https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions Grammar, punctuation and conventions Reference this section for definitive rules and examples of Australian Government style. Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution 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 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 https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/types-words 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 Nouns Prepositions Pronouns Verbs Parts of sentences Punctuation Spelling Shortened words and phrases Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution 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. 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. Fixing a misplaced modifier is more complicated. Sentences with this issue often need some rewriting. 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.] 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.] Release notes 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 References 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. University of Chicago Press (2017) Chicago manual of style: the essential guide for writers, editors, and publishers, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. Last updated This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021. 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.] https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/parts-sentences 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. The predicate can sometimes appear as a whole sentence because the subject is implied. This can depend on the 'mood' of the verb. Spelling Shortened words and phrases Numbers and

measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution 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.] 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. A noun phrase that is part of the subject is partially formed by determiners (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. Objects and complements An object is the thing, person or concept that complements the verb. Objects can be direct or indirect. Some verbs have no action. They have complements that describe a quality or characteristic of the subject. 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’.] Example They met in the boardroom. [‘They’ is the subject.] People use the website to find information. [‘People’ is the subject.] The Digital Service Standard has 13 criteria. [‘The Digital Service Standard’ is the subject.] The heavy rain that fell last week subdued the fire. [‘The heavy rain that fell last week’ is the subject.] Example They met in the boardroom. [‘met’ is the verb] The meeting finished early. [‘finished’ is the verb] They were all late. [‘were’ is the verb] Example 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.] Sentences are simple, compound or complex Simple sentences A simple sentence contains only one main (or principal) clause. This means it has only one complete verb in it. The subject can be implied by using a verb in the imperative mood. 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. If the 2 clauses share the same subject, don’t repeat the subject or insert a comma before the conjunction. You could also write this as 2 short sentences, but this approach can appear repetitive. Example 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.] Example 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.] Example Enter your verification code. [The implied subject is ‘you’. The verb is ‘enter’. ‘Your verification code’ complements the verb to form the predicate.] Example 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.] Example 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’.] Example Complex sentences A complex sentence contains a main clause and at least one subordinate clause. You can start the sentence with the main clause. You can also start the sentence with the subordinate clause to change the emphasis. 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. 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. The agency planned to start the project next year. The agency ran out of funding. [‘The agency’ is the subject of both sentences.] Example She finished the report before she left work. [The focus of the sentence is that ‘she finished the report’, which is the main clause.] Example 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.] Example Wind forecasts are 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 produced by computer models to show average speeds. [Passive voice with modified sentence structure: ‘by computer models’ is an adverbial phrase. It answers the question, ‘Who or what produces wind forecasts?’] Computer models produce 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?’] Example A formal complaint was made about the use of discriminatory language. Release notes The digital edition has practical guidance on plain language. It relates grammatical concepts to the principles of plain language and discusses plain language sentences. It consolidates information from the sixth edition and highlights the basics about clauses. 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. References 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. Last updated This page was updated Thursday 22 December 2022. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/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. Brackets and parentheses Colons Commas Dashes Ellipses Exclamation marks Forward slashes Full stops Hyphens Question marks Quotation marks Semicolons Spelling Shortened words and phrases Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Punctuation and capitalisation 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 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. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/spelling 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: the Australian concise Oxford dictionary (ACOD) the Macquarie 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 a user need. Record decisions you make about alternative spellings in a style 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: Shortened words and phrases Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution 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. There is also guidance related to spelling at punctuation 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 the Macquarie dictionary might 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’ for legal material). This is consistent with current advice in Australian English dictionaries. Release notes 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 on English-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 recommended The Macquarie dictionary. It did not mention the Australian concise Oxford dictionary or any other alternative. It gave advice on setting spellcheckers in Microsoft Word, which the digital edition does not. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/shortened-words-and-phrases 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 Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution 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. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/numbers-and-measurements Numbers and measurements Style for numbers and measurements supports accessibility and readability for users. Numbers and measurements Choosing numerals or words Currency Dates and time Fractions and decimals Mathematical relationships Measurement and units Ordinal numbers Percentages Telephone numbers Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution 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 https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/italics 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. 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 a page 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. Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Example The Australian of the Year honour is a government award. It is different from The Australian’s annual award of the same name. [Publication titles use italics, but not awards.] 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 the detailed 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. Unpublished works are in roman type. Example 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. Reverse italics in titles of published works 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’. 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. 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. Standard Australian English can absorb words or phrases from other languages. Write these ‘borrowed’ words without italics or accent marks. Check a dictionary if

you are unsure about whether a word of foreign origin should be italics. Do not italicise names or words from First Nations languages. They are Australian languages, not foreign languages. Don't use italics for Latin shortened forms Example 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.] Example 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.] Example The more things change, plus c'est la même. Example John was the head barista at the department's coffee shop. 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. 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-known mathematical theorems and formulas. 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. 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. Example The abbreviation 'cf.' is from the Latin word confer and means 'compare'. Example Pythagoras's theorem for a right-angled triangle proved that $a + b = c$. 2 2 2 Example 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. Write the scientific names of infectious organisms, including some bacteria and fungi, in italics. 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. 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. If the italics is part of the original text, write 'emphasis from original' in the square brackets following the quotation. Release notes 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. Example Acacia phlebocarpa is the scientific name for the tabletop wattle. Certain strains of the bacteria Staphylococcus aureus cause golden staph. Example 'I didn't mean her,' they said, 'I meant him.' The deadline is Monday, not Friday. Example 'Subsequently, in 1903, Parliament passed a unanimous resolution that it should be flown.' [emphasis added] 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 References 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. Last updated This page was updated Wednesday 19 April 2023. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/names-and-terms Names and terms Check official sources for correct names and terms. Use consistent capitalisation and punctuation. Numbers and measurements Italics Names and 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 address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution 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 https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/titles-honours-forms-address Titles, honours, forms of address Use correct titles and capitalisation for academics, diplomats, judges, government officials, royalty and members of the armed forces. Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Academics and professionals Australian Defence Force Awards and honours Diplomats Judiciary Parliaments and councils Royalty, vice-royalty and nobility Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution 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. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/types-words 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 Nouns Prepositions Pronouns Verbs Parts of sentences Punctuation Spelling Shortened words and phrases Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution 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. 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. Fixing a misplaced modifier is more complicated. Sentences with this issue often need some rewriting. 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.] 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.] Release notes 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 References 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. University of Chicago Press (2017) Chicago manual of style: the essential guide for writers, editors, and publishers, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. Last updated This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021. 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.] https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/types-words/adjectives Adjectives Adjectives describe, compare and define nouns and words that act as nouns. Use adjectives to help people understand meaning. Adjectives describe nouns Adjectives describe nouns, noun phrases and noun clauses. Adjectives usually go immediately before the noun. They can go elsewhere in a sentence – for example, as a predicate. Adjectives also modify noun phrases and noun clauses. Nouns Prepositions Pronouns Verbs Parts of sentences Punctuation Spelling Shortened words and phrases Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Example They had a short conversation. [The adjective 'short' describes the noun 'conversation'.] Their conversation was short. [The adjective 'short' describes the noun 'conversation', but appears as the predicate in this sentence.] Different types of words, such as nouns, can also function as adjectives. 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 a sentence. 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 with hyphens to make compound adjectives. A compound adjective usually has a hyphen if

the adjective is before the noun it is describing. A compound adjective can be made up of an adverb and a verb. 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'. There are few exceptions to this rule, so check a dictionary if you are unsure. Example They had a short conversation about the meeting. [A noun phrase] They had a short conversation that led to a decision. [A noun clause] Example A moving speech brought the sound of applause. [A verbal noun (gerund) functioning as an adjective] Example We need a fit-for-purpose strategy to solve this specific problem. [Adjective before the noun 'strategy'] The strategy is fit for purpose. [Adjective after the noun 'strategy'] Correct A badly worded sentence can be difficult to read, even if it is grammatically correct. Incorrect A badly-worded sentence can be difficult to read, even if it is grammatically-correct. 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. Not all adjectives follow the regular pattern of 'fast–faster–fastest'. These irregular adjectives have different patterns. Some adjectives don't have a different form to show degree. They show degree by using 'more' for comparative or 'most' for superlative. 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: 1. evaluative – features of a noun that you can measure or compare Example Positive Claire is a fast talker. [There is no comparison. Claire is fast.] Comparative Sam is a faster talker than Claire. [Adds '-er' to compare Claire's and Sam's talking speed.] Superlative Sam is faster than Claire, but Petra is the fastest of them all. [Adds '-est' to compare Petra's talking speed to that of the others.] Example little, less, least good, better, best bad, worse, worst Example The department decided on a more flexible approach to working arrangements. This is the most significant reform of public health policy in decades. 2. descriptive – features of a noun that you can't measure 3. definitive – features of a noun that are intrinsic to the noun. Evaluative adjectives can also express an opinion. 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. You can also use 'and' instead of commas to help the sentence flow more smoothly. 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 A beautiful round committee table Example A large, black nuclear submarine ['Large' and 'black' are descriptive; 'nuclear' is definitive.] A new, red long-range electric car ['New' and 'red' are descriptive; 'long-range' and 'electric' are definitive.] Example A new and shiny red long-range electric car 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.] Release notes 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 References 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. Last updated This page was updated Tuesday 27 September 2022. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/types-words/adverbs 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'. Nouns Prepositions Pronouns Verbs Parts of sentences Punctuation Spelling Shortened words and phrases Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Example The staff worked happily. [Modifies the verb 'worked'] The staff arrived early this morning. [Modifies the verb 'arrived'] She is a very dedicated worker. [Modifies the adjective 'dedicated'] You finished quite quickly. [Modifies the adverb 'quickly'] Adverbs can affect clarity Use adverbs sparingly. Remove any adverb that doesn't play a critical function in a sentence. 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, some words can be adjectives or adverbs. Make sure you use the correct form. For example, 'quickest' is the adjective and 'most quickly' is the adverb. Not all adverbs follow this regular pattern of using 'more' or 'most' to show comparison. The following examples show irregular adverbs. Adverbs don't always show or imply comparison. These are called positive adverbs. Release notes 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. Example Comparative Bob spoke more quickly than Tom. [Uses 'more' to compare Tom's and Bob's speaking speed] Superlative Tom speaks more quickly than Bob, but Harry speaks the most quickly of them all. [Uses 'most' to compare Harry's speaking speed to that of the others] Example He spoke well, but she spoke better. You finished work early, but they finished even earlier. Example Tom spoke quickly. [Tom's speaking speed is not compared with anything else.] The staff worked happily. [We don't know if they worked more happily than others.] The Content Guide mentions adverbs in the advice on hyphens. It does not provide any other information about adverbs. About this page References 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. Last updated This page was updated Thursday 24 March 2022. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/types-words/conjunctions 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, phrases and clauses. Examples of conjunctions are: and but or because when. Nouns Prepositions Pronouns Verbs Parts of sentences Punctuation Spelling Shortened words and phrases Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Example 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. 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. Coordinating conjunctions can also join clauses that could stand alone as sentences. Subordinating conjunctions join clauses and phrases to a The team met early because the manager requested it. Print the page in black and white, please. Lee wanted casual or part-time work. Give me a call when you have finished the report. Example Whether rain or shine, we're going ahead with the team-building exercise. [Both conjunctions pair with a noun.] My manager and I discussed both my performance review and my career prospects. [Both conjunctions pair with a noun phrase.] Either we complete the report today, or we work on it tomorrow. [Both conjunctions pair with clauses.] Example The Australian Defence Force will build new patrol boats and submarines. [Joining nouns] Work quickly but carefully. [Joining adverbs] The answer is true or false. [Joining adjectives] The content designers had Post-its on the wall and on the floor. [Joining phrases] Schools reopened so students returned. [Joining clauses] Example Keep the sentence simple otherwise the message will get lost. 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 to form a complete sentence. Examples of subordinating conjunctions are: when if unless until because since. 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. 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 When you 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 health as though your life depends on it. ['Take care of your health' is the main clause; 'your life depends on it' is the dependent clause.] Example A quick guide outlines the issue, besides detailing other sources on the topic. 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. Release notes 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 References 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. Last updated 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, with the lake closed to swimming at least once a year since 2002. This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/types-words/determiners 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 a noun or a noun 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' Nouns Prepositions Pronouns Verbs Parts of sentences Punctuation Spelling Shortened words and phrases Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution 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. You can use 'the' for a group of things, but only if you refer to a specific group. Don't use 'the' when you make a generalisation. 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. 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, and contractions). 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 They finished the report on time and on budget. [This sentence refers to a specific report.] Example The

employees were on time for the meeting. [Specific employees were on time.] Example People work in offices. [This is a generalisation about people and offices.] Example A school should teach a child how to read and write. [This could be any school and any child.] An EL2 usually supervises several staff. [This could be any EL2.] Example 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. Pronouns can also quantify the noun. Numbers can function as determiners Numbers work as determiners because they give information about how many nouns they are introducing. It was an error. [The ‘e’ sound in ‘error’ is a vowel.] It was a cold office. [The ‘c’ sound in ‘cold’ is a consonant.] The job required a university degree. [The ‘u’ sound in ‘university’ sounds like the consonant ‘y’.] Example Write some instructions. Those meetings were long but fruitful. Give it your best shot. Example Every public servant knows the code of conduct. Most reports are well written. Few people have time to fill out forms. Example They had 2 meetings. This is my second cup of coffee for the day. This month, the minister delivered 3 keynote addresses. Release notes 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 References 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. Last updated This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/types-words/nouns 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 for some commercial terms. Nouns Prepositions Pronouns Verbs Parts of sentences Punctuation Spelling Shortened words and phrases Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Example June Shark Bay Collingwood Football Club Torres Strait Regional Authority 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. Capitalise nouns only if they are part of a proper noun. Don’t capitalise them if you use them as common nouns. Common nouns can be concrete or abstract Concrete nouns name things you can identify through one or more of the 5 senses. Abstract nouns name intangible things. These include ideas, emotions and physical feelings. Prime Minister of Australia Example month coast local government prime ministers Example The ACT’s Office of the Commissioner for the Environment was the first such agency in Australia. [‘Office’ is part of the formal title.] I worked in the office for 11 years. [‘Office’ is not part of the formal title, even if it refers to the Office of the Commissioner for the Environment.] Example server phone software person Some nouns can be either concrete or abstract, depending on the context. Verbal nouns are also called ‘gerunds’ Gerunds are nouns that form by attaching an ‘-ing’ to a verb. You can combine gerunds and other verbal nouns with a determiner (such as ‘my’ or ‘your’). 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. Other verbal nouns don’t have any suffix but have the same spelling as the verb. It is context that gives the distinction. Example honesty reliance engagement admiration Example The office is upstairs. [Concrete noun] Alfred Deakin was the first to hold the office of Attorney-General in Australia. [Abstract noun] Example meet [verb], meeting [noun] report [verb], reporting [noun] Example Your writing has improved. [‘Your’ is the determiner; ‘writing’ is the noun; ‘has improved’ is the verb.] They resent Bill’s laughing at them. [‘Bill’s’ is the determiner; ‘resent’ is the verb; ‘laughing’ is the noun.] Example fixation [Noun related to the verb ‘fix’] attachment [Noun related to the verb ‘attach’] Example 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. Some nouns don’t change to form the plural. Don’t use an apostrophe before (or after) the ‘s’ to show the plural. Collective nouns describe a group in a single word Collective nouns are a type of common noun. They label groups of people or things. ‘fix the issue’ [verb], ‘a quick fix’ [noun] ‘report an issue’ [verb], ‘annual report to the minister’ [noun] Example a computer, many computers a policy, many policies the standby, many standbys the Attorney-General, many attorneys-general Example an aircraft, many aircraft Correct Adjust the desks and chairs. Incorrect Adjust the desk’s and chair’s. Example crowd committee cluster [for example, of desks] Subject–verb agreement A collective noun usually has a singular verb. This is so, even if it’s made up of component parts. An exception is when you need to draw attention to the individual parts of the collective noun. 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. A countable singular noun must have a determiner. An uncountable noun has no plural and only a singular verb. Uncountable nouns don’t need to Correct The government intends to act. The committee is meeting. Incorrect The government intend to act. The committee are meeting. Example The branch meets once a week. [‘The branch’, as a whole, meets once a week. The singular form of the verb is used.] The branch are divided over 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.] Example Would you like a cup of coffee or tea? [‘Cup’ is countable; ‘coffee’ and ‘tea’ are uncountable.] Correct The report is being printed. Our report is being printed. Incorrect Report is being printed. have a determiner. Whether it has one depends on the meaning of the sentence. 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. 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 you write in plain language. Release notes 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. Example Respect is an Australian Public Service value. [No determiner with ‘respect’. The value is not quantifiable.] The leadership avoided a spill. [‘The’ is the determiner with ‘leadership’. The noun refers to a single, specific group of people.] Example Language is powerful. [In this context, ‘language’ is uncountable.] Australians speak many languages besides English. [In this context, ‘language’ is countable.] 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 of injury management outcome improvements. [Noun train included] About this page References 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. Last updated This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/types-words/prepositions 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 a noun or verb. Use prepositions to give information about the time and place of an action or thing. Examples of prepositions are: in before around since Nouns Prepositions Pronouns Verbs Parts of sentences Punctuation Spelling Shortened words and phrases Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution between. Prepositions often come before related words or phrases. 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. 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. Release notes 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 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'.] 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'.] 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. 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 References 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. Last updated This page was updated Wednesday 31 January 2024. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/types-words/pronouns 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 for nouns. They stand in for groups of words that function as nouns (noun phrases and noun clauses). They can also act like determiners. Nouns Prepositions Pronouns Verbs Parts of sentences Punctuation Spelling Shortened words and phrases Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Example I, he, she, they, it myself, yourself, ourselves who, which, that any, several Pronouns can be singular or plural. 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. 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 Example I, we she, they me, us 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] 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’). When the singular ‘they’ is used in a sentence as a gender-neutral term, 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 the subject or object. Sentences can have reflexive pronouns when the subject is also the object of the verb. Don’t use a reflexive pronoun if the subject and the object are not the same person or thing. 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.] Correct My colleague and I travelled with the delegation. My manager sent their director and me an email. Incorrect My colleague and me travelled with the delegation. My manager sent their director and I an email. Example The manager emailed themself. [‘Themself’ is the object but refers to ‘the manager’, which is the subject.] Correct I emailed myself. Incorrect The manager emailed myself. Don’t use reflexive pronouns such as ‘yourself’ and ‘myself’ as the subject of the verb. 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 example commas. Choosing between relative pronouns can be a matter of style in some situations, depending on voice and tone. It is the use of punctuation with the relative pronoun that clarifies meaning. Release notes 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 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 to inclusive 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 Correct My colleague and I travelled with the delegation. Incorrect My colleague and myself travelled with the delegation. Example The farm that produces oats is for sale. [The only farm that is for sale is the one that produces oats.] The farm, which produces oats, is for sale. [The farm, which happens to produce oats, is for sale.] the Style Manual to use gender-neutral language. It also had some information on using pronouns for tone. About this page References 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. Last updated This page was updated Thursday 4 January 2024. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/types-words/verbs 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. Nouns Prepositions Pronouns Verbs Parts of sentences Punctuation Spelling Shortened words and phrases Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Example to work, to discuss, to try [actions] to be, to have, to seem [states] 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’. 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 a collective noun. Sentences contain at least a subject and a verb. Keep the relationship between the grammatical subject and the verb clear to users. This relationship is the basis for writing plain 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. Some verbs don’t have an object. These are ‘intransitive’ verbs. Intransitive verbs can instead have a complement in the form of an adverb or adverbial phrase. to happen, to occur, to result in [events] to become, to grow, to dissolve [changes] Correct The analyst works in the office on Mondays. [There is one specific analyst, so the verb takes the singular form ‘works’.] Incorrect Jan work in the office on Mondays. [There is one person, Jan, so the verb should not take the plural form ‘work’.] Example They need advice before the hearing. [‘Advice’ is the object of the verb ‘need’.] Take my advice. [‘My advice’ is the object of the verb ‘take’.] Some verbs can be transitive or intransitive. They can have meaning with or without an object, depending on the rest of the sentence. 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 often adjectival phrases or adjectives. 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 The power grid failed. [The verb ‘failed’ does not have an object.] The candidate campaigned tirelessly. [The verb ‘campaigned’ does not have an object. ‘Tirelessly’ is an adverb. The adverb complements the verb.] Example They opened the door. [The object is ‘the door’.] The door opened. [‘Opened’ has no object.] Example The door is open. [‘Open’ complements the verb ‘is’. It is an adjective that describes the subject, ‘the door’.] The forecasts seem reasonable. [‘Reasonable’ complements the verb ‘seem’. It is an adjective describes the subject, ‘the forecasts’.] Each agency has its own arrangements. [‘Its own arrangements’ complements the verb ‘has’. The complement is a noun phrase describing an attribute of the subject, ‘each agency’.] Example I was writing the 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.] I wrote the report yesterday. [The action is in the past tense and has finished.] I am writing another report today. [The action is in the present tense and it is continuing.] I will write a final report tomorrow. [The action is in the future tense and it will be finished tomorrow.] By next week, the executive will have reviewed the 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. 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 in forms. Be deliberate about the tone the content needs to convey. Imperative commands can seem blunt, even if you use the word ‘please’. Subjunctive mood This is the mood for expressing possibility. It shows that something is hypothetical, possible, conceivable or desirable. Example Jan went into the office on Monday. The commander ordered the troops to stand at ease. Was the report tabled in July this year? Example Apply now. Lodge your submission by 31 July. Verify your corporate credit card. Example Please speak up. Example If supply were to stop, we wouldn’t be able to meet demand. Verbs in the subjunctive mood can work together with other words to express a condition. The subjunctive mood doesn’t always need an auxiliary verb to show the mood, only the main verb. Recommendations can follow this formula. You can use auxiliary verbs to convey ability, possibility, permission or obligation. This affects the tone of your writing. These verbs are: can could may might will would shall should must ought to. Phrasal verbs need a preposition or adverb Phrasal verbs are verbs paired with one or more prepositions. They can also go with an adverb. Check the dictionary entry for the verb to use the correct combination. If only they would update the data! You should apply now. Example If you took a sample, you would have some data. If you applied now, we could process your application tomorrow. Example Recommendations That the Minister meet with peak body representatives. Example This could take some time. You must submit your application by close of business. When phrasal verbs need an object, you can put the object between the verb and its other part. Release notes 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 References 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. Example We need to check in with each other. [The verb ‘check’ pairs with the prepositions ‘in’ and ‘with’.] They found out 6 breaches had occurred. [The verb ‘found’ goes with the adverb ‘out’.] Example The clue gave away the answer. [The object, ‘the answer’, comes after both parts of the phrasal verb, ‘gave away’.] The clue gave the answer away. [The object comes between the first and second part of the phrasal verb.] 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. Last updated This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/parts-sentences 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. The predicate can sometimes appear as a whole sentence because the subject is implied. This can depend on the ‘mood’ of the verb. Spelling Shortened words and phrases Numbers and measurements Italics Names and terms Titles, honours, forms of address Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution 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.] 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. A noun phrase that is part of the subject is partially formed by determiners (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. Objects and complements An object is the thing, person or concept that complements the verb. Objects can be direct or indirect. Some verbs have no action. They have complements that describe a quality or characteristic of the subject. 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’.] Example They met in the boardroom. [‘They’ is the subject.] People use the website to find information. [‘People’ is the subject.] The Digital Service Standard has 13 criteria. [‘The Digital Service Standard’ is the subject.] The heavy rain that fell last week subdued the fire. [‘The heavy rain that fell last week’ is the subject.] Example They met in the boardroom. [‘met’ is the verb] The meeting finished early. [‘finished’ is the verb] They were all late. [‘were’ is the verb] Example 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.] Sentences are simple, compound or complex Simple sentences A simple sentence contains only one main (or principal) clause. This means it has only one complete verb in it. The subject can be implied by using a verb in the imperative mood. 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. If the 2 clauses share the same subject, don’t repeat the subject or insert a comma before the conjunction. You could also write this as 2 short sentences, but this approach can appear repetitive. Example 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.] Example 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.] Example Enter your verification code. [The implied subject is ‘you’. The verb is ‘enter’. ‘Your verification code’ complements the verb to form the predicate.] Example 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.] Example 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’.] Example Complex sentences A complex sentence contains a main clause and at least one subordinate clause. You can start the sentence with the main clause. You can also start the sentence with the subordinate clause to change the emphasis. 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. 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. The agency planned to start the project next year. The agency ran out of funding. [‘The agency’ is the subject of both sentences.] Example She finished the report before she left work. [The focus of the sentence is that ‘she finished the report’, which is the main clause.] Example 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.] Example Wind forecasts are 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 produced by computer models to show average speeds. [Passive voice with modified sentence structure: ‘by computer models’ is an adverbial phrase. It answers the question, ‘Who or what produces wind forecasts?’] Computer models produce 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?’] Example A formal complaint was made about the use of discriminatory language. Release notes The digital edition has practical guidance on plain language. It relates grammatical concepts to the principles of plain language and discusses plain language sentences. It consolidates information from the sixth edition and highlights the basics about clauses. 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. References 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. Last updated This page was updated Thursday 22 December 2022.