https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/links Links Links can help users navigate content. Include links when they support user journeys and for search engine optimisation. Write link text that is accurate and accessible. Link to something only if it helps meet the user's need Links (hyperlinks) are words or images that users can click to go to other content. Links help people navigate digital services or products. But they can also reduce readability and increase cognitive load. For this reason, use them only when they support a user need. Links are also important for search engine optimisation. Search engines use links to: discover webpages determine how they rank in search results. Use text for links in most cases. These links are called anchor text. Use images for links only if they meet a user need. If you do use images, accurately describe the link with alt text. Don't describe the image itself. Digital Service Standard requirements You must understand users and their context for using the service to meet the Digital Service Standard: Criterion 1. Understand user needs. Do research with users to understand the task they are trying to do and how they navigate through your end-to-end service or product. Link to a different site only if essential External links connect pages on a website to those on other domains. Use them only when they are an essential part of the user journey. Include external links when the user needs: to complete their task on an external website to access original, authoritative information that's provided by another government agency or external source. Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution Follow your agency's external linking policy when linking to non-government websites. Avoid implying endorsement to commercial websites in external links. Link to sources instead of duplicating them When planning content, find out if similar information already exists. If it does, link to it rather than duplicating it. Duplicated content is confusing because it's not clear to the user which page is the authoritative source. This can cause users to abandon digital services. Duplicated content also requires resources to maintain, as it can become out of date easily. Link directly to the specific page that the user needs to go to, not the homepage. This is known as 'deep linking'. Include document title, file type and size when linking to files Provide content in HTML format by default. This has benefits for both accessibility and maintenance. If a full HTML version of the file is not available, link to a summary page if it exists. There will be some situations in which you need to link to non-HTML documents and files. Give users the information they need to decide whether to download the file by providing the: document title (not the file name) the file type the file size in kilobytes (kB) or megabytes (MB). Include all this information in the link text, but remember that this adds extra information for all users. Minimise the number of links where you can. You don't need to explain 'kB' and 'MB' as they are units of measurement. 'PDF', 'DOCX' and other common file types are widely recognised. If your website uses an unusual or specialist file type, consider explaining this in your support pages. Take care when using file type icons For some users, file type icons can be a useful way of recognising different kinds of files. These icons have disadvantages though: File type icons can create 'clutter' for users, including those who use assistive technology. This is especially true when there are lists of links. File type icons are images and require the same consideration for all images on websites. This includes alternative text. File type icons may require resources to apply and maintain. They can be difficult for content authors to use if your content management system does not apply them automatically. They may not support the branding or overall look and feel of your site. There is a large variety of icons available and selecting or designing an inappropriate icon may confuse users. Example You can read more about our financial position in the Digital Transformation Agency Annual Report 2019–20 [PDF 1.96 MB]. Write link text that makes the destination clear Users scan content for links to understand what it is about. People who use assistive technologies often use the tab key to read from link to link. People who use screen readers often generate a list of links for quick navigation. For these reasons, links need to make sense when read out of the context of surrounding content. Links like 'click here' or 'more information' don't give the user any information about the destination. Write link text that describes the destination in clear language. Match the content on the linked page so the user knows they have reached the right place. Accessibility requirements User need: I can find and navigate the content and determine where I am on the webpage. Fundamentals: Write link text that makes the destination and purpose of the link clear. All users must be able to understand the purpose of a link without extra context. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criteria: 2.4.4 Link purpose (in context) – level A 2.4.9 Link purpose (link only) – level AAA Don't use exit modals An 'exit modal' or 'exit pop-up' is an alert that appears on the user's browser when they select a link to an external website. Don't use these to tell users they are leaving your site when they use external links. Make it clear in your text that the link is external and explain why you have included it. These pop-ups interrupt users, overemphasise the transition and can make users feel lost and confused. You should also consider developing a policy to explain to users how your site approaches and Write this Find out more about our upcoming events on our Eventbrite page. Not this Click here to find out about our upcoming meetups. presents links to government and non-government content. Include keywords at the start of links People usually only read the first few words of links. Keep them concise and put the most important words at the start of the link. Using relevant words at the start of links is called 'frontloading'. Frontloading makes it easier for people to scan and find what they're looking for. It also helps them to read and assess the link's relevance. Write links that are about a single idea, to help people to decide whether to click. Only link the keywords. Put most links at the end of sentences Links reduce readability because they are distracting. They also make it easy for users to click away before they have read all your content. If it's important for users to understand all your content, put links at the end of sentences. If a link makes more sense at the start of a sentence, consider if everything in the sentence is essential. Write short calls to action that explain what they do Use concise keywords for call-to-action text or buttons. Accurately describe what will happen next. Like this Attend next month's Brisbane workshop for developers and writers. Not this Attend a Brisbane workshop for developers and writers next month. Write this Find out your eligibility for a payment by filling out the application form. Not this You need to fill out the application form to find out if you are eligible for a payment. Write this Link email addresses not names To link to an email address, use the email address as the link text so it's not mistaken for a website address. Use the mailto: prefix in the URL but not in the link text. Open links in the same browser tab or window Set links to open in the same browser window or tab by default. This prevents users from becoming disoriented and allows them to use the 'back' button if needed. This is the default behaviour for links created using the (anchor) HTML tag. Consider carefully how users move through your website before you set a link to open in a new tab or window. Whether a user decides to

open a link in a new browser tab or window depends heavily on the task they are trying to complete. Some examples are: logging on to a secure website giving information that would disrupt a multi-step process, such as filling out a form downloading a document. In all cases, give users contextual information in the link to explain why a link will open in a new window or tab. Create internal links that support the user's journey Internal links connect pages on the same website. They help users and search engine find and navigate your content. Build internal links to help users move through each stage of the user journey. Use them to help users: Start your application Not this Click here to apply Write this belinda.bloggs@dta.gov.au Not this Belinda Bloggs orient themselves when using your digital product or service move sequentially through a step-by-step task find information that's directly related to a topic. Use the same homepage links across the site You must include a homepage link in your main navigation. This helps users when they become lost or want to start a new task. Add homepage links to the agency name or site title and the Commonwealth Coat of Arms image. Place these links in the top left part of the page. Add in-page links only if they help the user navigate In-page links (anchor links or bookmark links) connect to content on the same page. Useful in- page links include: tables of contents back-to-top links. In-page links can be helpful when content is lengthy. But they can also be disorienting if users expect to go to a different page. Test content with users. Shorter content may better meet their needs. Release notes The digital edition significantly updates and expands on information about links. The sixth edition guidance focused on hyperlinks in the context of creating material specifically for on-screen use. It made a distinction between 'information hyperlinks' and 'navigation hyperlinks' that is not used in the digital edition. The Content Guide had advice on using hypertext and hyperlinks. About this page References Content Design London (2019) 'Links', Content Design London readability guidelines, Content Design London website, accessed 7 June 2020. General Services Administration (n.d.) 'Avoid duplication', 18F Content Guide, 18F website, accessed 7 June 2020. General Services Administration (n.d.) 'Links and repetitive content', 18F Accessibility Guide, 18F website, accessed 7 June 2020. GOV.UK (2020) 'Links', Content design: planning, writing and managing content, GOV.UK, accessed 7 June 2020. Hendriks M (15 March 2019) 'Internal linking for SEO: why and how?', Yoast, accessed 7 June 2020. Johnson T (6 May 2010) 'Embedded links and online reading accessibility: Whitney Quesenbery and Caroline Jarrett' [video], Tom Johnson, YouTube, accessed 7 June 2020. 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University of Minnesota (2020) 'Hyperlinks', Accessible U, University of Minnesota website, accessed 7 June 2020. W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) (2016) 'G200: Opening new windows and tabs from a link only when necessary', Techniques for WCAG 2.0, W3C website, accessed 7 June 2020. WebAIM (n.d.) Links and hypertext, WebAIM website, accessed 7 June 2020. Wild G (February 2014) 'Links and accessibility', AccessibilityOz, accessed 20 January 2021. Last updated This page was updated Tuesday 23 July 2024. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/lists Lists Lists make it easy for users to scan and understand a series of items. Structure and style lists with the user in mind. Set up grammatical structure for list items with a lead-in. Structure items in a series as a list Lists are series of items. All lists have a 'lead-in' (a phrase or sentence) or heading to introduce the list. Use lists to: help users skim information group related information help users understand how items relate to each other show an order of steps arrange information by importance. Lists can be ordered or numbered (the order is important) or unordered (the order is not critical). A bullet list can be ordered or unordered. A numbered list is always ordered. Don't use a list if you have only one item. Lists are only for a series of items. Accessibility requirements User need: Fundamental requirement: use lists to make it easier for users to skim content and navigate pages. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criterion: 1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A. Make short lists Long lists can lose meaning and hierarchy, as lower items are further away from the lead-in. Move long lists to a separate page or an appendix. Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution Limit the number of lists Content with too many lists is hard to follow. The content should flow so people can read it easily. Use a consistent pattern for list items Write items in a list so they follow a consistent pattern. The pattern is made up by the number of words you use and grammatical structure. If items follow a consistent pattern, it makes a list easier to scan and understand. Write list items so they have parallel structure Write all list items so they have the same grammatical structure. This is called 'parallel structure'. It makes lists easier to read. To make a parallel structure, use the same: word type to start each item (such as a noun or a verb) tense for each item (past, present or future) sentence type (such as a question, direction or statement). Move any words repeated in the list items to the lead-in. Punctuate lists according to style Unnecessary punctuation makes your list look cluttered. Current government style is for minimal punctuation. Write this I will: read more emails go to meetings be punctual. Not this I will be: reading more emails going to meetings punctual. [The last item is an adjective while other list items begin with verbs.] Punctuate lead-ins and headings consistently Phrase lead-ins always end in a colon (:). Sentence lead-ins can end in a colon or a full stop. Choose one punctuation mark and use it for all sentence lead-ins in your document. If in doubt, choose a colon; it is used more commonly. Headings do not have punctuation marks. Use minimal punctuation for all lists In a bullet or numbered list, don't use: semicolons (;) or commas (,) at the end of list items 'and' or 'or' after list items. Only include 'and' or 'or' after the second-last list item if it is critical to meaning – for example, you are writing in a legal context. Make sure the lead-in is a clear guide for how this kind of list should be interpreted. Lead-ins for incomplete lists can use 'for example', 'including' or 'includes'. Don't write 'etc.' at the end of the list to show the list is incomplete. When listing items that may be additional or optional, write a lead-in to explain any variables. Use full stops to complete sentences and fragment lists Sentence lists and fragment lists are 2 types of list that use full stops. Finish each item in a sentence list with a full

stop, including the last one. Finish fragment lists with a full stop only after the last item. If you don't include the full stop, people using screen readers may assume the next paragraph is part of the list. A stand-alone list is a third type of list. Stand-alone lists don't end in a full stop. Choose a type of list There are different ways to construct a list, whether the list is ordered or unordered. Example Select your preference from one of these options: [Lead-in with many options] Please write your response to any 3 of the following questions: [Lead-in with a specific number of options] Applicants need to choose between either: [Lead-in with a choice between 2 options] Types of list include: sentence lists fragment lists stand-alone lists. Use sentence lists for a series of complete sentences If you have a paragraph with a series of related sentences, you can consider breaking it into a sentence list. Sentence lists have a list of sentences, each marked by bullets or numbers. The list can have a: heading (without a colon or full stop) sentence lead-in (ending in a colon or full stop) phrase lead-in (ending in a colon). Rules for sentence lists: Follow normal sentence structure in each list item. Start each list item with a capital letter and end it with a full stop. Align run-over lines with the text, not the bullet or number. Avoid using multiple sentences in each bullet or numbered item. If you include more than one sentence per list item, consider whether: all list items conform to a similar pattern the list builds rhythm for readability. Use full sentence list items for imperative list items where there is no stated subject in the lead-in. Example Actions for the committee [Heading without a colon before an ordered sentence list] 1. The secretary will respond to each recommendation. 2. The secretary will allocate responses that need more work to members. 3. Members will discuss the recommendations at the next meeting on 9 March. The committee members decided on several actions. [Sentence lead-in to a sentence list, ending in a full stop] 1. The secretary will respond to each recommendation. 2. The secretary will allocate responses that need more work to members. 3. Members will discuss the recommendations at the next meeting on 9 March. Example Use fragment lists for a series of incomplete sentences If you list more than 3 items in a sentence, consider breaking the sentence into a fragment list. This will aid readability. Fragments are words, phrases or incomplete sentences. Another name for fragment lists is 'phrase lists'. Fragment lists have a: lead-in phrase or sentence followed by a colon list of fragments, each marked by a bullet. Use fragment list items when the lead-in states the grammatical subject. Rules for fragment lists: Use lower case for the first letter of each fragment, unless it's a proper noun. Add a full stop to the last list item only. Use a grammatically parallel structure for each list item. Make sure each fragment can complete a phrase lead-in. The last rule for fragment lists means that if you add each fragment to a phrase lead-in, it will make a complete sentence. If list items run-on from a phrase lead-in, the list should be very short. The full sentence should be fewer than 25 words. To write well: Use everyday words. Learn about the words people use. Choose simple words, not complicated expressions. [Phrase lead-in to a sentence list, ending in a colon; imperative list items without a stated subject in the lead-in] Example Writers should become familiar with the conventional types of content structure: hierarchical sequential narrative. [Fragment list with a sentence lead-in] Write this Queensland is famous for its: Use stand-alone lists for items under a heading If you are not breaking up a paragraph or a sentence, consider a stand-alone list. Stand-alone lists have a heading without a colon. Brochures and technical documents often contain stand-alone lists. Items in stand-alone lists can be nouns or noun phrases. They can also be sentence fragments. Items cannot be full sentences. Rules for stand-alone lists: Use a heading, not a lead-in. Start each list item with a capital letter. Don't add full stops to the end of any of the list items (even the last item). Indent each list item if it helps people scan the content. islands and coral reefs abundant wildlife tropical rainforest beautiful beaches. [If you combine the lead-in with each fragment, you make 4 complete sentences: Queensland is famous for its islands and coral reefs. Queensland is famous for its abundant wildlife. Queensland is famous for its tropical rainforest. Queensland is famous for its beautiful beaches.] Not this Queensland is famous for its: islands and coral reefs experience the tropical rainforest the wildlife. It can kill you. beautiful beaches. [If you combine the lead-in with each fragment, the second sentence doesn't make sense, 'Queensland is famous for its ... experience the tropical rainforest'. Neither does the third sentence, 'Queensland is famous for its ... the wildlife. It can kill you.'] Example My weekly tasks Answer phone enquiries Book conference venues The differences between a fragment list and a stand-alone list are: A fragment list has a sentence or phrase lead-in. A stand-alone list has no lead-in, only a heading. Fragment list items complete phrase lead-ins to form a grammatical sentence. Stand-alone list items do not form a grammatical sentence. Use consistent formatting for all lists Sometimes you need to use different types of lists in the same piece of content. Use the right punctuation and capital letters for each type of list. Follow your organisation's templates to format lists consistently. Make sure lists conform to their type Each list must look the same as other lists of the same type. For example, a fragment list needs to have the same format as other fragment lists. Consistency helps people scan lists. Check that the list displays properly on all platforms. Indent most lists Indent most types of lists after the lead-in. Indent stand-alone lists if it helps the user scan the list. Write numbered lists if the order is critical Use a numbered (ordered) list when the order is important, such as a list of instructions. Sometimes you have more than one numbered list in the document. You must choose whether to continue or reset the numbering across the lists. Order stationery Take meeting minutes Example How to register for the conference: 1. Choose the days you will attend. 2. Pick the workshops you want to join. 3. Enter your discount code (if you have one). Avoid using in-line numbered lists Break up text into a numbered list instead of using an in-line numbered list. This will aid readability. To order points in general content, don't use ordinal numbers. Instead, you can either: use a numbered list rephrase the sentences to link them in the same paragraph. Put unordered lists in a sequence that helps the user Use an unordered list if the order is not critical to understanding the content. List items in the order that will make sense to the user reading it. It's common to write lists in alphabetical order. [This list is numbered because users must complete each step in turn.] Write this The facilitator will: 1. welcome participants to the conference 2. introduce each of the speakers. [A numbered list] Not this The facilitator will 1) welcome participants to the conference, and 2) introduce each of the speakers. [An in-line numbered list] Write this The facilitator will welcome participants to the conference. Next, they will introduce each of the speakers. [The sentences are linked as a sequence with 'next' (an adverb).] Not this The facilitator will firstly welcome participants to the conference. Secondly, they will introduce each of the speakers. [The ordinals use more words than necessary. They also affect tone.] Example Avoid using a multilevel list Multilevel lists group information into a hierarchy. The levels explain how each item relates to other list items. Some types of content need multilevel lists, but they can be hard for people to follow. If you have to use multilevel lists: Don't use more

than 2 levels. Use lowercase letters for the second level in a numbered list. Use a dash for the second level in a bullet list, not hollow (open) bullets. Use the same symbol, number or letter for the same level in each list. National parks near Perth Avon Valley National Park Serpentine National Park Walyunga National Park Yanchep National Park [This stand-alone list uses an alphabetical order, which is easy for users to follow. Context might give you a reason to use a different order for the same list of national parks. For example, you could also sort them by proximity to Perth.] Like this There are many types of birds in Australia, including: nocturnal birds – frogmouths – nightjars – owls marsh birds – crakes – grebes – snipes. [A multilevel (bullet) list, using a dash for the second level] Not this There are many types of birds in Australia, including: nocturnal birds frogmouths nightjars Release notes The digital edition, like the sixth edition, calls for punctuation only for the last item in a bullet list. The Content Guide advised against punctuating the final item in a bullet list. The digital edition advises against using 'and' or 'or' at the end of dot points in lists. The sixth edition allowed 'or' at the end of a list item, though recommended avoiding this if possible. The December 2020 update to the digital edition accommodates the need to use conjunctions in some lists (such as in legal material, where they can be critical for meaning and interpretation). The digital edition says multilevel lists can be used if essential, but they should have no more than 2 levels. The Content Guide said lists should have no more than one level. The sixth edition permitted the addition of sentences to fragments in lists with advice about punctuation. The digital edition does not include a rule for the addition of sentences in new rules for fragment lists. In sentence lists, the sixth edition allowed each list item to include up to 2 paragraphs. The digital edition is silent on this particular issue. It says to avoid using multiple sentences in bullet or numbered lists. This guidance was expanded in the December 2020 release. About this page References Centre for Information Design Research (2016) 'Lists', The GOV.UK content principles: conventions and research, report prepared by University of Reading, UK Government, accessed 30 May 2020. Content Design London (2020) 'Bullet points', Content Design London readability guidelines, Content Design London website, accessed 30 May 2020. 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Moran K (5 April 2020) 'How people read online: new and old findings', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 17 May 2020. Oxford University Press (2016) New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford. Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) '5.2: use lists to help people scan', Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca, accessed 29 May 2020. University of Chicago (2017) Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) (n.d.) 'Understanding success criterion 1.3.1: info and relationships', Understanding WCAG 2.1, W3C website. W3C (2019) 'Content structure', Web accessibility tutorials, W3C website, accessed 3 June 2020. Last updated This page was updated Thursday 6 June 2024. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/paragraphs Paragraphs One idea per paragraph helps users absorb information. Organise them under headings to help users scan the content. Write short paragraphs, each with a topic sentence. Limit each paragraph to one idea People find it easier to understand content when a paragraph contains only one idea or theme. Don't introduce a new idea in the middle or at the end of a paragraph. Start a new paragraph instead. Introduction or summary paragraphs recap ideas covered in the content. Group sentences in these paragraphs by theme – for example, to help users understand how the content is structured. Put paragraphs in the order that makes sense to the user Order paragraphs in a logical sequence, such as: steps in a transaction the order of importance cause then effect problem then solution pros then cons. This helps people follow related ideas or steps in a sequence. Expand on the heading in the first paragraph The first paragraph under a heading helps people decide if they've found the information they need. Search engines also use first paragraphs when analysing content. Use the first paragraph to make the purpose of your content easier to find in searches. It should include a topic sentence and summarise the following paragraphs. You can use first paragraphs to improve long-form content, such as reports. First paragraphs can summarise the main points in each section. Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution Copy and paste all the first paragraphs together to compile a summary of your content. If you're missing any main points, rewrite some of your first paragraphs. Introduce the main idea in the topic sentence The first sentence in each paragraph should be the topic sentence. The topic sentence helps people follow the meaning of your writing as they skim content. Each paragraph should contain only the information that relates to the topic sentence. To write an effective topic sentence, write it in the active voice. This approach makes the main idea in the paragraph the grammatical subject of the topic sentence. Take care if starting a paragraph with a pronoun. It should already be clear who or what the pronoun is referring to. If not, make sure to mention the noun in each paragraph before using the pronoun that substitutes the noun. Write this Our rapid response team began operating in 2019 as a result of the 2018 stakeholder survey. The survey showed it took too long to repair damage. Not this A stakeholder survey in 2018 revealed dissatisfaction with the time taken to repair damage. Our rapid response team began operating in 2019. [This paragraph is about the rapid response team, not the stakeholder survey. The grammatical subject of the topic sentence should be 'the team', not 'the survey'.] Write this The initial amounts for appropriation in 2019–20 were up to: $295 million for ordinary annual services $380 million for other annual services. The appropriations increased in March 2020 to account for unforeseen expenditures in relation to COVID-19. [The new paragraph clearly states what increased in March 2020: 'the appropriations'.] Not this The initial amounts for appropriation in 2019–20 were up to: $295 million for ordinary annual services $380 million for other annual services. These increased in March 2020 to account for unforeseen expenditures in relation to COVID-19. Keep most paragraphs to 2 or 3 sentences Short paragraphs help people understand content. The ideal length depends on what you are writing: Media releases and news articles have only one or 2 sentences in a paragraph. Content designed for mobile screens has no more

than 2 or 3 sentences in a paragraph. In reports and other long-form content, a limit of 6 sentences in a paragraph is acceptable. If your paragraphs or sentences are too long, you might be trying to say too much in one place. Consider starting a new paragraph or using an itemised list. Make sure the items relate to each other and are grammatically parallel. Digital Service Standard requirements Use responsive design methods to make sure users can read the content on any device. Short paragraphs are critical in responsive design: Criterion 6. Consistent and responsive design. Many people do not use a desktop computer or printed material to access government services and information. Test your content on a mobile device first. Write clear sentences using fewer than 25 words All sentences should use plain language. Even in technical documents, keep sentences to fewer than 25 words. Long sentences often cause long paragraphs. Sentences in a paragraph develop the main idea from a topic sentence by: giving examples or details comparing or contrasting showing cause and effect drawing conclusions from evidence. In complex content, you might need to use a paragraph or more for each of these points. Accessibility requirements User needs: I can read and understand text, even if the content includes unusual words and shortened forms, or features languages other than English. Fundamentals: [The new paragraph has the demonstrative pronoun 'these' to begin the topic sentence. The pronoun does not specify what increased; the topic sentence is unclear.] Write in plain language. This helps all users and is essential for some. Avoid (or explain) unusual words, phrases, idioms and so on. Expand all acronyms on their first use. Avoid using double negatives. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criteria: 3.1.5 Reading level – level AAA. Level AAA requires a lower secondary education reading level, after removal of proper names and titles, (year 7 or between 12 and 14 years old). Release notes The digital edition is based on the material in the sixth edition. It gives more advice on how to put paragraphs together, what belongs in a paragraph and when to start a new one. It fleshes out the advice on topic sentences. It does not give information about numbered paragraphs. The sixth edition focused on being succinct and on the length of paragraphs. The digital edition also builds on the Content Guide, which recommended using short, simple paragraphs of 2 or 3 sentences containing one idea. About this page References 4 Syllables (2014) Writing paragraphs: 10 tips for web writers, 4 Syllables website, accessed 30 May 2019. Content Design London (2020) 'Mobiles and tablets', Content Design London readability guidelines, Content Design London website, accessed 30 May 2020. Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019) Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra. Flann E, Hill B and Wang L (2014) The Australian Editing Handbook, Wiley Milton. Moran K (20 March 2016) 'How chunking helps content processing', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. Mc Kenzie J (2011) The editor's companion, 2nd edn, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne. Oxford University Press (2016) New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford. United States Government (n.d.) 'Have a topic sentence', Plain language guidelines, plainlanguage.gov, accessed 30 May 2020. University of Chicago (2017) Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. Last updated This page was updated Thursday 9 March 2023. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/tables Tables Tables provide a structure for complex and detailed information. Design accessible tables and organise data so it's easy for users to scan. Use tables if they make content easier to read Use a table only if there isn't a simpler way to present your content, such as a list, paragraph of text or diagram. Use tables for exact values and information that is too detailed for the text. Don't create a table for only one or 2 items. Report them in the body of the text instead. Design tables to allow users to: scan the information find an exact value compare values in different categories understand how you have categorised the information. Don't make tables with other tables inside them (known as 'nested' tables). Some people will look at tables before they read the text. For this reason, design tables so they are self-explanatory. You must still refer to the table to in the body of the text. Place the table immediately after the reference to it in the text. Accessibility requirements User needs: I can change the content without losing information or structure. I can find and navigate the content and determine where I am on the webpage. Fundamentals: Tables can be made accessible for all users. The World Wide Web Consortium has tips for setting up tables. You must give a table: - a title (also called a caption) - row and column headings Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution - information (entries) - a cross-reference in the text. You may also need to add notes below the table to help users understand the information and where it comes from. Don't rely on colour as the only visual means of conveying information in tables. Don't leave cells empty. Use 'zero' or 'nil' or 'n/a' where there is no data. If it is numeric data, use the numeric zero (0). Only use zero if that is the true value. WCAG quick reference: 1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A 1.4.1 Use of color – level A Print considerations Publish long and detailed tables separately or in an appendix. Refer to the table in the text Tables support the discussion in the text, not the other way around. It is essential to refer to a table in the text. A single table on a webpage does not need a table number. If you use tables repeatedly, number tables and include the table number when you refer to the table in the text. When using a table: Place the table close to where you mention it in the text and after the paragraph that refers to it. In print, the table should be on the same or facing page. Ensure that the table number referenced in the text matches the table number in the title. Don't repeat the whole title of the table in the text. Don't refer to 'the table below' or 'the table above'. Ensure that the information in the text is consistent with the information in the table. Your text comments on or interprets the table. Where possible, avoid repeating the text or data in the table word for word. Write Table 2 shows that average rainfall has … Don't write Table 2 (Average monthly rainfall, June 2017 to December 2019) shows that average rainfall has … Print considerations Avoid referring to a page number in the text. Page numbers can change during the publishing process. Limit tables to only the information the user needs Be informative, but don't include too much information. Use only as much text or data as you need to make sure the table is easy to understand. Make sure information is: precise relevant to the title or caption from a credible source and backed by evidence consistent with how it's presented in the text. Check text and data in the table against the same information in the body of your content. It is easy to make a last-minute change to one and forget to correct the other. Place data in a consistent and sequential order Ensure that information in the table is correctly grouped and sits under the correct headings. The text or data in a table should use the same grammatical form (for example, noun, noun phrase or sentence). Organise data in a sequential order. For example, order a list of names alphabetically by family name. Merged cells can reduce usability for many people, including screen reader users. They can be made accessible in HTML and PDF. Avoid using them in

word processing applications. To design usable tables: Don't make tables too long or too wide. Consider splitting a large, complex table into smaller tables. If the content includes a large number of tables, consider putting them in an appendix. Check the structure and content of all the tables in your content. If you repeat or duplicate information, combine or delete tables. Set column and row headings that are clear and accurate Use simple language in row and column headings for tables. This makes it easier for people to understand the information. It also helps screen reader users navigate tables. Structure tables so: the first row contains the column headings the first column (also known as the 'stub') contains the row headings. The column and row headings must relate to each other so users can make sense of the information. Mark up tables to show header cells and data cells. PDF software and web authoring programs have tools to help you with this. Use the same grammatical form for each entry in a column. Complex tables Complex tables have header cells that span more than one column or row. If you use a complex table, you must define the column and row groups and mark up the table accordingly. This is so screen reader users can access the information in the table. For detailed instructions and tutorials, visit: W3C's web accessibility tutorial 'Tables with irregular headers' Adobe's PDF accessibility repair: examine and repair tables. Print considerations If a table runs over pages when printed, ensure: column headings appear at the top of each page you repeat row headings on each page. Add notes to provide sources or help interpret the data The notes below a table can apply to the whole table or a specific entry in the table. Use notes to tell users: how to interpret information in the table what the source of the information in the table is. Don't include this information in the table title or caption or in ordinary footnotes or endnotes. To connect the note under the table to the information it refers to in the table use: a symbol such as an asterisk (*) or hash (#) for only one note superscript numbers or letters for more than one note. Use only one type of note in a table. Either use all symbols, all superscript numbers or all superscript letters. When writing table notes, list them in the following order: 1. abbreviations 2. notes to superscript locators 3. general note to the table 4. source of data (use the appropriate form for author–date or documentary–note). Align notes to the left. They should not extend beyond the edges of the table. Don't use superscript for the note identifiers (the symbol, number or letter) in the note. They should be the same font size as the text of the notes so that they are easily found. Copyright requirements You must attribute copyright material you reference. This includes data tables. Read the government copyright rules in the Australian Government intellectual property manual. Scan-read table data and text for alignment The text and data in a table are as important as the structure. Align data and text so the table is easy to scan. In general: Align text to the left. Align numbers to the right. In addition, decimal points in the column should line up. Text should be set horizontally so it is easy to read. Don't rotate text to display vertically. If you can, use a fixed-width font for numbers in columns to help users scan the column and compare the values. For column and row headings: Align column headings with the content in the column. Include the unit in the heading if it is not in the title or caption. Left-align row headings. Print considerations Choose a clear typeface in a smaller point size than the text. Don't use a point size that is too small. Although typefaces and sizes vary, anything smaller than 8 points is too small. Try to keep tables on one page. If you must use a long table: omit the rule at the bottom of the table – this is a visual cue that the table is not complete at the bottom of the table, insert '(continued)' aligned right to the edge of the table on the next page, repeat the caption and insert '(continued)' after the table number – for example, 'Table 3 (continued): Farm output from 1990 to 2000'. Use lines and contrast to help readability Design tables for readability. Don't use colour as the only way to convey meaning. Don't use cell or text formatting to convey meaning. It can make the table difficult to read. Screen reader users cannot 'see' the formatting. Use lines where they help people read the table. Short tables need only a line above and below the header row and at the bottom of the table. Longer tables need lines, or shading of alternate rows (zebra shading), to help people follow the alignment across the table. Ensure there is not too much white space between columns. This makes the content harder to read. A table will take up the full width of the screen when viewed on a mobile phone. This may change the white space between columns and make it more or less readable. A key benefit of tables is that they help people compare information. This is possible only if tables look the same as one another. Use the same font, and font sizes, rule (line) thicknesses and colour schemes for tables throughout the document. Provide a summary for complex tables For complex tables, provide a summary to give people who use screen readers an overview of the information in the table. The summary does not provide the same information as the title or caption. Examples of summaries and captions and how to include them in HTML are in W3C's caption and summary tutorial. A summary can include a brief description of what: is in the rows and columns is being measured and the units of measurements the relationship between rows and columns is. Release notes The digital edition includes detailed information about accessibility and how to structure tables for digital content. The sixth edition dealt mainly with tables for print. The digital edition includes print considerations. The Content Guide had a general overview on table structure and design. About this page References Cutts M (2013) Oxford guide to plain English, Oxford University Press, Oxford. Few S (2008) Telling compelling stories with numbers: data visualization for enlightening communication [PDF 22.2 MB], Perpetual Edge, accessed 9 October 2019. General Services Administration (n.d.) 'Tables', 18F accessibility guide, 18F website, accessed 5 May 2020. GOV.UK (2020) 'Tables: when to use tables and how to make them accessible', Content design: planning, writing and managing content, GOV.UK, accessed 20 May 2020. GOV.UK (n.d.) 'Table', Design system, GOV.UK, accessed 20 May 2020. Moran K (5 April 2020) 'How people read online: new and old findings', Nielsen Norman Group website, accessed 17 May 2020. Purchase S (1998) The little book of style, AusInfo, Department of Finance and Administration, Canberra. Stabina R (2005) Quantitative data graphics: best practices of designing tables and graphs for use in not-for-profit evaluation reports, University of Oregon: Applied Information Management Program, Portland. Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) '5.3 Use tables to organize data', Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca, accessed 5 May 2020. University of Chicago (2017) Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) (2016) Accessibility requirements for people with low vision, W3C website, accessed 9 October 2019. W3C (2019) 'Tables concepts', Web accessibility tutorials, W3C website, accessed 8 October 2019. WebAIM (2018) Creating accessible tables, WebAIM website, accessed 21 May 2020. 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