mobiles – 10 digits (there is no area code).

There are also categories of telephone numbers that don't have 10 digits – for example, '13' numbers have 6 digits.

Example

- 02 5550 4321 [A landline number in NSW or the ACT]
- 0491 570 159 [An Australian mobile number]
- 1300 975 707 [An Australia-wide local-rate number]
- 13 00 00 [An alternative Australia-wide local-rate number]
- 1800 160 401 [An Australia-wide freephone number]
- +61 2 5550 4321 [An Australian landline number in international format]
- +61 491 570 159 [An Australian mobile number in international format]

Put a non-breaking space between the chunks of digits

Use a non-breaking space between chunks of digits in a telephone number. A non-breaking space means that line breaks won't split up the number. The telephone number will stay together on one line.

You can insert a non-breaking space using the Unicode character U+00A0.

In HTML, use the entity   to insert a non-breaking space. You can also use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Shift+Spacebar in Word.

Print considerations

Use a narrow no-break space between chunks of digits in a telephone number.

The narrow no-break space ensures that the:

- telephone number stays together on one line
- spacing between digits doesn't change when text is justified.

You can insert a narrow no-break space using the Unicode character U+202F.

Write telephone numbers in the national or international format

Write telephone numbers in a format appropriate for the location of the users.

National format for telephone numbers

Use Australia's national format when writing Australian telephone numbers for content that will be used within Australia.

For landline telephone numbers, write the 2-digit area code followed by a non-breaking space. Then write the rest of the number in 2 chunks of 4 digits.

Write mobile telephone numbers in 1 chunk of 4 digits and then 2 chunks of 3 digits.

- 02 5550 4321 [Telephone]
- 0491 570 159 [Mobile]

International format for telephone numbers

Use international format for content that will be used outside Australia.

The international format uses a plus sign '+' to represent the international prefix, followed by a country code ('61' for Australia).

For landline numbers:

- start with a plus sign '+' and add the country code ('61' for Australia)
- add the area code without the '0'
- write the telephone number in 2 chunks of 4 digits.
- +61 3 7010 4321 [Landline]

For mobile numbers:

- start with a plus sign '+' and add the country code ('61' for Australia)

- omit the first '0'
- write the telephone number in 3 chunks of 3 digits.

+61 491 578 888 [Mobile]

Always write foreign telephone numbers in the international format.

- +1 212 555 0188 [US landline]
- +44 20 7946 0990 [UK landline]

Make telephone numbers accessible through 'click-to-call' functionality

'Click-to-call' allows users to call a telephone number by selecting (clicking) the number shown in content. When the user selects the number, the user's mobile phone, other mobile device or personal computer (if it has a supporting application) calls the number.

Click-to-call makes telephone numbers more accessible because users don't need to copy the number manually. Click-to-call also works with screen readers.

Devices sometimes recognise when a number in content is a telephone number and automatically treat the number as a click-to-call link. This is not always the case, so use HTML code to support this functionality. Seek specialist advice if you're unsure of how to do this.

Using HTML for click-to-call

Use 'tel:[telephone number]' as the URL. Remove spaces between the numbers.

Remember that all webpages can be accessed internationally. Include the international dialling prefix if appropriate.

- 02 5550 5722[HTML: 02 5550 5722]
- 1300 975 7007[HTML: 1300 975 7007]
- 13 83 87[HTML: 13 83 87]
- 1800 160 401[HTML: 1800 160 401]
- +61 2 7010 0000[HTML: +61 2 7010 0000]
- +61 491 570 156[HTML: +61 491 570 156]

Don't use 'phone words'

Always display the telephone number as digits. Don't use 'phone words'. Use the relevant 13 or 1300 number instead.

Some organisations use phone words to advertise their telephone number as a digit-word combination. Don't do this, because some people find it hard to convert letters to numbers.

Write this

13 83 87

Not this

13 VETS

The digital edition expands on information in the sixth edition. It includes examples and has more advice about spaces in telephone numbers.

The sixth edition guidance mentions non-breaking and thin spaces and includes spacing allowances for handwritten telephone numbers on forms.

The Content Guide had information about the format of telephone numbers and how to include a clickable link on webpages.

About this page

ACMA (Australian Communications and Media Authority) (2022)Buy a custom number, ACMA website, accessed 14 January 2022.

ACMA (2022)Choose your phone number, ACMA website, accessed 4 June 2020.

International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2001)'Recommendation ITU-T E123 (02/2001): notation for national and international telephone numbers, e-mail addresses and web addresses',Standardization (ITU-T) recommendations, ITU website, accessed 2 February 2022.

LePage P (2019)Click to call, Web Fundamentals website, accessed 10 February 2022.

Moran K (2016)How chunking helps content processing, Nielsen Norman Group website, accessed 21 January 2022.

North American Numbering Plan Administrator (NANPA) (n.d.)'555 line numbers',Numbering resources, NANPA website, accessed 21 January 2022.

Ofcom (The Office of Communications) (2004)Telephone numbers for use in TV and radio drama programmes, Ofcom website, accessed 21 January 2022.

The Unicode Consortium (2022) 'General punctuation',Unicode 15.0 character code charts, Unicode website, accessed 3 November 2022.

The Unicode Consortium (2022) 'Latin-1 punctuation',Unicode 15.0 character code charts, Unicode website, accessed 3 November 2022.

University of Chicago (2017)Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

WebAIM (n.d.)Links and hypertext, WebAIM website, accessed 9 February 2022.

This page was updated Friday 6 September 2024.

Australian place names

Spell official place names correctly. Follow style rules so people recognise names for other public places. Use standard shortened forms in addresses.

Check official place names and style them correctly

Using official Australian place names helps us all communicate more clearly. You can check the spelling of a place name using theAustralian Place Names dataset.

If still unsure, contact the relevant state or territory naming authority. You can click on the government logos in the search results from the dataset. They will take you to the jurisdictional webpage.

Official place names are generally given under Acts of parliament and associated rules. Each state and territory has its own legal and administrative processes.

National principles for naming are intended to provide consistency across the country. This helps ensure that wherever we go in Australia, we find names are chosen and spelt in a common way.

Place names reflect culture at various points throughout history. Because of this reality, there may appear to be exceptions to the general rules given in this guide.

There are many First Nations naming systems across Australia. These were in place before the official national system and continue today.

Many names from First Nations languages have become official names, used by all Australians. There are also many that have not. Consult directly with relevant communities about conventions fornaming and spelling in specific First Nations languages.

Spelling and capitalisation

Australian place names are proper nouns, written using standard Australian English. Place names:

- use a standard 26 character alphabet
- don't use diacritical marks
- are not possessive
- don't generally have punctuation.

Some Australian place names stem from other languages. Spelling and capitalisation can change when they're adopted as an official Australian place name. For example, the official spelling:

- loses any accent marks or diacritics
- adds capitalisation.

D'Entrecasteaux

d'Entrecasteaux

Punctuation

Hyphens and apostrophes can be part of an official name. They appear if they were part of the name of the person commemorated by the place name.

Baden-Powell Waterhole

Baden Powellwaterhole or Baden-Powell'sWaterhole

Australian places have official names derived from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Some places have official dual names from those languages and English.

When writing official dual names, use a spaced forward slash to separate the 2 parts of the name. The order should be as written in the official name, which you can check in theAustralian Place Names dataset.

- Kata Tjuta / Mount Olga
- Karlu Karlu / Devils Marbles

Some official Tasmanian place names do not follow the convention of using initial capitals for proper nouns.

- kunanyi / Mount Wellington

Use capitals for names of places, roads and streets

Words that don't usually need an initial capital have one when they are part of a place name.

Example

- the Adelaide Hills
- the North Shore
- the Western District

The names of roads, streets and other thoroughfares also take an initial capital.

Example

- George Street
- Wickham Terrace
- Monaro Highway

This is a similar rule to style for proper names of mountains, valleys, bays, islands and othertopographic features.

Use shortened forms for addresses

Addresses usually have abbreviations and contractions. Do not add punctuation marks to these.

Example

- 10 Bendemeer Blvd
- PO Box 1RMB 99

Common abbreviations include:

- Av (Avenue)
- Cct (Circuit)
- Cr (Crescent)
- Ct (Court)
- Dr (Drive)
- Esp (Esplanade)
- Gr (Grove)
- Hts (Heights)
- Hwy (Highway)
- Pde (Parade)
- Pl (Place)
- Rd (Road)
- St (Street)
- Tce (Terrace).

Shortened state and territory names for addresses

When addressing a letter, write the last line in capitals without punctuation or underlining, with the postcode last. The last line should contain the place name or post office of delivery, state or territory abbreviation and postcode.

11 Banks AvWAGGA WAGGA NSW 2650

If you are sending mail overseas, spell out all names in the address in full to avoid confusion.

'SA' could refer to South Australia or to South Africa.

Write the names of buildings, structures and public places with an initial capital

Names of buildings, structures and public places have initial capitals. Write generic and plural terms in lower case.

Example

- St Paul's Cathedralis close to Melbourne's Federation Square. Thecathedral...
- The Iron Cove and Gladesvillebridgesare both in Sydney.

Use initial capitals for the names of private properties.

Example

- Thargomindah Station
- Myocum Downs
- Tocal Homestead

Shorten names for states and territories in 4 situations

Spell out the names of Australian states and territories in formal content.

You can use shortened forms when:

- the name is used as an adjective
- space is limited
- the full name would result in repetition
- you are writing an address.

Example

TheWAGovernment has reopened the Eyre Highway. ['WA' is used as an adjective.]

Don't use a full stop after the shortened forms. This rule applies to the initialisms (NSW, WA, ACT and NT), abbreviations (Vic and Tas) and the contraction (Qld).

States and territories are generally listed in an order when more than one is mentioned. For example:

- in alphabetical order (ACT to WA)
- by population size (NSW to NT).

Example

- NSW
- Vic
- Qld
- WA
- SA
- Tas

- ACT
- NT

Other orders might be more suitable for some content. For example, content might include a list of states and territories ordered by total annual rainfall or number of enrolled voters. Use the order that fits with context and helps people understand your content.

The digital edition includes new information about dual place names. It links to the Australian place names dataset as the authoritative source for correct spelling and capitalisation for official place names.

The digital edition updates punctuation style for shortened forms.
- Consistent with the sixth edition, it does not use full stops withacronyms or initialisms, orcontractions.
- It removes the requirement to use full stops with abbreviations of state names (as with othernon-Latin abbreviations).

This is a change from the sixth edition, which recommended using a full stop with 'Vic' and 'Tas'. It is consistent with the digital edition's guidance for shortened forms. Australian corpus data informed this change.

The Content Guide provided general advice but no specific details on Australian place names.

About this page

ACT Government (n.d.)Place names, Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate – Planning website, accessed 10 November 2022.

Australia Post (n.d.)Suburb index, Australia Post website, accessed 29 May 2020.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (n.d.) 'Heritage places and lists',Heritage, DCCEEW website, accessed 22 December 2022.

Northern Territory Government (2017)Place Names Committee, Place Names Committee website, accessed 10 November 2022.

NSW Government (2016)Geographical Names Board, Geographical Names Board website, accessed 10 November 2022.

Permanent Committee on Place Names (2016)Principles for the consistent use of place names:includes principles for the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names and dual naming depiction principles, Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping, accessed 29 May 2020.

Permanent Committee on Place Names and Geoscience Australia (2012)Gazetteer of Australia, Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping, accessed 29 May 2020.

Queensland Government (2022)Place names, Queensland Government website, accessed 10 November 2022.

South Australian Government (2022)Naming places, SA.GOV.AU, accessed 10 November 2022.

Standards Australia,Rural and urban addressing, AS/NZS 4819:2011.

Tasmanian Government (n.d.)Place naming (nomenclature) in Tasmania, Department of Natural Resources and Environment website, accessed 10 November 2022.

Victorian Government (n.d.)Place naming, Land Use Victoria website, accessed 10 November 2022.

Western Australian Government (n.d.)WA geographic names, Landgate website, accessed 10 November 2022.

This page was updated Thursday 22 December 2022.

Commercial terms

Brands and model names are protected by law. Unless using common names, write trade mark names and use symbols so people can understand legal status.

Use initial capitals for commercial terms

Use initial capitals for trade marks, brands and business names.

Example

- Collins Class submarine
- Harley-Davidson
- Instagram

An exception to using initial capitals is where the business itself uses an unusual mix of spacing, capitals and lower case letters. In this case, write it the way the business writes it.

Example

- iPhone
- nbn
- UNIX
- X
- YouTube

Don't use an initial capital at the start of sentences when the trade mark or brand starts with a lower case letter.

Example

eBayis a popular online auction site.

Use initial capitals for the proprietary names of drugs and other chemicals, but lower case for generic names.

Example

Celestone V [Proprietary name] – hydrocortisone [Generic name]

Panadol [Proprietary name] – paracetamol [Generic name]

Spelling of 'trade mark'

'Trade mark' is spelled as 2 words in theTrade Marks Act 1995. Use this spelling when writing for government, even though most dictionaries prefer 'trademark'.

Thetrade markVegemite was first registered in 1923.

You should also spell 'trade mark' as 2 words when you use it as a verb, although it's better to say 'register a trade mark'.

Trade markyour brand if you don't want other organisations or businesses to use it.

Register your brand as a trade markif you don't want others to use it.

Use a common word for a product if you can

Avoid using trade marks and brand names if possible. Instead use a generic word.

Write this
- tissue
- cooler

Not this
- Kleenex
- Esky

The ® and ™ symbols

Avoid using the registered (®) symbol or the trade mark (™) symbol for trade marks if possible.

The registered symbol shows a trade mark is registered. A business doesn't have to use the symbol for protecting its intellectual property. It's illegal to use it if the trade mark is not registered.

The trade mark symbol can be used with registered and unregistered trade marks. Businesses can use it when they intend to register the term or when registration is pending. The symbol doesn't protect the intellectual property of the trade mark.

Find more guidance in theAustralian Government intellectual property manual.

Take care using product names

The way a trade mark or brand is written is part of the intellectual property of its owner. Trade mark owners sometimes take legal action to prevent names being used in a generic sense.

If a term is still registered as a trade mark, you should use it only for that brand and use a capital letter. This may vary between different countries.

It's more difficult when brands are becoming generic terms but are also still used as trade marks. 'Thermos' and 'Hoover' are examples.

Dictionaries show the way such words are used. Don't rely on dictionaries to work out if such words have legal status as trade marks.

Find out if a trade mark has been registered in Australia by usingAustralian trade mark search. If you're not sure, seek legal advice.

A product name can change meaning when used in the generic sense

A few words have different meanings when used as a trade mark or used generically.

- Band-Aid [A sticking plaster; initial capitals only for that brand]
- bandaid [A word meaning a temporary or makeshift solution to a problem]
- Google [A popular search engine; initial capital only for that brand]
- google [A verb meaning to search on the internet using a search engine]

Other brand names have become so widely used that they are no longer associated with a specific product. They have become common household names used in a generic sense. They start with lower case except at the start of a sentence.

Example

- aspirin
- elevator
- dry ice
- linoleum
- trampoline

The digital edition covers much the same information as the sixth edition. It provides more direct advice about commercial terms; for example, using a common word instead of a commercial name where possible. It also includes examples of proprietary names of drugs and chemicals.

The Content Guide did not have information about commercial terms.

About this page

Department of Communication and the Arts (2019)Australian Government intellectual property manual, Department of Communication and the Arts, Australian Government, accessed 10 June 2020.

IP Australia (n.d.)Trade marks, IP Australia website, accessed 10 June 2020.

Oxford University Press (2016) '5.15: Trade names',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

TGA (Therapeutic Goods Administration) (2019) 'Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods',Regulation basics, TGA website, accessed 10 June 2020.

TGA (2019) 'Ingredient basics', Regulation basics, TGA website, accessed 10 June 2020.

This page was updated Thursday 21 September 2023.

Government terms

Use the correct term and follow the rules for capitalising government terms. People find it easier to understand content that has a consistent style.

Use initial capitals for formal names and titles

Use initial capitals only for the formal names and titles of government entities and office holders. Use lower case for generic references.

These are rules for general content. There might be exceptions if you are writing specialist legal content using terms defined in legislation.

This page orders guidance for common government terms alphabetically.

Australian Government

Refer to the national government of Australia as the 'Australian Government'. Use an initial capital for both words only when they occur together.

TheAustralian Governmentcoordinates emergency management with the states.

Australian GovernmentDepartment of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources

The advertised grants are funded by theAustralian Government. Thegovernmentrecently extended the closing date for applications.

Bench

In general content, use lower case for the 'bench' and 'full bench'.

She was elevated to thebench.

The High Court hears cases that require afull bench.

Budget

Use an initial capital for 'the Budget' to show the difference from the generic reference.

People on lower incomes will receive tax relief in this year'sBudget.

Just like the federalBudgetwas deferred in 2020, so too were state budgets.

Use lower case for 'budget' when it is used as an adjective or as a plural.

- budgetprovisions
- thebudgetaryprocess
- successive federalbudgets

Cabinet

Always use an initial capital for 'the Cabinet' to show the difference from its generic reference.

It was a decision by theCabinet.

Commonwealth

'The Commonwealth of Australia' is the name of Australia in theConstitution. Use an initial capital for 'Commonwealth'.

Do not use the phrase 'Commonwealth government' to mean 'Australian Government'.

- Defence is anAustralian Governmentresponsibility under the Constitution.
- TheCommonwealthmarine area is any part of the sea between 3 and 200 nautical miles from the coast.
- Defence is aCommonwealth governmentresponsibility under the Constitution.

Crown

Always use an initial capital for 'the Crown' to show the difference from its generic reference.

The Governor-General is appointed by theCrown.

Departments and agencies

Use initial capital letters only for the formal names of government departments and agencies. Check the names of departments and agencies in the government online directory.

Don't use capital letters for generic mentions. For example, use:

- 'the agency' instead of 'the Agency'
- 'the authority' instead of 'the Authority'
- 'the commission' instead of 'the Commission'
- 'the department' instead of 'the Department'.

Use a shortened form of the name only if the department or agency uses it regularly in their own content.

If you cite a source written by an organisation that has since changed its name, use the name published in the source. This might not be the organisation's current name.

The Department of Finance owns the policy. The department has been working on it for months.

The Department of Finance owns the policy. The Department has been working on it for months.

Always use an initial capital for 'the Treasury' to show the difference from its generic reference.

The Treasury conducts itself to the highest standards.

Use initial capitals for the formal names of areas in a department or agency's organisational structure. Don't use initial capitals for generic mentions of parts of the formal names.

The Budget Policy Division is part of Treasury's Fiscal Group. The division coordinates the delivery of the Budget and other fiscal reports.

Federal

Use an initial capital letter for 'federal' when it forms part of a formal name. Don't capitalise it when it is used as an adjective.

- the Federal Court of Australia
- federal issues

Federation

Use an initial capital for the word 'federation' only when referring to Australia's Federation in 1901.

The design of Australia's national flag is the result of a competition announced to coincide with Federation in 1901.

The type of architecture popular between 1890 and 1915 is known as Federation style architecture.

Government

Use an initial capital for the word 'government' if it is part of a formal name. Use lower case everywhere else.

- theVictorian Government
- the Australian and New Zealandgovernments
- thegovernmentsof South Australia and Tasmania
- Road maintenance is a localgovernmentresponsibility.

Government programs and agreements

Use initial capitals for the full names of:

- government programs
- treaties
- protocols and similar agreements.

Use initial capitals for abbreviations that remain specific but not for generic references or abbreviations.

- theGreater Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative
- theArtesian Basin Initiative
- theinitiative

Heads of state and prime ministers

Use initial capitals for the formal and abbreviated titles of current heads of state.

ThePrime Ministerannounced the new initiative this morning.

ThePrime Minister of the United Kingdomchairs Cabinet meetings.

TheSultan of Omancomes from a dynasty of rulers. TheSultanmet with thePrime Ministerlast week.

You do not need to use capitals for generic references to the position or when referring to previous incumbents.

Sir Edmund Barton was the firstprime ministerof Australia.

Justin Trudeau is the eldest son of former Canadianprime ministerPierre Trudeau.

Legislation

Use government sources to check the titles of legislation, especially:

- theFederal Register of Legislation

- the Australian Parliament House list of bills and legislation.

Follow the guidance in this manual to use the correct title for legislation.

Use initial capitals for these terms when referring to specific legislation:

- Act
- Ordinance
- Regulation
- Bill.

Use lower case for generic references to bills, regulations and ordinances. Use initial capitals for all references to Acts.

Follow detailed rules for references to delegated legislation.

The Act separated legal ties between the 2 entities. [A short-hand reference to an Act]

The bills were rejected for the second time. [A generic reference to a set of bills]

Ministers and departmental secretaries

Use initial capitals for the official titles of ministers and departmental secretaries. Use lower case for generic references.

The Minister for Education announced the new policy. Education groups met with the minister to present their views.

The Secretary of the Department of Social Services gave the opening address. Several secretaries attended the forum.

The Minister for Education announced the new policy. Education groups met with the Minister to present their views.

The Secretary of the Department of Social Services gave the opening address. Several Secretaries attended the forum.

Apply this rule to the titles of other government office holders and department officials.

- Our local member is Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister.
- Assistant ministers are designated as parliamentary secretaries under the Ministers of State Act 1952.
- The Deputy Secretary of Policy and Programs was one of 5 deputy secretaries to attend the interdepartmental committee meeting.
- She will take on the role of first assistant secretary responsible for overseeing engagement with external stakeholders.

Always use 'for' (not 'of') for a minister's portfolio.

Generally, use 'of' for anyone working at a department or agency.

- the Minister for Education
- Secretary of the Department of Health.

- the MinisterofEducation
- Secretaryforthe Department of Health

Principals of Australian institutions

In many cases, you need to use initial capitals for the official titles of the principals and chief executives of Australian institutions. Check a dictionary or reliable reference if you are unsure of the correct title and format.

- theChief Justice of the High Court of Australia
- theAttorney-General
- TheSecretary of the Department of Social Services
- theVice-Chancellor and President of the University of Queensland
- thePremier of New South Wales
- theChief Minister of the Northern Territory

Use lower case for most of these titles in general references that do not refer to a specific person.

- The average salaries ofvice-chancellorshave reached a new high.
- Severalattorneys-generalmet to discuss the issue last week.
- Thepremiersof New South Wales and Victoria met to discuss health reforms.

States and territories

To refer to an Australian state or territory:

- Use initial capitals for words in the formal name.
- Use lower case for generic or plural references.
- TheAustralian Capital Territoryhas a land border length of 306 kilometres. Theterritory'stotal area is more than 2,000 square kilometres.
- TheSouth Australian Governmentstarted the project. Thegovernmentwill meet regularly to review progress.
- Thestatesandterritoriesare responsible for health care and education.

Few situations will require you to use theshortened form for a state or territory.

'Territory' is a semi-official term for the Northern Territory.Use a capital'T'when using'Territory'instead of the full name for the Northern Territory. Use lower case for generic references.

TheNorthern Territoryroad toll is a concern to theterritory. [Initial capitals for the full name; lower case for a generic reference]

TheTerritoryis a common destination for overseas tourists. [The semi-official term instead of the full name]

Parliamentary terms

Use initial capitals for formal names connected with parliament. Generic references are in lower case.

- Parliament House
- theParliamentary Library
- The problem was raised in theQueensland Parliament.
- There was a change toparliamentaryprocedures.

Use initial capitals for the formal titles of parliamentary office holders. These include:

- Clerk of the House
- Clerk of the Senate
- Leader of the Government in the Senate
- Manager of Opposition Business
- President of the Senate
- Speaker of the House
- Serjeant-at-Arms
- Usher of the Black Rod.

Senator Lines is theDeputy President and Chair of Committeesin the 46th Parliament.

Use initial capitals for the formal titles of current members of parliament.

- Mr Adam Bandt MP
- Senator Pauline Hanson
- They met with Senator Griff.

Use lower case for parliamentary terms that are not formal titles. These words include:

- member of parliament; members of parliament
- senator; senators
- member; members
- frontbench; frontbencher
- backbench; backbencher
- crossbench; crossbencher.

She moved from thebackbenchto take the new ministerial portfolio.

He was a formersenatorfor Tasmania, serving from 1947 to 1951.

Always use initial capital letters to refer to:

- the Senate
- the House of Representatives
- the corresponding bodies in the states and territories.

The Legislative Assembly will vote on the matter tomorrow. The Assembly has been debating the matter for months.

The Senate and the House of Representatives are the 'houses of parliament', in lower case.

Use 'the House', 'this House', 'lower house' or 'people's house' to refer to the House of Representatives.

Use 'this house', 'upper house', 'house of review' or 'states' house' to refer to the Senate.

The digital edition consolidates the advice from the sixth edition and provides updated examples.

The capitalisation of 'house' used in the parliamentary context has changed. Style in the digital edition is consistent with Hansard style for the Australian Parliament.

The digital edition prefers 'Cth' over 'Cwlth' as the contraction for 'Commonwealth'. This reflects a departure from the sixth edition based on a corpus check with the Australian National Dictionary Centre.

The Content Guide had brief advice on government names, consistent with the sixth edition.

About this page

Evidence

Parliament of Australia (2020) Hansard style guide [internal style guide, version 8.1], Department of Parliamentary Services, Canberra.

Australian Government (2020) Directory, Australian Government Directory website, accessed 14 June 2020.

Department of Finance (2021) Structure of the Australian Government public sector, Department of Finance website, accessed 19 October 2022.

Office of the Legislative Assembly (2017) Hansard style manual, Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, accessed 14 June 2020.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2020) Parliamentary information, PM&C website, accessed 14 June 2020.

This page was updated Friday 31 March 2023.

Medical terms

Medical terms have specific meanings. Introduce scientific terms and common names if that helps users, but always use the correct spelling and style.

Use capitals for proper nouns and genus names

Use an initial capital letter for medical terms only if the term is a proper noun or adjective, or if it is the name of a genus. Otherwise don't use initial capitals for the names of:

- diseases and viruses
- diagnostic procedures
- syndromes
- anatomical parts.

Example

- hepatitis B
- Hendra virus
- foot-and-mouth disease
- Golgi apparatus
- Tourette syndrome
- computed tomography
- colon

Shortened forms

Use capital letters for acronyms and initialisms of medical terms. Spell out the full term in lower case, unless the word or term you're shortening includes a proper name or a genus name.

- acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS)
- drug-resistantStreptococcus pneumoniae(DRSP) disease
- sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- intensive care unit (ICU)
- magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)

Spelling for eponyms

Some terms are named after the people who discovered, studied or described the specific anatomical part or disease. Other terms are named after people who had a particular disease.

All of these terms are called 'eponyms'. Eponyms appear as different types of adjectives in medical terms. They are usually possessive adjectives.

When referring to an eponym in writing, use the following rules:

- If it is a disease named after people who had the disease, use the possessive case.
- If it is a disease or anatomical part named after the person who discovered, studied or described it, don't use the possessive case.
- Lou Gehrig'sdisease [Named after Lou Gehrig, a high-profile person who had the disease]
- Legionnaires'disease [Named after members of the American Legion – known as Legionnaires – who were the first documented people to have the disease]

- Alzheimer disease [Named after Dr Alois Alzheimer, who first described the disease]
- Down syndrome [Named after Dr John L H Down, who first described the syndrome]
- Henle loop [Anatomical part named after anatomist Gustav Jakob Henle]

This rule doesn't apply to names of organisations dedicated to studying certain diseases or supporting people who are affected by them. Always refer to organisations in the same way as they refer to themselves.

- Alzheimer's Association
- Crohn's & Colitis Australia

Italicise organism names

Write scientific names of infectious organisms – such as viruses, bacteria and parasites – in italics. Use an initial capital for the name of the genus only.

Example

The bacterium *Legionella pneumophila* causes Legionnaires' disease. [*Legionella* is the name of the genus and *pneumophila* is the species.]

Cite common names for pharmaceutical drugs, not brand names

Use the generic names of drugs where possible. Write them in lower case.

You can include the brand name in parentheses after the common name. Use initial capitals for brand names. Commercial terms might be trade marked: take care using product names.

Example

- benzoyl peroxide (Benzac)
- paracetamol (Panadol)

Refer to medical conditions using clear and inclusive language

The language you use for some medical conditions can change as research and social understanding of the conditions evolve. Be mindful of outdated language that can perpetuate stigma or misunderstandings about the condition.

Refer to peak bodies that study the condition or that provide support and information to people affected by it.

Example

The term 'bipolar disorder' replaces 'manic depression', a term that is no longer in use.

When you are writing about people with a medical condition, focus on the person. Use neutral language to describe the condition. Don't label the person.

Write this

- a person with cancer
- people with asthma
- a person with diabetes

Not this

- a cancer patient
- Asthma sufferers
- a diabetic person

If you're writing both the scientific and common names for a medical condition, place the scientific name in parentheses. Don't use 'or'. This could confuse readers into thinking they are 2 separate medical conditions.

Write this

People with pneumonia-like infections might have Legionnaires' disease (legionellosis).

Not this

People with pneumonia-like infections might have Legionnaires' diseaseorlegionellosis.

The digital edition consolidates and expands information from the sixth edition. It clarifies the use of eponyms in disease names and includes more examples than the sixth edition.

The digital edition has more information about style for proprietary drug names in guidance oncommercial terms.

The Content Guide did not cover medical terms.

About this page

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.)Punctuation, CDC website, accessed 9 June 2020.

healthdirect (n.d.)Australian health thesaurus, healthdirect website, accessed 9 June 2020.

Medical Journal of Australia (n.d.)Archive, MJA website, accessed 9 June 2020.

Medical Library Association (n.d.)What did my doctor say?, Medical Library Association website, accessed 9 June 2020.

Menon D (9 July 2019) 'Disorder, condition, syndrome:what's the difference?',Health Writer Hub, accessed 9 June 2020.

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (n.d.)Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, PBS website, accessed 9 June 2020.

TGA (Therapeutic Goods Administration) (2019) 'Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods',Regulation basics, TGA website, accessed 10 June 2020.

TGA (2019) 'Ingredient basics',Regulation basics, TGA website, accessed 10 June 2020.

TGA (2019) 'Updating medicine ingredient names: list of affected ingredients',Regulation basics, TGA website, accessed 10 June 2020.

US National Library of Medicine (2020)Medical subject headings 2020 (MeSH browser), US National Library of Medicine website, accessed 9 June 2020.

World Health Organization: Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (n.d.)Unified medical dictionary, WHO website, accessed 9 June 2020.

This page was updated Wednesday 5 July 2023.

Nationalities, peoples and places outside Australia

Refer to peoples and places outside Australia based on current information. Correct spelling and style avoids causing confusion or offence among users.

Check official sources for country and place names

Some countries have several official names. Consult trusted references to decide which name to use, then use it consistently. Helpful references include:

- thecountries, economies and regionswebpages, on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website
- the United Nationsgeographical names database
- the Australian Bureau of StatisticsStandard Australian classification of countries.

Example

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is often called the 'United Kingdom'.

The names of countries can change for political reasons. For example, a country might change its name to show independence from a former occupying country.

Example

The Democratic Republic of the Congo used to be called 'Zaire'. The former name came from the Portuguese colonial name for the Congo River.

Country boundaries can also change.

Spell country names with a capital letter

Use initial capitals for:

- the official name of a country
- any commonly used short forms of the country's name
- the names of states, territories and provinces.

The definite article 'the' isn't capitalised unless it begins a sentence.

Example

- the Cayman Islands – the Caymans
- the Falkland Islands – the Falklands

Shorten a country name only if it is clear to the user

Use a short form of a country's name only if it's clear and accurate. Shortened forms can make it easier to read text or tables, illustrations, notes, lists and bibliographies.

Example

'North Korea' is the shortened form of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Use English versions of countries and places in most content

English-language content usually uses the English version of a country's name.

Example

- 'Socialist Republic of Vietnam' is the English version ofC■ng hòa xã h■i ch■ ngh■a Vi■t Nam.
- 'Germany' is the English version ofDeutschland.
- 'New Zealand' is the English version ofAotearoa.
- 'The Czech Republic' or 'Czechia' are the English versions of■eská republika.

There are some cases where the preferred official name isn't in English.

Example

- 'Côte d'Ivoire' is the preferred official name for the Ivory Coast.
- 'Eswatini' is the preferred name for Swaziland.

In English-speaking countries, the convention is to use the established English forms for well-known place names.

Example

- Beijing
- Krakow
- Rome
- Brussels
- Florence
- Pyongyang
- the Hague

When the name is used generically, you don't need an initial capital.

Example

- brussels sprout [A type of sprout, not a sprout from Brussels]
- venetian blind [A type of screen for a window, not a blind from Venice]
- french door [A type of door, not a door from France]

Check the official status for area and region names

Groups of nations or areas that are recognised as political or geographic regions take initial capitals.

Example

- South-East Asia
- Central America
- the Balkans

Use lower case if the names of compass points (such as north and south-east) are not part of the name but are used to refer to the geographic area.

Example

- southernGermany
- northernIraq

Some names that aren't officially recognised become well known and gain a semi-official status. Use a dictionary to help you decide when this is appropriate.

Example

Kurdistan

Write nationalities, peoples and places with initial capitals

There's usually a clear relationship between the name of the country or region and the word used for the nationality. It's not always obvious though, so check a dictionary to ensure you're using the correct term.

Example

- Türkiye– Turkish
- Melanesia – Melanesian
- the Philippines – Filipino
- Congo – Congolese
- United Arab Emirates – Emirati
- New Zealand – New Zealander

Follow guidance for writing non-Englishpersonal names.

Capitalise the names of certain groups.

Example

- People groups – Hispanic, Sentinelese, Vietnamese R■c, Sámi
- Clans – Clan Campbell (Scottish)
- People from particular regions – Asian, European, Sumatran, Basque
- People who follow particular religions – Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Greek Orthodox
- People who speak particular languages – Hokkien-speaking

Check if an official language differs from the country name

The name of a country's language isn't always derived from the name of the country.

Example

- The people ofIranspeakFarsi.
- DariandPashtoare the official languages ofAfghanistan.
- WhileChileansspeakSpanish,BraziliansspeakPortuguese.
- East Timorhas 2 official languages:PortugueseandTetum.

The digital edition builds on sixth edition content: it consolidates details about peoples and places outside of Australia. It links to authoritative sources so users can find current spelling for official country and place names.

The guidance on nationalities, language names and groups of peoples relates to guidance on:

- personal names
- cultural and linguistic diversity.

The Content Guide had generic advice about capitalisation. It did not go into detail about names of people and places outside Australia.

About this page

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016)Standard Australian classification of countries (SACC), catalogue number 1269.0, accessed 8 November 2022.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (n.d.)Countries, economies and regions, DFAT website, accessed 8 November 2022.

International Organization for Standardization (n.d.)Popular standards: ISO 3166 Country codes, ISO website, accessed 9 June 2020.

Seterra (20 April 2018) 'Countries known by more than one name',The Seterra Blog, accessed 9 June 2020.

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (2019)UNGEGN world geographical names: geographical names database, UNGEGN website, accessed 8 November 2022.

This page was updated Wednesday 5 July 2023.

Natural phenomena

Treat terms for climate and weather events with consistent style. It helps users scan content for keywords and supports readability.

Standard rules of capitalisation apply for most natural phenomena

Follow the rules of capitalisation for most natural phenomena:

- Proper nouns start with a capital letter.

- Adjectives and common nouns are in lower case.

Do not use italics.

Most terms are usually in lower case

Write generic terms for climate and weather in lower case. This rule applies to many compound nouns.

Example

climate change, global warming, greenhouse gases

Specific terms usually take lower case. For example, this rule applies to scientific names for types of clouds.

Example

cumulonimbus, cirrus and stratus

Terms for specific phenomena can take initial capitals

Scientific terms for natural phenomena can include common nouns that combine to form a proper noun.

Use initial capitals when spelling out this kind of scientific term. Common shortened forms are in full capitals. Any non-English names retain the spelling of the original.

Example
- Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)
- Southern Oscillation Index (SOI)

Climate and weather events take on proper names

Individual climate and weather events have names to help communicate the event to the public.

There are specific capitalisation rules for climate and weather events. We follow the style recommended by Australia's Bureau of Meteorology.

For events not listed here, follow the standard rules for capitalisation.

Cyclones are usually given people's names

Use initial capitals for the names of cyclones.

Do this for the given name and for the adjectives and common nouns that appear immediately before the given name. The bureau uses 'Cyclone', 'Tropical Cyclone' and 'Severe Tropical Cyclone' as part of the cyclone's name.

Check the name is accurate on thebureau's website.

Use the same rule for hurricanes and typhoons. These are different terms for the same natural phenomenon.

- Cyclone Yasi
- Tropical Cyclone Winifred
- Severe Tropical Cyclone Damien
- Hurricane Wilma
- Typhoon Fengshen

Always write 'Cyclone' as part of the name unless it is clear from the surrounding text that you are referring to a cyclone.

Hilda was the first cyclone in the Australian region to make landfall in the 2017–18 season.

Cyclone Hilda made landfall in the 2017–18 season.

Droughts are usually named after a period in time

If the time is a formal period, the name has an initial capital.

- Millennium drought
- Federation drought
- the 1982–83 major drought

Fires are usually named for a time or location

Bushfires take initial capitals for the adjectival part of their name as well as any proper noun. Fires leading to substantial loss of life and property are usually named after the worst day or where they started.

- State Mine fire (New South Wales, 2013)
- Black Saturday bushfires (Victoria, 2009)
- Ash Wednesday bushfires (Victoria and South Australia, 1983)
- Black Tuesday bushfires (Tasmania, 1967)
- Black Friday bushfires (Victoria and New South Wales, 1939)
- Black Thursday bushfires (Victoria, 1851)

During a fire, authorities usually name a fire based on where it started.

the Taylors Creek Road fire

Floods, earthquakes and tsunamis are named by year, location and event

Use 'year Location event' as the naming convention for floods, earthquakes and tsunamis. Only the location (the proper noun) has an initial capital.

- 1974 Brisbane flood
- 1989 Newcastle earthquake
- 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami

The digital edition significantly expands style advice for referring to natural phenomena. The sixth edition had brief information under 'atmospheric phenomena'.

The digital edition recommends using initial capitals for all parts of a cyclone's name. The sixth edition restricted the use of initial capitals to the given name.

The Content Guide did not cover style for natural phenomena.

About this page

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (n.d.) 'Australian disasters',Knowledge hub, AIDR website, accessed 12 June 2020.

Bureau of Meteorology (n.d.)Bureau Blog, accessed 18 October 2022.

Bureau of Meteorology (2020)Tropical cyclone names, Bureau of Meteorology website, accessed 18 October 2022.

Japan Meteorological Agency (2020)Tropical cyclone information, Japan Meteorological Agency website, accessed 12 June 2020.

National Hurricane Center and Central Pacific Hurricane Center (n.d.)Tropical cyclone names, National Hurricane Center and Central Pacific Hurricane Center website, accessed 12 June 2020.

World Meteorological Organization (2020)Tropical cyclone naming, WMO website, accessed 12 June 2020.

This page was updated Tuesday 18 October 2022.

Organisation names

Spell and punctuate organisation names correctly. This helps people to understand your content.

Write the name as the organisation writes it

Organisations determine how their names should be spelt and punctuated. This does not always follow the usual rules.

Write the name of the organisation the same way the organisation writes it. This rule applies except in rare cases when the organisation name is in all lower case. Use an initial capital for these names in body text. This helps people identify the name as a proper noun.

Some names start with a lower case letter but have a medial capital (for example, 'eBay'). Write the name the same way, including to begin a sentence. A medial capital is enough to identify the name as a proper noun.

Example

eSafetykeeps tips on its website topical and up to date.

Pay attention to the use of capital letters, punctuation (such as apostrophes) and logograms (such as '&'). Make sure to include all words in the name. Don't add additional words.

Example

- United NationsEducational, Scientific and CulturalOrganization['United Nations' doesn't have an apostrophe because it isdescriptive. Note the variant spelling of 'Organization'.]
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) [The ampersand is part of the initialism but not the spelt-out form.]
- State Library Victoria[The name is not the 'State Library of Victoria'. It does not include a preposition.]
- Meat & Livestock Australia[The ampersand is part of the name.]

Check the correct name of an organisation

The names of organisations can change. The most efficient way to confirm an organisation's name is to check its website, annual report or letterhead. If this is unsuccessful, there are other reliable services.

For Australian Government entities, use thegovernment online directory. Directory entries contain links to departmental pages listing annual reports. Annual reports are a good way to find the former names of departments.

The government online directory includes the Australian Government Organisations Register and the directories of state and territory governments. There are also website directories for some local governments.

For non-government entities, use:
- the Australian Securities Exchange'slisted companies
- theAustralian Securities and Investments Commission registers

For all entities, use:
- the Australian Business Register'sABN lookup

- a publication that lists organisations such as theDirectory of Australian associationsorMargaret Gee's media guide,if your organisation has access.

Example

Before September 2013, the Department of Social Services was called the 'Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs'.

If you cite a source written by an organisation that has since changed its name, use the name that was published in the source. This may be the organisation's orgovernment department's past name.

Capital letters in registered business names

Some organisation names appearing on the Australian Business Register have all capitals. Our first rule applies:write the name as the organisation does.

Check the organisation's website and publications to find how it capitalises its name and follow the organisation's preferred style.

Example

MySA GOV [All capitals for 'GOV' is the preferred style. The registered business name has the same capitalisation.]

The Smith Family [Initial capitals is the preferred style. The registered business name is 'THE SMITH FAMILY' in all capitals.]

Shortened forms of the name

Use the organisation's shortened form only if the organisation regularly uses it in its own content.

For example, the Department of Home Affairs uses 'Home Affairs' as the shortened form. It would be inappropriate to use 'DHA' to refer to Home Affairs. However, Defence Housing Australia does use the initialism 'DHA', so using it to refer to that organisation would be appropriate.

Spell out the shortened form the first time, unless the organisation's name is known only by the shortened form.

- Zoning laws allowedIKEAto lease the land.
- Defence Housing Australia (DHA) provides housing for Defence members and their families.DHAalso provides other related services.
- Zoning laws allowedIngvar Kamprad Elmtaryd Agunnaryd(IKEA) to lease the land.
- DHAprovides housing for Defence members and their families.

Shortened forms as part of the name

Some organisations use shortened forms such as 'Ltd', 'Pty Ltd', 'Co' and 'Inc' as part of their legal name. Others use the spelt-out forms.

Don't add a full stop at the end of'Co' and'Inc' unless they finish a sentence. No full stop is the correct Australian Government style forabbreviations.

- AppleInc
- Woodside PetroleumLtd
- PerpetualLimited

Use the organisation's full title on first mention in a publication. On subsequent mentions in print documents, you can omit words like 'proprietary' and 'limited' and the corresponding shortened forms.

Capitalise organisations' names in 2 situations

Use initial capitals for:

- all words capitalised in the full, official names of organisations
- the first mention of an organisation.

Don't use an initial capital for:

- generic terms – such as 'the department'or 'the agency' – even if the organisation being referenced capitalises the generic term in its content
- mentions of several organisations with the same generic name.

Example

- Australian Academy of the Humanities – the academy
- Department of Finance – the department
- The departments of Health and Finance – the departments
- Western Sydney University – the university
- Australian Ballet Company – the company
- Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry – the royal commission
- Gundagai Shire Council – the shire council/the council
- Regional Australia Summit – the summit

In body text, use lower case for the definite article in the names of organisations

Some organisations use the definite article 'The' in their name with an initial capital. Use the full name, including 'The', in 2 situations:

- inemails and letters

- if the name appears in an alphabetical list (arrange by 'The' as the first word in the name).

Always use lower case 'the' in body text. This follows the practice of most organisations.

TheUniversity of Sydney [Correct name, not 'University of Sydney']

Next yeartheUniversity of Sydney will renovate its science buildings. [Body text uses lower case for 'the']

If organisations omit the definite article from their name, don't use it in emails and letters. In body text, 'the' appears before the correct name or isn't needed at all.

Charles Sturt University [Correct name, not 'The Charles Sturt University']

Research atCharles Sturt Universityexamined whether early Australian wheat varieties caused allergic reactions. [Body text does not use 'the']

Put a possessive apostrophe in a name if the organisation does

Use an apostrophe only when it forms part of the official name of an organisation.

Example

Actors'and Entertainers'Benevolent Fund Qld

In all other cases for organisation names, don't usepossessive apostrophes.

The apostrophe is disappearing from many organisational names, particularly from those that contain plural nouns ending in 's'. In these cases, the plural noun is descriptive rather than possessive.

Example

- Australian Securitiesand InvestmentsCommission
- LibrariesBoard of South Australia
- MineralsCouncil of Australia
- Chief Government GeologistsConference
- Australian WorkersUnion

Use the singular verb with organisation names

The rules of grammar allow the use of a plural or singular verb with the names of organisations. This is not Australian Government style.

Always use a singular verb. This applies even if organisation names end in an 's'and look plural.

Write this

- The Bureau of Meteorologyhasbeen quick to respond.
- Woolworthsisadvertising its new stock.
- The United Nationsturns75 in 2020.
- NT Fisherieshasreviewed its policies.

Not this

- The Bureau of Meteorologyhavebeen quick to respond.
- Woolworthsareadvertising their new stock.
- The United Nationsturn75 in 2020.
- NT Fisherieshavereviewed their policies.

The digital edition consolidates and updates information from the sixth edition. It has links to online resources writers can use to ensure the information is up to date. In a departure from the sixth edition, the abbreviations 'Co' and 'Inc' do not have a full stop. This is consistent with Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) guidance and relevant legislation.

The sixth edition had relevant information on organisations' names in different parts of the manual.

The Content Guide had an example to illustrate style for generic and full organisation names, consistent with the sixth edition, but no explicit guidance.

About this page

Australian Business Register (n.d.)ABN lookup, Australian Business Register website, accessed 11 August 2021.

Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (n.d.)Charities, ACNC website, accessed 10 June 2020.

Australian Government (2020)Directory, Australian Government Directory website, accessed 10 June 2020.

Australian Securities and Investments Commission (n.d.)Search business names register, ASIC Connect website, accessed 11 August 2021.

Australian Securities Exchange (n.d.) 'The official list (listed companies)',Company information, ASX website, accessed 10 June 2020.

Department of Finance (2021)Structure of the Australian Government public sector, Department of Finance website, accessed 19 October 2022.

This page was updated Wednesday 1 February 2023.

Personal names

Getting personal names right is respectful. It also helps users avoid any confusion. Check that you've used the correct spelling, punctuation and capitalisation.

Use the right name

When you write to or about people, always use the form of personal name that the person uses. If you can, ask the person which name they prefer. Otherwise, consult reputable sources for:

- Names of people who work within government or in roles related to government, including state and territory governments:Directory.gov.au.

- Records of names of people closely associated with Australia: TheNational Archives of Australia.

- Historical and biographical information: TheAustralian dictionary of biographyandTrove.

- Information on prominent Australians, search 'eResources' such asWho's who in AustraliaorEncyclopedia Britannica:National Library of Australia.

- The accepted form of authors' names and the names of people being written about: library catalogues.

Names are important to a person's sense of self. To avoid cultural or gender bias when referring to parts of names, use:

- 'given name' instead of 'Christian name'

- 'family name' instead of 'surname'

- 'previous names' instead of 'maiden name'.

Use initial capitals for personal names, initials and nicknames

Use initial capitals for the names of real and fictitious people.

Example

- Oodgeroo Noonuccal

- Clive James

- Minjee Lee

- Miles Franklin

- Fiona Katauskas

- Beatie Bow

- King O'Malley

Capitalise the initials of people's given names. Write them unspaced and without full stops. Use non-breaking spaces to ensure that initials are not separated from family names.

Example

- W Aly

- Ken G Hall
- AD Hope
- J-P Bruneteau [Hyphen is part of the individual's given name, Jean-Paul]

Use initial capitals for nicknames. The first time they appear in your text, place nicknames in quotation marks.

Example

- 'Madame Butterfly' [Swimmer, Susie O'Neill]
- 'Blocker' [Rugby League player, Steve Roach]
- 'Million Dollar Mermaid' [Annette Kellerman, swimmer, diver and film star]
- 'Maj' [Majak Daw, the first Sudanese-born AFL footballer]
- 'The Little Digger' [Former prime minister, Sir William Hughes]

Be aware that a few people don't use capitals for their names. This is a deliberate style decision that is part of their personal identity. Examples include bell hooks and kd lang. Use the form the person uses.

Spell plural forms correctly

The plural of any personal name is formed by adding 's' or 'es'. It depends on the spelling of the personal name (Table 1).

Punctuate possessive forms with an apostrophe

Use an apostrophe and an 's' with personal names, even when they already end in 's' (Table 2).

Plural personal names take just an apostrophe. Simply add an apostrophe to the end of the plural form.

Keep hyphens and all parts of compound family names

Always retain hyphens when you write given and family names that are hyphenated.

Example

- Kath Day-Knight
- Alen-Igor O'Hran

Write all parts of compound family names. Keep the compound when writing a person's family name.

Example

WilliamDelafield Cook['Delafield Cook' is a compound name.]

Sometimes someone has more than one family name but is only known by one. Write all the names the first time and use the well-known family name after.

Example

Mary MortonAllport[The artist is known as 'Allport'.]

To decide which name to use, ask the person if you can. Otherwise, check works they have written, personal correspondence from them or reliable sources about them.

Follow reliable sources for non-English names

As far as possible, if you need to write a non-English name, use the same form and spelling as the person uses. Check their personal correspondence or works they have written. If you can, ask them how you should address them. As a last resort, use the name that is most commonly used in writing about the person.

Pay attention to the order of names

The order of names is culturally based. In many English-speaking countries, the order of a name is given name then family name. However, other cultures use family names first.

Some people change the order of their name when they move countries.

If you can, ask the person which name is their family name and how they would prefer to be addressed. Follow guidance for how to write aboutnationalities, peoples and places outside Australia.

Chinese–Australian economist ProfessorXiaokai Yangwas bornYang Xiguang.Yangis his family name. He changed his given name toXiaokaiafter being released from prison in China. He is known byXiaokai Yangin the US and Australia, but asYang Xiaokaiin China.

Keep accents and diacritic marks in names

Given and family names sometimes have diacritic marks or symbols, including accents, such as à, á, â, ã, ä, ■, ■, ■, ■.

When you write names, retain diacritic marks unless the person commonly uses a simplified form of their name.

Insert diacritic marks into your document with theUnicode Standard– for example, U+00E8 is è. In word processing applications, you can also use theASCII extended character set.

- Renée Geyer

- Jirí Václav Daneš
- Faddéj Faddéevi■ Bellinsgáuzen [Romanised Russian form] – Fabian Bellingshausen [English form]
- Nguy■n Thu Giang [Vietnamese form] – Giang Thu Nguyen [English form] – Giang Nguyen [Simple form] – GT Nguyen [Initialised form]
- Florens Theodor Reinhard Müller

Treat names with particles case by case

Some family names contain a particle, such as 'della', 'Al' or 'von'.

It is sometimes difficult to decide how to capitalise these personal names in English.

Use the same capitalisation as the person uses. It is largely a matter of individual preference and family custom. If you can't ask them, use reliable resources to decide on a case-by-case basis, then use the same form throughout the content.

Most, but not all, particles are written in lower case.

- KimvanNetten
- Thomasde laCondamine
- JulianVanAalst
- Dame ConstanceD'Arcy
- FredaDuFaur

The particle is sometimes omitted when the given name is omitted.

- LudwigvanBeethoven – Beethoven [The particle is omitted.]
- RichardDiNatale –DiNatale [The particle is included.]

Always use an initial capital for the particle when a name starts a sentence. You can also rephrase the sentence to retain the original form.

- WillemvanOtterloo was chief conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.
- VanOtterloo was chief conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.
- The chief conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra wasvanOtterloo.

List family name first in reference lists

In a reference list, put the family name first and then the initial for the given name of the lead author.

Follow the rules for the author–date system tocreate an alphabetically ordered list.

Names you pronounce the same way but spell differently go together in an alphabetical list.

Example

- MacArthur AB

- M'Cay H
- McFarlane AD
- MacFarlane D

[In this list, all family names are pronounced 'Mac'. They are ordered as if they were spelt the same way.]

The digital edition includes a new section on hyphens in personal names. This section wasn't in the sixth edition.

The digital edition guidance complements the topic on cultural and linguistic diversity, which also discusses personal names. It has links to useful online sources such as a link to the Unicode Standard for diacritic marks.

The Content Guide did not provide specific advice on the style for people's names.

About this page

Australian Government (2020)Directory, Australian Government Directory website, accessed 10 June 2020.

Australian of the Year Awards (n.d.)Honour roll, Australian of the Year Awards website, accessed 9 June 2020.

Microsoft Corporation (2020)Keyboard shortcuts in Word: insert international characters, Microsoft website, accessed 9 June 2020.

National Archives of Australia (n.d.)Search for people, NAA website, accessed 9 June 2020.

National Centre of Biography (2020)Australian dictionary of biography, Australian Dictionary of Biography website, accessed 9 June 2020.

National Library of Australia (n.d.)eResources, National Library of Australia website, accessed 9 June 2020.

National Library of Australia (n.d.)Trove, National Library of Australia website, accessed 9 June 2020.

Owen M (2018),How to type accented letters in macOS three different ways, appleinsider website, accessed 9 June 2020.

The Unicode Consortium (2020) 'Combining diacritical marks',Unicode 13.0 character code charts, Unicode website, accessed 9 June 2020.

This page was updated Friday 5 August 2022.

Plants and animals

Names for plants and animals come from classification systems. The right style for the classification conveys meaning to people reading the content.

Italicise genus and species names

The genus and species form the definitive name of a plant or animal. By convention:

- the genus is in italics and takes an initial capital
- the species is in italics and is lower case.

Example

Backhousia citriodorais the scientific name of the lemon myrtle.

Ornithorhynchus anatinusis the scientific name of the platypus.

Subspecies and the names of varieties are also italicised. In these names, abbreviations for the words 'subspecies' and 'variety' take a full stop. This is an exception to thegeneral rule for abbreviations.

Example

Eucalyptus paucifllorasubsp.hedraiais a subspecies of snow gum found only in the Mount Bogong and Falls Creek areas of Victoria.

Acacia alatavar.platypterais a variety of winged wattle that is found only in Western Australia.

Accessibility requirements

Screen readers don't pronounce italics. Use the semantic tag to provide emphasis for italicised names in HTML.

Write common names in lower case and roman type

Most plants and animals have a common name as well as their genus and species name.

For common names:

- Use lower case unless they are also a proper noun, a registered trade mark or in some specialised content such as genetics.
- Do not use italics.

Example

- TheTasmanian devilis named after its home range of Tasmania.
- The grasslands were home to more than a millionred kangaroos.
- Tuross River was home to a family ofplatypus.

Use initial capitals when the name includes a proper noun.

Example

- Norfolk Islandpine
- Mount Arthurburrowing crayfish

Plant and animal names that are also common English words

Names that have become everyday words are shown in roman type and don't need a capital letter.

- acacia
- eucalypt

This includes English derivatives. These are plant and animal names that came from the scientific classification system and are now in everyday use.

- feline [From the subfamily Felinae]
- carnivore [From the order Carnivora]

You usually don't need to use an initial capital for breeds, even if they are derived from a regional name.

- labrador
- siamese cat
- friesian cattle

Registered trade marks

Use an initial capital for names of registered cultivars or breeds. In a sentence, the registered name is sometimes in quotation marks.

Acacia'Cascade'is a registered cultivar derived from Australian native flora.

It's best to check a dictionary or another reputable source to confirm whether the name has an initial capital. Refer torelated guidance on commercial terms.

Birds (ornithology)

In generalist Australian Government content, use lower case for the names of birds unless the name contains a proper noun.

Thesilver gull(Larus novaehollandiae) is a common gull of the Australian coast.

South-west Western Australia is the only place whereCarnaby's black cockatoois found.

This style may vary in some specialist content and content following international conventions. If writing for these, check and use the style that readers will understand. For example, in some

contexts the common names of bird species start with a capital letter but are lower case when used as a generic term.

The Silver Gull (Larus novaehollandiae) is frequently observed in Australian coastal regions.

A species of cockatoo, Carnaby's Black Cockatoo, is native to south-west Western Australia.

In both generalist and specialist content, use lower case for bird names in a list of common names of plants and animals.

The area was inhabited by green tree frogs, carpet pythons, bush rats and silver gulls.

Genetics

When using genetic terms for plants and animals:

- Use italics for the names of genes.
- Use roman type for the names of proteins (enzymes).

Capitalisation varies for the names of genes, but proteins usually take an initial capital only.

In plants, the gene Sbe1 encodes starch-branching enzyme one, Sbe1.

Include the genus and species at first mention of the common name

The common name of a plant or animal can be a local name for more than one species in different places. Only the scientific name is the definitive name.

For this reason, include the species name in parentheses when you first mention the common name so it is clear which plant or animal you are writing about.

Example

Royal grevillea (Grevillea victoriae) is one of more than 350 species in the genus Grevillea.

A common name is often a local name for a species:

- A common name can be used for several species.
- A species can have different common names in different places.

Example

Black wattle is used as a common name for several Acacia species, such as Acacia mearnsii, A. aulacocarpa, A. auriculiformis, A. concurrens and A. crassicarpa.

Acacia dealbata is known by several common names, such as 'silver wattle', 'blue wattle' and 'mimosa'.

When the genus is repeated, it can be abbreviated

If you have already written the full name of the genus, use a shortened form for later mentions. This is often just the first letter of the genus name, followed by a full stop. This is an exception to thegeneral rule for abbreviations.

Ornithorhynchusanatinusbelongs to the Ornithorhynchidae family. The elusiveO.anatinuscan be spotted in the riparian zone of our freshwater rivers.

When there are several genera that start with the same letter, include the second letter in the abbreviation.

AnopterusmacleayanusandAleuriesmoluccanaare small Australian trees. AlthoughAn.macleayanuais found in cool places,Al.moluccanacan tolerate tropical conditions.

Refer to classification systems to help you name plants and animals

Plants and animals are classified in a hierarchy from general to specific. The style you use is set by where the name is in the hierarchy:

- Names down to genus level start with capital letters.
- Species names are in lower case.
- Genus and species names are in italics.

The examples in the table show the classification for:

- a plant, lemon-scented myrtle
- an animal, the platypus.

Scientific names often have Latin endings

The scientific names of plants and animals often derive from Latin. Check the spelling when you use them.

It can help to recognise spelling patterns:

- The family names of plants usually end in 'ceae'.
- The family names of animals usually end in 'idae'.

Ornithorhynchus anatinusbelongs to the Ornithorhynchidaefamily.

All classification names above genus level are in roman type and take initial capitals.

- Backhousia citriodorais in the familyMyrtaceae.
- Ornithorhynchus anatinusis in the orderMonotremata.

Scientific names can include the name of a person

Technical content often includes the name of the person who first described the species.

The person's name follows the first mention of the species in the content. The publishing date of the description can also follow the name.

The name and date, if they are included, appear in roman type.

Grevillea victoriaeF.Muell.was first described by botanist Ferdinand von Mueller.

There is a standard form for writing the person's name. In this example, 'F.Muell.' is a standard abbreviation in biology – it uses full stops and has no spaces. Check a biology dictionary if you are not certain.

Plants and animals are sometimes allocated to a different genus from the one they were given when they were first described. In this case, the name and date appear in parentheses after the genus and species name.

Robshelfordia circumducta(Walker, 1869)

[This shows that Walker first described the cockroach in 1869 as a species, but another author has since allocated it to the genusRobshelfordia.]

Subcategories of species are usually abbreviated

For plants, there are 5 taxonomic categories below species level:
- subspecies (abbreviated as 'subsp.' for a single subspecies and 'subspp.' for more than one subspecies)
- variety (abbreviated as 'var.')
- subvariety (abbreviated as 'subvar.')
- form (abbreviated as 'f.')
- subform (abbreviated as 'subf.')

The abbreviations are in roman type and lower case. The subspecies and varietal names themselves are in italics.
- Grevillea victoriaesubsp.nivalisis one of the subspecies of thisGrevilleagenus.
- Grevillea banksiivar.fosterihas beautiful blood-red flowers.

If the species or variety is unknown or unspecified, there is no word after the abbreviation.
- Grevillea victoriaesubsp.
- Grevillea banksiivar.

For animals, there is only one taxonomic level below that of species: subspecies. By convention, the abbreviation 'subsp.' is not used.

Macropus agilis jardiniiis a subspecies of the agile wallaby (M. agilis).

Use specialised resources for more information

Check the names of plants and animals. Make sure the information is up to date.

Use reliable sources such as:

- theAustralian National Herbarium's Australian Plant Name Index
- theAtlas of Living Australia.

The digital edition builds on content from the sixth edition. It provides more examples, and links to specialised resources. It consolidates information from other parts of the sixth edition.

The Content Guide did not have specific content about the style for the names of plants and animals.

About this page

Atlas of Living Australia (n.d.)Search species, Atlas of Living Australia website, accessed 11 June 2020.

Australia's Virtual Herbarium (2018)Plant names: a basic introduction, Australia's Virtual Herbarium website, accessed 11 June 2020.

Australian Cultivar Registration Authority (2017)List of registered cultivars derived from Australian native flora, ACRA website, accessed 11 June 2020.

Australian National Herbarium (n.d.)Australian plant name index, Australian National Botanical Gardens website, accessed 17 June 2020.

Biotext Pty Ltd and Macquarie University (2021) 'Names of organisms',Australian manual of style, stylemanual.com.au, accessed 12 October 2021.

Chapman G (1970)Common Australian birds of towns and gardens, Lansdowne, Melbourne.

CSIRO (n.d.)Australian national wildlife collection, CSIRO website, accessed 11 June 2020.

Day N and Simpson K (2019)Field guide to the birds of Australia, Penguin Books Australia, Melbourne.

Gill F and Donsker D (eds) (2020)Capitalization, IOC World Bird List website, accessed 11 June 2020.

International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (2012)International code of zoological nomenclature, 4th edn, ICZN website, accessed 17 June 2020.

Pizzey and Knight (2020)Birds of Australia, digital edition, Gibbon Multimedia Australia, accessed 11 June 2020.

Queensland Museum, Ryan M and Brisbane Council (1995)Wildlife of Greater Brisbane, Queensland Museum, Brisbane.

Ravindran PN (2017)The encyclopedia of herbs & spices, CABI, Oxfordshire.

Spencer R and Cross R (2020)A guide to botanical nomenclature, 4th edition, CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne.

Turland NJ, Wiersema JH, Barrie FR, Greuter W, Hawksworth DL, Herendeen PS, Knapp S, Kusber W-H, Li D-Z, Marhold K, May TW, McNeill J, Monro AM, Prado J, Price MJ and Smith GF (2018)International code of nomenclature for algae, fungi and plants (Shenzhen code), Koeltz Botanical Books, doi:10.12705/Code.2018.

This page was updated Thursday 23 March 2023.

Ships, aircraft and other vehicles

Names of ships, aircraft and other vehicles follow a set style. Using the correct style helps people identify the names of vehicles in text.

Italicise specific names and use capitals

Write the names of individual ships, aircraft and other vehicles:

- in italics
- with initial capitals.

This makes the name of the ship, aircraft or other vehicle clear. The name contrasts with the rest of the sentence.

Don't use the definite article for navy ships.

Example

- HMASCanberrais the Royal Australian Navy's flagship.
- Australian–American astronaut Andy Thomas flew his first flight in space aboard theEndeavour.
- TheIndian Pacifictravels 4,532 kilometres from Perth to Sydney.

Accessibility requirements

Screen readers don't pronounce italics. Use the semantic tag to provide emphasis for italicised names in HTML.

Names in citations

Separate the names of vehicles from titles incitations and reference lists. Separate them according to the type of publication:

- If the title is in italics (such as in book and website titles), use roman type for the name of the vehicle.

- If the title is in roman type (such as a journal article), use italics for the name of the vehicle.
- Mair C (2013)The lucky ship: the nine lives of the Australian coasterTambar1912–1960, Nautical Association of Australia, Australia.
- McMaugh D (21 March 2020) 'Albatrossbreaks bread with women in need of a hand',Navy Daily, accessed 24 March 2020.

Don't write brands or types of vehicles in italics

Begin the names of the brands, models and classes of vehicles with an initial capital letter but don't use italics.

Example

- She was driving aToyota Corolla.
- ABoeing 737brought the Australians home.
- They travelled in aCommodorefor the last part of the journey.

Don't italicise or capitalise types of ships, aircraft or other vehicles. Use an initial capital for a generic name only if it starts a sentence.

Example

- During the Second World War,flying boatswere deployed to strike remote enemy targets to Australia's north.
- The Waco 10 was anopen-cockpit biplaneintroduced in 1927.
- Mail trainsstop at every town, adding hours to the trip.

Don't italicise the definite article (the word 'the') before the vehicle's name unless it is part of the name.

Example

- TheGhantakes 54 hours to travel from Adelaide to Darwin. [The definite article is part of the train's name.]
- TheDreamtimewas on the shortlist for the name ofQantas's new fleet of Boeing 787 Dreamliners. [The definite article is not part of the ship's name.]

Don't put the abbreviated parts of a ship's name in italics.

Example

- HMASArunta,HMASSydney
- ThePSAlburytravelled the Murray River in the mid-1800s.

Don't use italics for the ship's class name.

Example

HMASAnzac(III)is the lead ship of eightAnzac Classfrigates.

Refer to vehicles with the pronoun 'it'

Use the pronoun 'it' for ships, aircraft and other vehicles. Do not write 'she' when referring to vehicles in government content. Use pronouns that reflectgender-neutral language.

Example

Brisbane was the first stop for the replicaEndeavouronitsmaiden circumnavigation of Australia.

The digital edition expands on advice from the sixth edition about ships, aircraft and other vehicles. It adds explicit advice about using gender-neutral language to refer to ships. It includes guidance on referring to spacecraft.

The Content Guide did not cover this topic.

About this page

Australian Maritime Safety Authority (n.d.)List of registered ships, AMSA website, accessed 9 June 2020.

Judd T (21 March 2002) 'Lloyd's Listtakes sex out of shipping',The Independent, accessed 9 June 2020.

Mellefont J (2000) 'Heirlooms and tea towels: views of ships' gender in the modern maritime museum',The Great Circle, 22(1):5–16.

National Museum of Australia (n.d.) 'Italics',Style guide, National Museum of Australia website, accessed 2 December 2019.

National Museum of Australia (n.d.) 'Gender',Style guide, National Museum of Australia website, accessed 9 June 2020.

Oxford University Press (2016) '5.16: Ships, aircraft and vehicles',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

University of Chicago (2017) 'Names of ships and other vehicles',Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

This page was updated Wednesday 19 April 2023.

Topographic terms

Correct capitalisation helps people identify topographic and geographic terms in your content. Refer to landmark features, regions and compass points correctly.

Write official names with capitals

Check official place names andstyle them correctly. You can check the spelling of an official name using theAustralian Place Names dataset.

The full names of mountains, rivers, valleys, bays, islands and other features always take initial capitals.

Example

- the Hunter Valley
- the Three Sisters
- the Paroo River

Some shortened forms that are popular names or nicknames are also capitalised.

Example

- The Snowy Mountains can also be called the 'Snowies'.
- The northern part of the Northern Territory is known as the 'Top End'.

Write generic terms in lower case

In most cases, don't use initial capitals when you use the name as a generic term.

Example

I paddled a kayak 200 km down the Balonne River. Theriverwas in flood for some of the trip.

When using the same generic term for 2 or more names in the same sentence, use lower case for the generic term.

Example

The Barossa and Huntervalleysare important winemaking areas. [The word 'valley' refers to both valleys. It's used generically and does not take an initial capital.]

The BarossaValleyis in South Australia and the HunterValleyis in New South Wales. [The word 'valley' is part of the name of each valley and so is capitalised.]

Keep the initial capital when the general term is a well-recognised abbreviation and works as a proper name.

Example

The Great Barrier Reef is also called 'theReef'.

The Gulf of Carpentaria is also known as 'theGulf'.

Don't use an initial capital if you're using the noun in a generic sense.

Example

The Amazonrainforestis vital to the health of our planet. [The 'Amazon rainforest' is not the official name of the region. The word 'rainforest' is generic and doesn't need an initial capital.]

Limit abbreviated names

'Mt'is a common and easily recognisable abbreviation for mountains. Use the abbreviation consistently in content and use initial capitals.

Example

MtTennent is part of Namadgi National Park.

Spell out the names of other topographic features if you can. Use the abbreviated form only where there's limited space or a lot of repetition, such as in tables and maps.

Use Geoscience Australia'sauthorised abbreviations.

Example

- CTribulation [Cape]
- LBurley Griffin [Lake]
- MurrayR[River]
- GreenIs[Island]
- Keppel BayIs[Islands]

Don't use an apostrophe for possessive names

Don't use an apostrophe for topographic terms involving possessives. Official place names are not possessive and do not usually include punctuation.

Refer to relatedguidance on Australian place names.

Correct

- Careys Peak

Incorrect

- Carey's Peak

Spell the plural form correctly

The plural of any topographic name is formed simply by adding 's' or 'es'.

Example

There are 4 Mount Wellingtons in Australia but only one Mount Coot-tha.

- There are 3 Mount Jameses in Australia. There is one in Queensland, one in South Australia and one in Western Australia.

Write compass points in lower case

In text, write the points of a compass in lower case. Use hyphens for points such as 'north-east'.

Example

- south
- north-east
- west-north-west
- A north-westerly wind was blowing the fire towards the town.
- The car was 30 degrees east of where it should have been.
- A cool change was coming from the south.

You can use initialisms in tables, illustrations and some specialist works. Always use capital letters with no full stops or hyphens.

Example

The digital edition consolidates and expands information about topographic terms. It relates to guidance onAustralian place names.

The sixth edition provided brief information under 'geographic features' and 'compass points'.

The Content Guide did not have specific details on topographic terms.

About this page

Data.gov.au (n.d.)Datasets, data.gov.au, accessed 10 June 2020.

Geoscience Australia (2012) 'Section 2: National topographic map series (NTMS)andgeneralreferencemapspecifications',Geoscience Australia topographic data and map specifications, Geoscience Australia website, accessed 10 June 2020.

Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM) (n.d.)Permanent Committee on Topographic Information, ICSM website, accessed 10 June 2020.

ICSM (n.d.)Place names: foundation spatial data, ICSM website, accessed 10 June 2020.

Permanent Committee on Place Names (2016)Principles for the consistent use of place names:includes principles for the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names and dual naming depiction principles, Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping, accessed 29 May 2020.

This page was updated Wednesday 4 January 2023.

Academics and professionals

Follow these rules to address and title academics and professionals correctly. The guidance focuses on academics, medical practitioners, dentists and veterinarians. Apply the rules when writing about individuals in other professions.

Use initial capitals for the titles of individual academics and professionals

The academic and professional titles held by individuals usually have initial capitals. This includes honorary titles.

Use lower case if you use a titlegenerically.

Example

- Adjunct ProfessorMonty Chiratte [Honorary academic title]
- Allgeneral surgeonsat the hospital attended Wednesday's forum. [Generic use]

Use full titles in certain contexts

Academics and professionals are often addressed by their 'full title'. A full title includes the title or honorific (with initial capitals), name, post-nominals, position and organisation.

Use a full title:

- to introduce an individual as speaker
- in address and signature blocks in correspondence
- in official records of proceedings
- in lists in organisational publications such as annual reports
- if it is important to know where an individual works.

A full title is often about using titles in a display or presentation context (display text).

Example

- Professor Deborah Terry AC, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Queensland [Full title]

Titles immediately before a name

Use initial capitals for titles that appear immediately before a person's name. Do this unless the title isgeneric.

Also use initial capitals for theshortened formsof titles.

Example

- Our new vice-chancellor and president isProfessorRufus Black.
- We welcomeDrJamilah Mulyadi to our clinic.DrMulyadi is now available for skin examinations.

Shortened forms for titles immediately before a name

Only use shortened forms of titles in limited circumstances. People might understand common contractions like 'Prof' for 'Professor', but some shortened forms are confusing. For example, the initialism for 'Pro Vice-Chancellor' is 'PVC'. To ensure your content is readable, write the title in full.

Shortened forms are sometimes necessary because of limited space. For example, shortened forms often appear in tables. List the full form of any title that people might find confusing in anote.

The space available for image captions can be limited, but write the full names and titles as a default. If you have to use initials and the shortened forms of titles in a caption, always include the full forms in body text to provide context.

'Dr' is an exception in all instances. Like 'Ms' and 'Mr', 'Dr' is easy to understand when it appears before a name.

- Departmental officers recently attended Upsilon University's annual Copyright Symposium. The academic panel (pictured below), chaired byVice-Chancellor Tom Dhillon, discussed recent cases with implications for fair dealing provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. [Body text: spelt-out titles]

- Left to right: Associate Professor Sara Baird, Vice-Chancellor Tom Dhillon, Dean Frank Ealing, Adjunct Professor Olena Iraklidis, Dr Celia Nieminen [Image caption: preferred style]
- Left to right: Assoc Prof S Baird, VC T Dhillon, Dean F Ealing, Adj Prof O Iraklidis, Dr C Nieminen [Image caption: only for limited space]

Titles that replace a name

Use initial capitals for official titles that replace a name.

Titles replacing a name also have initial capitals:

- when you address someone directly
- for salutations in correspondence.

For all other uses, titles that replace a name should be lower case.

These other uses include abbreviated titles and titles given by an organisation to a role or position. Academic and professional organisations might capitalise such titles as a mark of respect or status, but this is notAustralian Government style. Treat them as generic and use lower case.

Example

- TheVice-Chancellor of the University of Tasmaniavisited last week. [Initial capitals: official title replacing name]
- Thevice-chancellorvisited Burnie campus last week. [Lower case: abbreviated title replacing name]
- DearChancellor[Initial capital: salutation]
- 'We note your concernsDoctor. Thank you for bringing this evidence before the committee'. [Initial capital: direct address]

Titles after a name

Use lower case for most titles that appear after a name. These titles describe the individual and are generic.

There is one exception. Only use initial capitals for titles after a name in afull title.

This includes for:

- address and signature blocks incorrespondence
- lists in organisational publications such as annual reports.

Follow your organisation's template style for signature blocks. Templates apply design elements and list all elements in correct order. Some organisations prefer all capitals for names, titles and the organisation's name.

Example

- They met with Associate Professor Dianne Stephens OAM,medical director of theNational Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre. [Lower case: generic descriptive title in body text]

- Associate Professor Dianne Stephens OAM,Medical Director, National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre [Initial capitals: full title]

- Professor Chris Goodnow FAA FRSExecutive DirectorGarvan Institute of Medical Research384 Victoria StreetDarlinghurst NSW 2010Australia [Initial capitals: full title for address block]

- Dr Fatima Dashti FASMDirector (Research)Institute for Virusestelephoneemailwebsite [Initial capitals: full title for signature block. Order of elements might vary.]

- #LIVE #COVID Update with Professor Paul Kelly, Australian Government Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health. [Initial capitals: full title to introduce speaker in government video.]

- 2021 Innovation Award recipientsDr Joanne ZhengSenior Research ScientistAcmeCo AustraliaProfessor Alexander BannonSenior Lecturer in Rehabilitation MedicineFaculty of Health and Medical SciencesUniversity of Adelaide[Initial capitals: full titles for list in annual report]

Dr Joanne ZhengSenior Research ScientistAcmeCo AustraliaProfessor Alexander BannonSenior Lecturer in Rehabilitation MedicineFaculty of Health and Medical SciencesUniversity of Adelaide[Initial capitals: full titles for list in annual report]

Use lower case for titles used in a generic way

Generic use of academic and professional titles includes:

- titles that describe a named individual

- plural titles

- common nouns.

As shown in the previous section, most titles that appear after a name are generic.

Some titles appearing immediately before a name are also generic because they describe the individual. These titles are usually preceded by 'the' or a modifier. Adjectives are modifiers because they restrict the meaning of a noun.

Example

- Professor Bartlett, the university'svice-chancellor, welcomed alumni to the reception. [Lower case: descriptive title after a name]

- Theresearch fellowLydia Mbegngue wrote extensively on this topic. [Lower case: title before a name, modified by 'the']

- Severalpostdoctoral fellowsin the research facility met last week. [Lower case: plural title]

- Aprovostoversees a university's academic performance. [Lower case: common noun]

- Dhriti Saxena is a localdoctorin general practice. [Lower case: common noun and descriptive title after a name]

- They met with former medical director Tom Perera. [Lower case: title immediately before a name, modified by 'former']
- Two doctors from this practice attended the conference. [Lower case: plural title]
- It is important to see your doctor to develop an asthma action plan. [Lower case: common noun]

Use title, name and post-nominals at first mention

When you write about an individual, it's respectful to use their title.

The first time you mention someone in body text, use their academic or professional title before their first name and last name, followed by post-nominals.

If you mention the individual again, only use the title and last name. Some academic titles have an accepted abbreviated title you can use after the first mention.

Example

- Emeritus Professor Stephen Duckett has extensive experience in health care at senior leadership level. Professor Duckett's membership of the RMIT Council concludes in 2022.
- ['Professor' is the accepted abbreviated title for an Emeritus or Emerita Professor.]

Never use the shortened form of the title in body text ('Prof' for example), except for the contraction 'Dr'.

Write this

This year's graduate cohort asked Deputy Vice-Chancellor Jonquil Johansson to moderate their debate.

Not this

DVC Jonquil Johansson to moderate their debate.

Write post-nominals after the name in academic and professional titles

Post-nominals are letters after a name that stand for academic, civil and military awards and honours.

Make sure you write post-nominals in the right order.

Don't use commas before or between post-nominals.

Example

- Professor Sally WheelerOBE MRIA FAcSS FAAL

Use post-nominals at first mention only

The first time you write a name in body text, use the academic and professional title along with the first and last name. Include the post-nominal for a civil or military honour in the title.

If you mention the name again, use the title and last name, but don't include the post-nominal.

Example

- Dr Ziggy Switkowski AOhas been chancellor of RMIT since 2011.Dr Switkowskiis also chair of NBN Co.

Include post-nominals in the shortened forms of titles

Retain any post-nominals for civil and military honours when using the shortened forms of titles.

- Attendees:Dr Z Switkowski AO,Prof M Bean CBE, Dr S Andrews, Ms J Latchford, Prof S Duckett, Ms T McLaughin and Mr D Hoogstra. [Extract from minutes of a university council meeting]

Use post-nominals for academic and professional qualifications in 2 contexts

Post-nominals can also stand for tertiary and professional qualifications.

Use these post-nominals:

- for correspondence within the academic community
- to show relevant expertise.

Don't include both 'Dr' (doctorate) and 'PhD' (Doctor of Philosophy) for the one name. It is conventional to use either the title or the post-nominal. This also applies to PhD equivalents such as 'LLD' (Doctor of Laws).

Don't include post-nominals for master and bachelor degrees in correspondence.

- DrZdenka Svoboda or Zdenka SvobodaPhD[Individual with doctorate]
- Dr Amin SalkeMD FRACGP[Medical practitioner]
- Brent HulotCPA[Accountant]
- Mark PriceBEngTech TMIEAust[Engineer]
- Mia LillardBCom CFP[Financial planner]

Titles for academics

In most contexts, address academics with their full title: title or honorific, name, position, post-nominals and academic institution.

Example

- Associate Professor Peter Spencer, College of Science, Health, Engineering and Education, Murdoch University [Full title]
- Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt AODirector of ResearchJumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and ResearchUniversity of Technology SydneyPO Box 123Broadway NSW 2007Australia   [Full title: address block]

An academic who is knighted

Use 'Sir' or 'Dame' after the academic title.
- ChancellorDameLeonie Kramer AC DBE
- ChancellorSirAlbert Axon KBE

Emails and letters to academics

Keep the initial capital for the title in correspondence when you're writing to a specific person.

In formal correspondence:
- Open with 'Chancellor' (or 'Vice-Chancellor', 'Professor' and so on).
- Conclude with 'Yours faithfully'.

In less formal correspondence:
- Open with 'Dear Chancellor' (or 'Vice-Chancellor', 'Professor' and so on).
- Conclude with 'Yours sincerely'.

Don't include a comma after these phrases. Australian Government style is to write salutations without punctuation.

Dear Associate Professor … Yours faithfully

Dear Assistant Professor … Yours sincerely

Dear Associate Professor,… Yours faithfully,

Dear Assistant Professor,… Yours sincerely,

How to address associate and assistant professors correctly in correspondence differs by country and educational institution.

For Australian correspondence, write 'Dear Associate Professor' and 'Dear Assistant Professor' not 'Dear Doctor' or 'Dear Professor'.

People with doctorates

You can address people who hold a doctorate as 'Doctor' or 'Dr' (without a full stop). Today, it is acceptable to use 'Dear Dr Name' for both formal and informal correspondence.

When writing 'Dear' without the person's name in emails and letters, write the title 'Doctor' in full.

Don't include a comma after these phrases.

- DearDrMuecke
- DearDoctor

A holder of a doctorate who is knighted

If the holder of a doctorate is knighted, don't address them as 'Doctor'.

Instead, address the person by 'Sir' or 'Dame'. Write the post-nominals for the knighthood after the name, followed by any other post-nominals. Don't insert commas before or between the post-nominals.

- DameBridget OgilvieAC DBE FRS FAA

Titles for medical practitioners, dentists and veterinarians

Use 'Doctor' or 'Dr' for medical practitioners, dentists and veterinarians, whether or not they hold a doctorate. Those with a doctorate may choose to add the post-nominal 'PhD'.

Use 'Professor', 'Associate Professor' or 'Assistant Professor' for doctors who hold these titles at academic institutions. Some doctors who hold professorships choose to use 'Dr' when working in clinical practice.

Surgeons in human medicine are traditionally called 'Mr', 'Ms' or their preferred gender-appropriate honorific. Some surgeons prefer to use 'Dr'. For example, a search of the website of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons shows that council members use 'Dr', 'Miss', 'Mr', 'Ms', 'Professor' and 'Associate Professor'.

It is best to contact the doctor's practice if you are unsure of their preferred honorific. You are unlikely to cause offence if you use the title (or honour) awarded most recently.

Example

- DoctorFarida Khan [Medical practitioner]
- DrWilson Chang MBBS [Medical practitioner]
- DrTina Macleod MDPhD[Medical practitioner with doctorate]
- DrPhil Smith BDS [Dentist]
- DrEve Fenton BVSc DVM [Veterinarian]

- MissPatricia Woo MBBS FRACS FAOrthA MsurgEd [Orthopaedic surgeon]
- ProfessorHenry Nicklin MBBS FRANZCP [Psychiatrist with academic title]

The digital edition includes the information from the sixth edition with updated and additional examples.

Capitalisation rules in digital edition are linked to the title's position in relation to the name. The digital edition also introduces the concept of a 'full title', mostly used in display contexts.

The sixth edition included relevant information about titles for academics and professionals.

The Content Guide had very brief information about abbreviations for some academic qualifications.

About this page

Evidence

American Psychological Association (2020) '6.15: Job titles and positions',Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edn, American Psychological Association, Washington DC.

Oxford University Press (2016) '5.10: Titles of office, rank, and relationship',New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

University of Chicago (2017) 'Names, terms and titles of work',Chicago manual of style,17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (Ahpra) (2021)National boards, Ahpra website, accessed 20 June 2021.

Australian National University (n.d.)University executive, ANU website, accessed 8 June 2020.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2016)It's an honour, PM&C website, accessed 13 June 2020.

Engineers Australia (n.d.)Engineer of the Year Awards, Engineers Australia website, accessed 8 June 2020.

Garvan Institute of Medical Research (2021) 'Leadership',About the Garvan Institute, Garvan Institute website, accessed 7 June 2021.

Medical Board of Australia (2012) 'Medical registration: what does it mean? Who should be registered?',Codes, Guidelines and Policies, Ahpra website, accessed 26 July 2021.

Monash University (n.d.)'Senior Monash staff',Organisational governance and structure, Monash University website, accessed 10 June 2020.

Murdoch University (n.d.) 'Environmental & Conservation Sciences',College of Science, Health, Engineering and Education: academic operations, Murdoch University website, accessed 19 July 2021.

National Centre of Biography (n.d.)Australian dictionary of biography, Australian Dictionary of Biography website, accessed 19 July 2021.

National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre (NCCTRC) (n.d.) 'Our people',About Us, NCCTRC website, accessed 6 July 2021.

Podiatric Board of Australia (2012) 'When is it necessary to be registered as a podiatry practitioner?',General Registration, Ahpra website, accessed 26 July 2021.

RMIT University (2021)Governance and management, RMIT University website, accessed 22 June 2021.

Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) (n.d.)Council, RACS website, accessed 28 June 2021.

The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia (n.d.)Australian honours and awards, The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia website, accessed 8 June 2020.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (n.d.)Fellowship, The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners website, accessed 8 June 2020.

University of Melbourne (n.d.) 'Honorary degree holders',Notable alumni and staff, University of Melbourne website, accessed 10 June 2020.

University of Technology Sydney (n.d.)Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, UTS website, accessed 23 June 2021.

University of Technology Sydney (n.d.) 'Our director: Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt',Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, UTS website, accessed 8 June 2020.

University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) (n.d.)Office of the Vice-Chancellor and President, USC website, accessed 16 July 2021.

University of Tasmania (2020),Biography, University of Tasmania website, accessed 19 May 2021.

University of Western Australia (2020) 'Former officers of the university',History of the university, University of Western Australia website, accessed 10 June 2020.

Veterinary Surgeons Board of Queensland (2018)Policy (general), Queensland Government website, accessed 20 June 2021.

This page was updated Friday 6 September 2024.

Australian Defence Force

Use the correct title and style to refer to members of the armed services. This guidance is intended primarily for users outside the Department of Defence and the Australian Defence Force.

Use terminology correctly

Use the term 'Defence' when you mean both the Department of Defence and the Australian Defence Force (ADF). 'Defence' is used to represent the organisation as a whole.

'Defence' has an initial capital when it is part of a formal name or title. Use lower case for generic references.

Use 'Australian Defence Force' and 'ADF' when referring to the Royal Australian Navy, Australian Army and Royal Australian Air Force, commanded by the Chief of the Defence Force.

Use 'Department of Defence' when referring to the department, headed by the Secretary of the Department of Defence.

Example

- Defence engages with industry to deliver procurement outcomes that support departmental and ADF capability.
- The institute's paper examines the implications for our defence strategy over the next decade.
- The aim is to support Australian Defence Force personnel and their families as they transition from military to civilian life.
- The Department of Defence operates under the Public Service Act 1999.

Follow the order of precedence for the 3 arms of the ADF

There are 3 arms of the ADF, known collectively as the 'services' ('Services' inside Defence). When referring to the services, follow the order of precedence established by the Defence Act 1903:

- Royal Australian Navy
- Australian Army
- Royal Australian Air Force.

Always use initial capitals when writing the short names of the services:

- Navy
- Army
- Air Force.

Example

- Defence Reserves are an essential part of the Navy, Army and Air Force

Address members of the ADF by rank, name and post-nominals

Use the following order to address members of the ADF:

- rank
- given name or initials
- family name
- post-nominals

- service (for commissioned officers in the Navy only).

Do this:
- the first time you write their name in body text
- in address blocks in correspondence
- when introducing an ADF member as speaker
- in official records of proceedings
- in lists in organisational publications such as annual reports.

ADF ranks are listed in the table 'Ranks and salutations'.

Example

- Rear Admiral Robert W Plath AM RAN
- Lieutenant General Susan Coyle AM CSC DSM
- Air Marshal Mel Hupfeld AO DSC
- [Don't use commas]

If you mention the name again in body text, use rank and family name.

Example

- Chief Petty Officer Ray Rosendale CSMis a Kuku Yalanji man of the Western Sunset Clan. He was born in Nambour and joined the Navy in 1991.Chief Petty Officer Rosendalenow has a role advising the Navy on First Nations cultural affairs.

Only one rank has a hyphen

Write military ranks of more than one word as separate words. Do not hyphenate the rank.

There is one exception from the Air Force: Air Vice-Marshal. It is always hyphenated.

Example

- Acting Sub Lieutenant DW Midson RAN
- Warrant Officer Class One K Felmingham NSC OAM
- Air Vice-MarshalCatherine Roberts AM CSC

Post-nominals

Post-nominals are letters after a name that stand for academic, civil and militaryawards and honours.

Write post-nominals after the family name. Place post-nominals before the shortened form showing service ('RAN').

Make sure you write post-nominals in theright order.

Don't use commas before or between post-nominals.

- Commander Algirdus DiciunasMBE CSM RAN
- Lieutenant General Natasha FoxAO CSC
- Air Commodore Michael KitcherAM DSC

Use 'RAN' to indicate Navy service for commissioned officers

Use 'RAN' (Royal Australian Navy) for all commissioned officers of the Navy. Place 'RAN' after the family name and any post-nominals.

Don't use an acronym to show service for officers in the Army or Air Force.

In Defence, 'RAN' is used to distinguish naval officers from officers in the other services and from naval officers in other countries.

Gazettal notices of Australian awards and honours follow this style. For consistency, the Style Manual recommends that Australian Government organisations also follow this practice.

- Captain Catherine Wilsen AO [Army]
- Captain Stephen Beckmann AO CSCRAN[Navy]

Write the rank before the title of ADF members who are knighted

When someone has a military rank and another title such as 'Sir', 'Dame' or 'the Honourable', place the military rank first.

- General SirJohn Monash GCMG KBE VD

Address chaplains and maritime spiritual wellbeing officers by title

Army and Air Force chaplains wear military rank.

Navy chaplains and maritime spiritual wellbeing officers (MSWOs) do not wear military rank. Instead, they wear chaplaincy or MWSO insignia and a service badge with the symbol of their faith or purpose. This gives them 'floating rank', meaning they take on the rank of the person they are talking to.

Address chaplains with their chaplaincy title, not a military rank.

MSWOs have been part of the Navy since 2020. Address them with their MSWO title, not a military rank.

Include any post-nominals.

The chaplaincy titles are:

- Principal Chaplain (Navy and Army) and Principal Air Chaplain (Air Force)
- Senior Chaplain (Navy) and Chaplain (Navy, Army and Air Force).

The MSWO titles include:

- Principal Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officer
- Senior Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officer
- Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officer.

Example

- Principal ChaplainDarren Jaensch [Army]
- Principal Air ChaplainKevin Russell CSC GAICD [Air Force]
- Senior ChaplainBrian Rayner OAM RAN [Navy]
- ChaplainCatherine Inches-Ogden CSC [Army]
- Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing OfficerTammy Dunne [Navy]

Address retired officers of the ADF by rank

Commissioned officers who retire can continue to use their military rank. When writing their name, use their rank and include '(Retd)' after any post-nominals.

Example

- Generalthe Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK CVO MC(Retd)

Avoid using the shortened forms of ranks

For internal Defence use, it is common to write the ranks in abbreviated form using capital letters.

Don't follow this convention in other types of content. Write the full rank with an initial capital letter.

LieutenantT Smith [Outside Defence]

LTT Smith [Defence only]

Address members of the ADF correctly in emails and letters

The style rule for address blocks applies to all members of the ADF.

The style rule for salutations changes with rank.

Address blocks

To write an address block, follow all preceding rules on this page.

The style of address blocks is the same for all ranks.

- rank
- given name or initials
- family name
- post-nominals
- 'RAN' for commissioned officers in the Navy
- '(Retd)'for retired commissioned officers who retain rank
- postal address.
- Brigadier Ana Duncan AM CSCCommandant Royal Military College-DuntroonStaff Cadet AvenueCampbell ACT 2612Lieutenant General Gregory Bilton AO CSCChief Joint OperationsHeadquarters Joint Operations Command (HQJOC)PO Box 7928Canberra BC ACT 2610His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd)Governor-General of the Commonwealth of AustraliaGovernment HouseDunrossil DriveYarralumla ACT 2600

Brigadier Ana Duncan AM CSCCommandant Royal Military College-DuntroonStaff Cadet AvenueCampbell ACT 2612

Lieutenant General Gregory Bilton AO CSCChief Joint OperationsHeadquarters Joint Operations Command (HQJOC)PO Box 7928Canberra BC ACT 2610

His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd)Governor-General of the Commonwealth of AustraliaGovernment HouseDunrossil DriveYarralumla ACT 2600

Salutations

The Style Manual follows the ADF's style for salutations.

The style of salutations depends onrank.

Don't include post-nominals in salutations.

Never add a comma after salutations.

Rule: Dear [Rank]

Use the rule for these ranks:

- Admiral, Rear Admiral, Commodore and Captain (Navy)
- General, Lieutenant General, Major General, Brigadier and Colonel (Army)
- Air Chief Marshal, Air Marshal, Air Vice-Marshal, Air Commodore and Group Captain (Air Force).
- Brigadier Ana Duncan AM CSC [Address block]
- Dear Brigadier [Salutation]

Rule: Dear [Rank Family name]

Use the rule for these ranks:

- Commander, Lieutenant Commander and Lieutenant (Navy)
- Lieutenant Colonel, Major and Captain (Army)
- Wing Commander, Squadron Leader and Flight Lieutenant (Air Force).
- Lieutenant Commander Siobhan Sturdy CSM RAN [Address block]
- Dear Lieutenant Commander Sturdy [Salutation]

Rule: Dear [Honorific Family name]

Use the rule for these ranks:

- Sub Lieutenant, Acting Sub Lieutenant and Midshipman (Navy)
- Lieutenant, Second Lieutenant and Officer Cadet (Army)
- Flying Officer, Pilot Officer and Officer Cadet (Air Force).

ADF style is to use a conventional title before the family name for these ranks.

Use the honorifics 'Ms', 'Mr', 'Mx', 'Mrs' or 'Dr' when it is possible to identify the appropriate title. If this is difficult, follow the 'Dear [Rank Family name]' rule.

- Officer Cadet Dean Collins OAM [Address block]
- Dear Mr Collins [Preferred salutation]
- Dear Officer Cadet Collins [Alternative salutation]

Rule: Dear [Rank Family name]

Use the rule for ranks from:

- Warrant Officer of the Navy to Recruit (Navy)
- Regimental Sergeant Major of the Army to Recruit (Army)
- Warrant officer of the Air Force to Aircraftman/Aircraftwoman (Air Force).
- Lance Corporal A Fenech BM [Address block]
- Dear Lance Corporal Fenech [Salutation]

Salutations for ADF chaplains and maritime spiritual wellbeing officers do not change with rank.

Rule: Dear [Chaplaincy title]

Rule: Dear [MSWO title]

- Chaplain Jui-Hsiang Su CSM [Address block]Dear Chaplain [Salutation]Principal Air Chaplain Rodger Boerth AM [Address block]Dear Principal Air Chaplain [Salutation]Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officer J Chan RAN [Address block]Dear Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officer [Salutation]

Chaplain Jui-Hsiang Su CSM [Address block]Dear Chaplain [Salutation]

Principal Air Chaplain Rodger Boerth AM [Address block]Dear Principal Air Chaplain [Salutation]

Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officer J Chan RAN [Address block]Dear Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officer [Salutation]

Other examples appear in the table that follows.

Ranks and salutations (in order of precedence)

*If it's difficult to establish the person's preferred honorific, use the rule 'Dear [Rank Family name]'.

Leading Aircraftman

Leading Aircraftwoman

Aircraftwoman

Aircraftman

Aircraftwoman Recruit

Aircraftman Recruit

Dear Recruit Rarru

Dear Aircraftman Recruit De Jong

Principal Chaplain

Senior Chaplain

Principal Chaplain

Chaplain

Principal Air Chaplain

Chaplain

Principal Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officer

Senior Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officer

Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officer

Guidance in the digital edition broadly follows theAustralian Defence Force writing manual(an internal Defence resource). There are also style conventions in the writing manual that the digital edition does not follow.

The digital edition consolidates information from the sixth edition and provides updated examples. It has advice on capitalisation for internal military use that was not in the sixth edition.

The digital edition outlines the order of precedence for the armed services and includes new guidance about maritime spiritual wellbeing officers.

The sixth edition had a table of armed service ranks in Australia. The digital edition has a table of ranks and associated salutation rules.

Examples in the digital edition do not follow the sixth edition's requirement for a comma before and between post-nominals. This is consistent with this edition's recommendation to use minimal punctuation.

The Content Guide did not have information about forms of address and ranks for the ADF.

About this page

Air Force (Royal Australian Air Force) (n.d.)Our leaders, Air Force website, accessed 20 August 2021.

Army (Australian Army) (n.d.)Our leaders, Army website, accessed 26 August 2021.

Army(n.d.)Ranks, Army website, accessed 4 July 2022.

Australian War Memorial (n.d.)Collection, Australian War Memorial website, accessed 14 June 2022.

Craig J (11 May 2020) 'New chaplaincy branch reflects secular care option',Defence News, Defence website, accessed 30 August 2021.

Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal (2020)Navy Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officer, DFRT website, accessed 10 June 2022.

Department of Defence (2008)Australian Defence Force: badges of rank and special insignia, Department of Defence, Canberra.

Department of Defence (2014)Australian Defence Force writing manual, Defence Publishing Service, Canberra.

Department of Defence (2021)Defence annual report 2020–2021, Defence website, accessed 2 June 2022.

Department of Defence (n.d.) 'Equivalent ranks and classifications',ADF pay and conditions manual, Defence website, accessed 10 November 2021.

Department of Defence (n.d.)Procurement and contracting, Defence website, accessed 2 June 2022.

Devlin D (1 June 2021) 'Navy's Indigenous advisers drive change',Defence News, Defence website, accessed 30 August 2021.

Directorate of History Services (2019)House style for authors, editors and publishers[PDF 1.47 MB], Air Force website, accessed 19 August 2021.

PM&C (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) (n.d.)It's an honour, PM&C website, accessed 4 July 2022.

PM&C (n.d.)Order of wearing, PM&C website, accessed 4 July 2022.

National Archives of Australia (n.d.)Abbreviations used in World War I and World War II service records, National Archives of Australia website, accessed 27 August 2021.

Navy (Royal Australian Navy) (n.d.)Ranks of the Royal Australian Navy, Navy website, accessed 4 July 2022.

Navy (n.d.)Royal Australian Navy personnel biographies, Navy website, accessed 26 August 2021.

Navy (n.d.)Senior leadership team, Navy website, accessed 10 August 2021.

Rosendale R (April 2015) 'Chief Petty Officer Ray Rosendale, CSM [PDF 2.52 MB]'Reconciliation News, Reconciliation Australia website, accessed 30 August 2021.

The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia (2020)About the Governor-General, The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia website, accessed 4 July 2022.

The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia (n.d.)Australian honours and awards, The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia website, accessed 4 July 2022.

This page was updated Tuesday 30 July 2024.

Awards and honours

Post-nominals and titles of status show the awards and honours an individual has. List them in the correct order.

Use post-nominals in the correct order

Post-nominals are the shortened forms for academic awards and civil and military honours.

There is anorder in which to write the post-nominals.

In summary, the rule is to write the highest honour first. The order is:

- post-nominals for honours and awards
- King's Counsel (KC) or Senior Counsel (SC) or Justice of the Peace (JP)
- university degrees and diplomas
- membership of professional associations
- membership of parliament.

Don't use:

- full stops or spaces within post-nominals
- commas before or between post-nominals.

Example

- Professor Fiona WoodAM FAHMS
- The Hon Ken WyattAM MP
- The Hon Linda BurneyMP

Write titles before a person's name in the correct order

Vice-regal and ecclesiastical titles and Australian Defence Force ranks usually precede all other titles.

Follow these with any other titles (such as 'Dame', 'Sir' and 'Dr') immediately before a person's name.

Example

- His Excellency General the HonourableDavid Hurley AC DSC (Retd)
- The Right Reverend DrSarah Macneil
- General SirJohn Wilton KBE CB DSO

The reference to 'King's Counsel' replaced the reference to 'Queen's Counsel' upon the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

The digital edition consolidates information from the sixth edition and uses topic-specific pages to help users find what they need. It includes updated examples.

The sixth edition had substantial information on awards and honours spread throughout the manual, but concentrated in an appendix.

Examples in the digital edition do not follow the sixth edition's requirement for a comma before and between post-nominals. This is consistent with this edition's recommendation to use minimal punctuation.

The Content Guide had brief guidance for punctuating abbreviations of honours, awards and distinctions. The digital edition is consistent with that guidance.

About this page

Evidence

Anglican Diocese of Grafton (n.d)History, Anglican Diocese of Grafton website, accessed 10 June 2020.

Australian Council of Health and Medical Sciences (2020)Council of the Academy, Australian Council of Health and Medical Sciences website, accessed 8 June 2020.

Debrett's (1991)Debrett's handbook of Australia, Debrett's Peerage (Australasia) & Collins, Sydney.

Department of Defence (n.d.)The order of wearing Australian honours and awards list, Department of Defence website, accessed 8 June 2020.

Gobbet H (2017)Indigenous parliamentarians, federal and state: a quick guide, Parliament Library, Parliament of Australia, accessed 8 June 2020.

Hyslop R (1992)Dear you: a guide to forms of address, AGPS Press, Canberra.

Joel A (1988)Australian protocol and procedures, 2nd edn, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

Parliament of Australia (n.d.)Senators and members, Parliament of Australia website, accessed 8 June 2020.

The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia (n.d.)About the Governor-General, The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia website, accessed 8 June 2020.

This page was updated Monday 12 September 2022.

Diplomats

Use the correct term when referring to ambassadors, high commissioners, nuncios and other diplomatic staff.

Use the correct term when referring to diplomats

The title for diplomats depends on what they represent:
- High commissioners represent Commonwealth countries.
- Ambassadors represent non-Commonwealth countries.
- Nuncios represent the Holy See, the governing body of the Roman Catholic Church.

Use initial capitals for the titles of high commissioners, ambassadors and nuncios

Use initial capitals when writing to ambassadors, high commissioners and nuncios.
- HisExcellencyMr Babar Amin,HighCommissioner for Pakistan

The pronouns 'His' and 'Her' are part of the title. Write these with an initial capital as well.

Address high commissioners, ambassadors and nuncios with 'His Excellency' or 'Her Excellency'

Use 'His Excellency' or 'Her Excellency' to address high commissioners, ambassadors and nuncios.
- Her Excellencythe Hon Dame Annette Faye King, High Commissioner for New Zealand
- Her ExcellencyMs Francesca Tardioli, Ambassador of Italy
- His ExcellencyMr Tim Kane, Ambassador to Brazil
- His ExcellencyArchbishop (Most Rev) Adolfo Tito Yllana, Apostolic Nuncio for Holy See

Emails and letters to ambassadors, high commissioners and nuncios

In formal correspondence with ambassadors, high commissioners and nuncios:

- Open with 'Your Excellency'.
- Conclude with 'Yours faithfully'.

In informal correspondence:

- Open with 'Dear High Commissioner' or 'Dear Ambassador'.
- Conclude with 'Yours sincerely'.

Address other diplomatic staff by name and appointment

Use the name and official position to address:

- diplomatic staff (such as chargés d'affaires and counsellors)
- consular appointees (such as consuls general, vice-consuls and honorary consuls).
- Mr John Smith, Chargé d'Affaires
- Ms Susan Grace,Consul General in Chennai

The digital edition consolidates information from the sixth edition and provides updated examples.

The Content Guide did not have specific information about titles and forms of address for diplomats.

About this page

DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) (n.d.)Australian ambassadors and other representatives,DFAT website, accessed 8 June 2020.

DFAT (n.d.)Foreign embassies and consulates in Australia, DFAT website, accessed 8 June 2020.

DFAT (n.d.)Protocol guidelines,DFAT website, accessed 8 June 2020.

Queensland Government Department of the Premier and Cabinet (2020)Protocol handbook: a guide for Queensland government officers, Department of the Premier and Cabinet website, accessed 8 June 2020.

This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021.

Judiciary

Use the correct titles to refer to members of the judiciary.

Use the correct form to refer to judges and magistrates

Refer to judges of the following courts as 'Justice' and use the title 'The Honourable':

- High Court

- Federal Court
- Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia
- supreme courts in the states and territories.

Use the titles 'Your Honour', 'His Honour' or 'Her Honour' for judges of:
- district courts
- county courts.

High Court and Federal Court

Instructions for addressing judges and registrars are at:
- High Court –How do I address a High Court judge? [PDF 31 KB]
- Federal Court –How to address [Federal Court] judges & judicial registrars.

Judges of these courts retain the title 'The Honourable' for life.
- The HonourableChief Justice Stephen Gageler AC
- The HonourableSusan Kiefel [Retired.]

You can also abbreviate the term 'Honourable' to 'Hon' without a full stop.
- The HonJustice Penelope Neskovcin
- The HonJustice Dowling

Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia and the supreme courts

Refer to judges of the following courts as 'Justice' and use the title 'The Honourable':
- Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia
- supreme courts in the states and territories.
- The Honourable JusticeChristine Mead
- The Honourable JusticeJoshua Wilson

Judges of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia and chief justices of the supreme courts in states and territories retain the title 'The Honourable' for life. Supreme court justices also generally retain the title for life.

In emails and letters, use 'Your Honour' to address:
- a justice of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia
- a judge of a state or territory supreme court.

Conclude correspondence with 'Yours faithfully'.

District and county courts

Address judges of the following courts as 'Judge':

- district courts
- county courts.

Use the title 'His Honour' or 'Her Honour' for judges of these courts.

- Her Honour JudgeMatteo
- His Honour JudgeJarro

In emails and letters:

- Open with 'Your Honour'.
- Conclude with 'Yours faithfully'.

Magistrate and local courts

Address magistrates in court as 'Your Honour'.When outside court, address them as 'Magistrate'.

When addressing an envelope use 'Her Honour Magistrate' or 'His Honour Magistrate'.

- His Honour MagistrateSmart
- Her Honour MagistrateDuvnjak

Knighted judges

Address a judge who is a knight or dame as 'The Honourable Sir' or 'The Honourable Dame'.

- The Honourable SirNinian Stephen KG AK GCMG GCVO KBE QC
- The Honourable DameRoma Flinders Mitchell AC DBE CVO QC

On subsequent mention, you can use 'Sir' or 'Dame' and the person's given name.

- SirNinian
- DameRoma

The digital edition includes information from the sixth edition with updated examples.

The digital edition removes the sixth edition's requirement to use full stops with the abbreviation of 'The Honourable' to 'The Hon'.

This change is supported by evidence from Australian corpora and is consistent with the digital edition's recommendation to use minimal punctuation.

For the same reason, digital edition examples do not follow the sixth edition's requirement for a comma before and between post-nominals.

The Content Guide did not include information on titles for the judiciary.

About this page

County Court of Victoria (2020)Judicial contacts, County Court of Victoria website, accessed 8 June 2020.

Courts Administration Authority of South Australia (n.d.) 'Judicial officers',Our courts, CAA website, accessed 8 June 2020.

Family Court of Australia (n.d.)Judges of the Family Court, Family Court of Australia website, accessed 8 June 2020.

Federal Court of Australia (n.d.)How to address judges and judicial registrars,Federal Court of Australia website, accessed 8 June 2020.

High Court of Australia (n.d.)How do I address a High Court judge?[PDF 31 KB], High Court of Australia, accessed 13 August 2024.

New South Wales Bar Association (2020)Court structure, judges' titles and order of seniority[PDF 897 KB], New South Wales Bar Association, accessed 8 June 2020.

Queensland Courts (2020)Judges of the District Court, Queensland Courts website, accessed 8 June 2020.

University of Technology Sydney (6 January 2020) 'The dummies' guide to addressing judicial officers', Faculty of Law News, accessed 8 June 2020.

Victoria Law Foundation (2013)What do I call the judge?[PDF 1.4 MB], Victoria Law Foundation, accessed 8 June 2020.

This page was updated Tuesday 13 August 2024.

Parliaments and councils

Refer to members of Australian parliaments and councils in the correct style. Follow these rules to address and title people correctly.

Capitalise the titles of the current prime minister and treasurer

Capitalise the titles of the current holders of the positions of:
- Prime Minister
- Treasurer.

Do this even when the titles are abbreviated.

If referencing prime ministers or treasurers generically, use lower case.

Example
- ThePrime Ministerannounced the new initiative this morning.
- ThePMannounced the new initiative this morning. [Less formal]
- Terms of office vary forprime ministersaround the world. [Generic]

- TheTreasurerwill present the mid-year report tomorrow.
- In many countriestreasurersare preparing responses to this latest development. [Generic]

Use lower case letters for former prime ministers and treasurers of Australia.

Example

- Alfred Deakin served 3 terms asprime ministerof Australia.
- Australia's first femaleprime ministerwas Julia Gillard, who took office in 2010.
- Peter Costello remains the longest-servingtreasurerin Australian history.

Capitalise titles for current senators and members of the Australian Parliament

The Parliament of Australia website has instructions forhow to address senators and members.

Write these titles as follows:
- the Prime Minister
- the President of the Senate
- the Speaker of the House of Representatives
- ministers (Senate)
- ministers (House of Representatives)
- assistant ministers (Senate)
- assistant ministers (House of Representatives)
- senators
- members (House of Representatives).

People elected to the upper house take the title 'Senator' before their given name.

Example

- SenatorClaire Chandler

Members of the House of Representatives take the initialism 'MP' after their name. Write it after any other post-nominals. Don't use commas before or between post-nominals.

Example

- Ms Zali Steggall OAMMP

Address certain office holders of the Australian Parliament as 'Honourable'

Use the title 'Honourable' for ministers (including the prime minister) and parliamentary secretaries in the Australian Parliament. The title is given to these office holders because they are members of theFederal Executive Council. They retain the title for life.

The abbreviation for 'Honourable' is 'Hon' without a full stop.

Example

- The HonChris Bowen MP, Minister for Climate Change and Energy [Serving minister]
- The HonDarren Chester MP [Serving MP and former minister]
- The HonWarren Entsch MP [Serving MP and former parliamentary secretary]

Use the title 'Senator' before 'the Honourable' if the minister or parliamentary secretary is a member of the Senate.

Example

- Senator the HonPenny Wong, Minister for Foreign Affairs

The presiding officers and former office holders of state parliaments

The President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives (the presiding officers) use the title 'Honourable'.

'Honourable' is also given to members of the Australian Parliament who are:
- former members of state ministries
- former presiding officers of state parliaments.
- Senator the HonSusan Lines, President of the Senate
- The HonMilton Dick MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives
- The HonBob Katter MP [Former minister in the Queensland Government]

In formal emails and letters to a minister:
- Open with 'Dear Minister'.
- Conclude with 'Yours faithfully'.

In less formal correspondence:
- Open with 'My dear Minister'.
- Conclude with 'Yours sincerely'.

Use the appropriate form for members of state and territory parliaments

In formal emails and letters, address members of state and territory parliaments with the relevant post-nominal after their name.

Number of chambers in state and territory parliament

The parliaments of all states except Qld are 'bicameral'. This means parliament has 2 chambers or houses:

- the Legislative Council – also called the 'upper house'
- the Legislative Assembly (NSW, Vic and WA) or House of Assembly (SA and Tas) – also called the 'lower house'.

The parliaments of Qld, the ACT and the NT are 'unicameral'. This means parliament has one chamber or house – the Legislative Assembly.

Use the correct post-nominal

Members of state and territory parliaments use the post-nominal:

- MLC (Member of the Legislative Council)
- MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly)
- MP (Member of the Legislative Assembly or Member of the House of Assembly).

All bicameral parliaments use the post-nominal 'MLC' for members of their upper houses.

The choice of 'MLA' or 'MP' for members of state and territory parliaments is less clear-cut.

Follow these rules to use the correct post-nominal.

Use MLC for members of the Legislative Council of:

- NSW
- SA
- Tas
- Vic
- WA.

Use MLA for members of the Legislative Assembly of:

- ACT
- NT
- WA.

Use MP for members of the Legislative Assembly of:

- NSW
- Qld
- Vic.

Use MP for members of the House of Assembly of:

- SA
- Tas.

Example

- The Hon Nicolas Pierre GoiranMLC
- Ms Tara CheyneMLA
- Mr Danny O'BrienMP
- Dr Amy MacMahonMP

A parliamentarian may have other post-nominals after their name. These can include:

- civilian and military honours
- educational and professional qualifications.

If so, write these in the same way the parliamentarian does. If you're unsure, check with the parliamentarian's office.

Emails and letters to members of a state or territory parliament

In formal correspondence with a member of a state or territory parliament:

- Open with 'Dear Ms' (or 'Mr', 'Mrs', 'Mx', 'Dr' and so on).
- Conclude with 'Yours faithfully'.

In less formal correspondence:

- Open with 'Dear Mr' (or 'Ms', 'Mrs', 'Mx', 'Dr' and so on).
- Conclude with 'Yours sincerely'.

Address certain office holders in state and NT parliaments as 'Honourable'

Use 'Honourable' when addressing all members of the executive councils of the states and the NT:

- premiers and ministers in all states
- chief minister and ministers in the NT
- former ministers in all states and the NT.

Use 'Honourable' when addressing these parliamentarians:

- members of all state legislative councils except in Vic
- Leader of the Opposition in Tas
- presidents of all legislative councils
- speakers of all parliaments except in the ACT.
- NSW:The HonBenjamin Cameron Franklin MLC, President of the Legislative Council

- NT: The Hon Mark Monaghan MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
- Qld: The Hon Scott Stewart MP, Minister for Resources [Serving minister]
- SA: The Hon Jing Shyuan Lee MLC [Member of the Legislative Council]
- Tas: The Hon Rebecca White MP, Leader of the Opposition
- Vic: The Hon Daniel Andrews MP, Premier of Victoria
- WA: The Hon Sophia Moermond MLC [Member of the Legislative Council]

Office holders in the ACT Legislative Assembly don't use the title 'Honourable'. Ministers in the ACT have more than one portfolio. Address emails and letters to them using the ministerial title appropriate to the topic.

- Ms Joy Burch MLA, Speaker of the ACT Legislative Assembly
- Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health
- Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
- Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Families and Community Services

Address state premiers correctly

Address state premiers as 'The Hon [given and family names] MLA/MP, Premier of …'

Check the premier's website to see whether they include other post-nominals in their title, such as academic or professional qualifications.

- The Hon Peter Malinauskas MP, Premier of South Australia
- The Hon Roger Cook BA GradDipBus (PR) MBA MLA, Premier of Western Australia

In formal emails and letters with a premier:

- Open with 'Dear Premier'.
- Conclude with 'Yours faithfully'.

In less formal correspondence:

- Open with 'My dear Premier'.
- Conclude with 'Yours sincerely'.

Address the chief minister of the NT correctly

Address the chief minister of the NT with details in this order:

- 'The Hon'
- their given and family names
- 'MLA, Chief Minister of the Northern Territory'.
- The Hon Natasha Fyles MLA, Chief Minister of the Northern Territory

In formal emails and letters with the chief minister:

- Open with 'Dear Chief Minister'.

- Conclude with 'Yours faithfully'.

In less formal correspondence:
- Open with 'Dear Chief Minister'.
- Conclude with 'Yours sincerely'.

Address the chief minister of the ACT with their preferred title

Address the chief minister of the ACT with details in this order:
- the appropriate title ('Dr', 'Mr', 'Ms', 'Mx' and so on)
- their given and family names
- 'MLA, Chief Minister of the ACT'.
- Mr Andrew Barr MLA, Chief Minister of the ACT

In formal emails and letters with the chief minister:
- Open with 'Dear Chief Minister'.
- Conclude with 'Yours faithfully'.

In less formal correspondence:
- Open with 'Dear Chief Minister'.
- Conclude with 'Yours sincerely'.

Address mayors and members of local governments with the correct title

Address members of local governments in urban and regional areas differently.

Check the current title of a mayor or local government member to ensure accuracy. Check with the mayor's or member's office if you're unsure.

Mayors of state capital cities

Use the title 'The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of [the name of the city]' for lord mayors of:
- Adelaide
- Brisbane
- Hobart
- Melbourne
- Perth
- Sydney.

In emails and letters, you can use either the full form 'Right Honourable' or its shortened form 'Rt Hon' (without full stops).

Add 'Councillor' before the names of the lord mayors of Brisbane, Hobart, Melbourne and Sydney.

Put a comma after the name of the city.

- The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, CouncillorAdrian Schrinner
- The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Hobart, CouncillorAnna M Reynolds
- The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, CouncillorSally Capp
- The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Sydney, CouncillorClover Moore AO

Use the honorific 'Ms', 'Mr', 'Mx', 'Mrs' or 'Dr' with the names of the lord mayors of Adelaide and Perth.

- The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Adelaide,DrJane Lomax-Smith AM

Address the lord mayor of Darwin as 'The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Darwin'.

- The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Darwin, the Hon Kon Vatskalis

In emails and letters to a lord mayor:

- Open with 'Dear Lord Mayor'.
- Conclude with 'Yours faithfully'.

Mayors outside capital cities

Address the mayors of Geelong, Newcastle and Wollongong as 'The Right Worshipful the [Lord] Mayor of [name of the city]'.

- The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Greater Geelong, Mr Trent Sullivan
- The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Newcastle, Ms Nuatali Nelmes
- The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Wollongong, Mr Gordon Bradbery AM

Address mayors of other cities as 'His' or 'Her Worship the Mayor of [name of city]'.

- Her Worship the Mayor of Fremantle, Ms Hannah Fitzhardinge

In correspondence:

- Open with 'Dear Mayor' (or 'Dear Lord Mayor' if applicable).
- Conclude with 'Yours faithfully'.

Shire presidents, aldermen and councillors

Address a shire president as 'President [family name]'. The abbreviation for 'President' is 'Pres' without a full stop, but use the full title 'President' because it's clearer.

- PresidentSmith

Address an alderman (regardless of gender) as 'Alderman[family name]'. The abbreviation for 'Alderman' is 'Ald' without a full stop.

- AldermanMiller

- AldMiller

Address a councillor as 'Councillor [family name]'. The abbreviation for 'Councillor' is 'Cr' without a full stop.

- CouncillorBrown
- CrBrown

In formal emails and letters:

- Open with 'Dear President', 'Dear Alderman' or 'Dear Councillor' as appropriate.
- Conclude with 'Yours faithfully'.

In less formal correspondence:

- Open with 'Dear President', 'Dear Alderman' or 'Dear Councillor [family name]'.
- Conclude with 'Yours sincerely'.

The digital edition consolidates information in the sixth edition and provides updated examples.

The digital edition removes the sixth edition's requirement to use full stops with the abbreviation of 'The Honourable' to 'The Hon'.

This change is supported by evidence from Australian corpora and is consistent with the digital edition's recommendation to use minimal punctuation.

For the same reason, digital edition examples do not follow the sixth edition's requirement for a comma before and between post-nominals.

The Content Guide has brief information about titles for members of federal, state, territory and local governments.

About this page

ACT Legislation Register (2023)Ministerial appointment and administrative arrangements, ACT Legislation Register website, accessed 5 July 2023.

ACT Legislative Assembly (n.d.)Members, ACT Legislative Assembly website, accessed 3 July 2023.

Brisbane City Council (n.d.) (2020)Councillors and wards, Brisbane City Council website, accessed 3 July 2023.

Chief Minister of the Northern Territory (n.d.)Ministry, Chief Minister of the Northern Territory website, accessed 3 July 2023.

City of Adelaide (2020)Your council, City of Adelaide website, accessed 3 July 2023.

City of Darwin (2020)Lord mayor & aldermen, City of Darwin website, accessed 3 July 2023.

City of Fremantle (2020)Your council, City of Fremantle website, accessed 3 July 2023.

City of Greater Geelong (n.d.)Mayor and councillors, City of Greater Geelong website, accessed 3 July 2023.

City of Hobart (2020)Current elected members, City of Hobart website, accessed 3 July 2023.

City of Melbourne (2020)Lord mayor and councillors, City of Melbourne website, accessed 3 July 2023.

City of Newcastle (n.d.)Councillors, City of Newcastle website, accessed 3 July 2023.

City of Perth (n.d.)Council, City of Perth website, accessed 3 July 2023.

City of Sydney (n.d.)Councillors, City of Sydney website, accessed 3 July 2023.

Council of Australian Governments (n.d.)COAG members, Council of Australian Governments website, accessed 25 March 2020.

Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory (n.d.)Members, Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory website, accessed 3 July 2023.

NSW Government Premier and Cabinet (2020)Protocol: the table of precedence NSW, NSW Government Premier and Cabinet website, accessed 8 June 2020.

Parliament of Australia (2020)Hansard style guide[internal style guide], version 8.1, Department of Parliamentary Services, Canberra.

Parliament of Australia (n.d.)How to address senators and members, Parliament of Australia website, accessed 8 June 2020.

Parliament of Australia (n.d.)Senators and members, Parliament of Australia website, accessed 3 July 2023.

Parliament of New South Wales (n.d.)Parliament of New South Wales [homepage], Parliament of New South Wales website, accessed 3 July 2023.

Parliament of Tasmania (n.d.)Parliament of Tasmania [homepage], Parliament of Tasmania website, accessed 3 July 2023.

Parliament of Victoria (n.d.)Parliament of Victoria [homepage], Parliament of Victoria website, accessed 3 July 2023.

Parliament of Western Australia (n.d.)Current members, Parliament of Western Australia website, accessed 3 July 2023.

Parliament South Australia (n.d.)Members home, Parliament South Australia website, accessed 3 July 2023.

Queensland Government Department of the Premier and Cabinet (2020)Protocol handbook: a guide for Queensland government officers, Department of the Premier and Cabinet website, accessed 28 January 2020.

Queensland Parliament (n.d.)Members, Queensland Parliament website, accessed 3 July 2023.

South Australian Government Department of the Premier and Cabinet (n.d.)Guide to titles and forms of address[PDF 304.6 KB], SA Department of Premier and Cabinet website, accessed 8 June 2020.

Victorian Government (n.d.)How to address royalty and officials, vic.gov.au, accessed 8 June 2020.

Western Australian Government (2019)A Western Australian Government guide to titles and forms of address,WA.gov.au, accessed 8 June 2020.

Wollongong City Council (2020)Your council officials, Wollongong City Council, accessed 3 July 2023.

This page was updated Wednesday 7 August 2024.

Royalty, vice-royalty and nobility

Royalty and representatives of the royal family should be addressed with their correct title.

Always capitalise the titles of current royals

Always use capitals for the title of the current Australian monarch.

The full title of the current monarch of Australia is 'Charles the Third, by the Grace of God King of Australia and His other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth'.

Example

- His Majesty The King
- Next week, theKingwill visit Australia.

Address letters to the King to his private secretary.

Example

- To the Private Secretary to His Majesty The King

The royal family

The title of the King's wife, Queen Camilla, is 'Her Majesty The Queen'.

The title of the late Queen Elizabeth II is 'Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II'.

The title of the late Queen's husband, Prince Philip, is 'His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh'.

The King's elder son, Prince William, is titled 'His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales'.

Prince William's wife, Catherine, is titled 'Her Royal Highness The Princess of Wales'.

Address letters to Prince William to his private secretary. You can use the shortened form for 'His Royal Highness' in this instance.

- To the Private Secretary toHRHThe Prince of Wales

Use an initial capital for 'The' for the formal titles of the King and his immediate family.

- ThePrince George
- ThePrincess Royal

Use regnal numbers (I, II, V) for titles of monarchs and religious leaders

Regnal numbers are upper case roman numerals that are used for the titles of monarchs and popes.

Don't use digits or ordinal numbers, even though you might pronounce them like that.

Correct

- MargretheII
- RamaIX
- GewargisIII

Incorrect

- Margrethethe second
- Rama9
- Gewargisthe 3rd

Use a non-breaking space for names with regnal numbers

Put a non-breaking space between the name and the regnal number. A non-breaking space means that line breaks won't split up both elements of the name. The name and number will stay together on one line.

You can insert a non-breaking space using the Unicode character U+00A0.

In HTML, use the entity   to insert a non-breaking space. You can also use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Shift+Spacebar in Word.

Use a narrow no-break space between the name and the regnal number.

The narrow no-break space ensures that the:

- name and number stays together on one line
- spacing between name and number doesn't change when text is justified.

You can insert a narrow no-break space using the Unicode character U+202F.

Capitalise 'Governor-General' when it's part of the formal title

The position of governor-general in Australia is known as vice-royalty. The Governor-General represents the King in Australia.

Address the Governor-General of Australia in the following style and order:

- 'His/Her Excellency the Honourable'
- prefixed titles
- given name and family name
- post-nominals
- 'Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia'.

You might need to vary the order of the items in the title to suit the titles of the incumbent. For example, place:

- military rank before 'the Honourable'
- 'Sir' or 'Dame' after 'the Honourable'.

Example

- His ExcellencyGeneralthe Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd), Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia
- Her Excellency the HonourableDameQuentin Bryce AD CVO, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

When you are referring to the generic term, use lower case 'governor-general'. When you are referring to 2 or more people who hold or have held the title, use lower case and refer to them as 'governors-general'.

Example

- Australia has had 28 governors-general. A governor-general's role is to represent the monarch.

Correspondence to the Governor-General

Address correspondence to the Governor-General to the Official Secretary at Government House, Canberra.

To address the Governor-General personally in formal correspondence:

- Open with 'Your Excellency'.
- Conclude with 'Yours faithfully'.

In less formal correspondence:

- Open with 'Dear Governor-General'.
- Conclude with 'Yours sincerely'.

For the partner of the Governor-General:

- Address a female partner as 'Her Excellency' or 'Your Excellency'.

- Address a male partner as 'His Excellency' or 'Your Excellency'.

The digital edition was updated to reflect changes to royal titles upon the coronation of King Charles III.

The digital edition gives updated guidance and examples on forms of address for royalty, vice-royalty and nobility.

These examples do not follow the sixth edition's requirement for a comma before and between post-nominals. This is consistent with the digital edition's recommendation to use minimal punctuation. The digital edition also includes advice on regnal numbers.

The sixth edition had relevant information on titles for royal and vice-royals. Advice on numbers in titles was in a different part of the manual.

The Content Guide did not cover this topic.

About this page

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2023)Why is Camilla's title now Queen and why did Prince Philip never get called king?, ABC News website, accessed 9 May 2023.

Debrett's (2023)A tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Debrett's website, accessed 9 May 2023.

Debrett's (2023)Addressing the royal family, Debrett's website, accessed 9 May 2023.

Debrett's (2023)Who can be a prince or a princess?, Debrett's website, accessed 23 January 2024.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2023)The life and coronation of King Charles III, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, accessed 8 May 2023.

Parliament of Australia (2020)Hansard style guide[internal style guide], version 8.1, Department of Parliamentary Services, Canberra.

The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia (n.d.)About the Governor-General, The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia website, accessed 8 June 2020.

The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia (2019)Former governors-general, The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia website, accessed 8 June 2020.

The Royal Household (2023)The Royal Family, royal.uk, accessed 9 May 2023.

This page was updated Friday 6 September 2024.