https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content Accessible and inclusive content Design content for equal access. Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Make content accessible People can experience ongoing, temporary or situational barriers to access information they need. Help them by designing accessible and inclusive content. Agency responsibilities and commitments Accessibility is a mandatory standard for government agencies. Test your content against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) success criteria. Agencies should commit to improving their performance against the standard. Apply accessibility principles User needs are at the heart of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). When you take user needs into account, applying accessibility principles becomes simpler, though not necessarily easier. Design for accessibility and inclusion How we design has a direct influence on what we design. Inclusive design means that the products and services we create work for everyone. Literacy and access https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/make-content-accessible Make content accessible People can experience ongoing, temporary or situational barriers to access information they need. Help them by designing accessible and inclusive content. Make content accessible Accessibility is about inclusion. Government services and products need to be available to everyone. This means creating inclusive content. Inclusive content recognises: Australia's diversity the diversity of technology Australians use to engage online. For example, inclusive content accommodates: cultural and linguistic diversity among users diversity of abilities among users how users interact with technology in different contexts. The Australian Government's aim is that all government services are digital first. This aim is described in the Government Digital Strategy. Australian Government digital services must be usable and accessible – a requirement under the Digital Service Standard. Follow accessibility guidance in context Style Manual topics give you the guidance you need to follow to create accessible content. Where there are specific accessibility requirements or guidance, the Style Manual provides callouts to make it clear what you need to do. Example This is an example of an accessibility callout. Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Style Manual guidance In addition to this contextual guidance, the Style Manual also provides information on: designing for accessibility and inclusion applying the principles of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) the responsibilities of government agencies. This guidance supports agencies in meeting accessibility requirements. The Style Manual does not provide technical guidance or support for developers and site owners on meeting specific accessibility requirements. Release notes The digital edition recognises accessibility as an integral aspect of government content. The sixth edition mentioned the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) but did not go into detail about how to implement accessibility in relation to writing and editing. Content Guide had an overview on accessibility that referred to specific success criteria in WCAG. About this page References ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) (2020) Accessibility statement, ABC website, accessed 4 December 2020. Australian Inclusive Publishing Initiative (2019) Inclusive publishing in Australia: an introductory guide, AIPI website, accessed 5 November 2020. Australian Taxation Office (2020) Digital inclusion guide, ATO website, accessed 25 November 2020. 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WCAG is a stable standard to meet specific needs of people with disability. The standard acknowledges its limitations in meeting needs for people with cognitive and learning disabilities. The standard is integrated with Style Manual guidance to help you create inclusive content. Meet WCAG level AA, but aim higher Accessibility is a mandatory government standard. WCAG is a baseline accessibility standard for Australian Government content. Test your content against the WCAG success criteria. You need to meet the level A criteria to meet level AA. Your agency will need to make its own assessment about whether content achieves a WCAG level AA standard. You'll find the WCAG success criteria that relate to any given Style Manual topic on the relevant page. Not all level AA success criteria are covered in the Style Manual. You will need to refer to WCAG to check if there are more criteria to consider for a specific piece of content. Aiming higher than the level AA standard will improve usability. The Style Manual relates the level AAA standard to some topics. This promotes the aim that government content meets the highest WCAG standard whenever possible. Include an accessibility statement Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution An accessibility statement gives users: information about how you've addressed WCAG information about the technical specifications you've tested evidence of a commitment to accessibility. For example, your statement might mention how your agency is working on its implementation of the standard. Include a page on your site that explains the extent your service or product complies with WCAG. You can check how the Style Manual measures up to level AA in its accessibility statement. Other accessibility guidance and standards W3C has a working draft of recommendations that will expand on WCAG:

Making content usable for people with cognitive and learning disabilities. You may also need to refer to other relevant W3C standards. For procurements, check Accessibility requirements suitable for public procurement of ICT products and services (AS EN 301 549:2016). Refer to the digital sourcing Consider First policy, which applies to non-corporate Commonwealth entities. Legal and policy frameworks Accessibility is integral to Australian Government policy for digital transformation, and written into the Digital Service Standard. Legal requirement Failure to provide equal access to government services (including information) can be a failure of obligation under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. Australia has obligations under international frameworks, including: the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities the World Intellectual Property Organization Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled (Marrakesh Treaty). These international frameworks are relevant to Australia's domestic policy settings through the National Disability Strategy. Release notes The digital edition recognises accessibility as an integral aspect of government content. The sixth edition mentioned the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) but did not go into detail about how to implement accessibility in relation to writing and editing. Content Guide had an overview on accessibility that referred to specific success criteria in WCAG. About this page References ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) (2020) Accessibility statement, ABC website, accessed 4 December 2020. 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Use WCAG principles to meet user needs The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 guidelines can be expressed as user needs. These needs feature throughout the Style Manual. The following lists group user needs (guidelines) under WCAG principles. Principle: content is perceivable Any user can perceive the content. User needs: I can understand any information contained in an image. (Guideline: text alternatives) I can access equivalent information to anything contained in a video or audio file. (Guideline: time-based media) I can change the content's presentation without losing information or structure. (Guideline: adaptable) I can easily control how I see and hear distinctions if colour or sound convey meaning. (Guideline: distinguishable) Principle: content is operable Any user can operate the navigation and interface. User needs: I can operate the content using only a keyboard. (Guideline: keyboard accessible) I can control any features that involve timing so I have enough time to read and use the content. (Guideline: enough time) I can use the content without experiencing a seizure or physical reaction. (Guideline: seizures and physical reactions) I can find and navigate the content and determine where I am on the webpage. (Guideline: navigable) I can operate the webpage with something other than a keyboard, like a pointer. (Guideline: input modalities) Principle: content is understandable Any user can understand the information and the interface. Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution User needs: I can read and understand text, even if the content includes unusual words and shortened forms,or features languages other than English. (Guideline: readable) I can predict the webpage's appearance and how I will operate the content. (Guideline: predictable) I can avoid making any mistakes with my inputs, and correct any that I might make. (Guideline: input assistance) Principle: content is robust Assistive technologies can interpret the content. User need: I have confidence the markup language supports my use of software and assistive technology to access the content. (Guideline: compatible) Follow Style Manual guidance on accessibility requirements Look for accessibility requirements as you check guidance for different topics. Callout boxes in the Style Manual relate user needs to fundamental actions you can take to ensure content is accessible by design. Callouts also include references to WCAG criteria that link to technical details (level A, level AA and level AAA success criteria). The Style Manual also includes links to other external resources about accessibility. Release notes The digital edition recognises accessibility as an integral aspect of government content. The sixth edition mentioned the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) but did not go into detail about how to implement accessibility in relation to writing and editing. Content Guide had an overview on accessibility that referred to specific success criteria in WCAG. About this page References ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) (2020) Accessibility statement, ABC website, accessed 4 December 2020. Australian Inclusive Publishing Initiative (2019) Inclusive publishing in Australia: an introductory guide, AIPI website, accessed 5 November 2020. Australian Taxation Office (2020) Digital inclusion guide, ATO website, accessed 25 November 2020. Interaction Design Foundation (n.d.) Usability, IDF website, accessed 5 November 2020. Microsoft (2016) Inclusive design, Microsoft website, accessed 12 November 2020. Standards Australia, Accessibility requirements suitable for public procurement of ICT products and services, AS EN 301 549:2016. Stephanidis C (n.d.) 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(2018) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, W3C website, accessed 1 November 2020. W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) (2020) Accessibility fundamentals, W3C website, accessed 5 November 2020. W3C WAI (2017), 'Diverse abilities and barriers', Accessibility fundamentals, W3C website, accessed 23 November 2020. W3C WAI (2019), W3C accessibility standards overview, W3C website, accessed 23 November 2020. W3C WAI (2020), What's new in WCAG 2.2 [working draft], W3C website, accessed 26 November 2020. W3C WAI (2015) 'Writing for web accessibility', Tips for getting started, W3C website, accessed 5 November 2020. Last updated This page was updated Friday 15 December 2023. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/design-accessibility-and-inclusion Design for accessibility and inclusion How we design has a direct influence on what we design. Inclusive design means that the products and services we create work for everyone. Design for all The idea of 'design for all' has its roots in human-computer interaction studies. This body of knowledge offers practical methods to improve people's experience of digital content. The Style Manual promotes some of these methods, in line with the Digital Service Standard, such as: understanding needs through user research embedding accessibility as a foundation using consistent and responsive design. The goal is inclusive design that meets a diverse range of needs. Inclusive design considers user experience in a range of situations – for example, on different devices and for time-poor users. Do user research Find out more about user research for content. This aspect of inclusive design is core to Style Manual guidance. As part of your user research, test content to gain: input from the users you're designing for views and feedback from a diverse and representative users. You can make content accessible for one user, but it will benefit others in different situations. For example, user research can help you understand: a person who uses their mobile and needs simple menu options a time-poor executive who needs content that's easy to scan a person who needs to fill in a form, but English is not their first language. Accessibility is a common thread in each of these situations. Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Combine your user research with accessibility techniques to design usable content. Ask what makes content usable Usability and accessibility are closely linked. People will use content that accommodates their needs (usable content). They turn away from content that is alienating or frustrating to use. Accessible content is a foundation to address broader user needs. For example, page structure feeds into assistive technology. But good page structure also improves readability. You can think of accessibility as a necessary step to create usable content. Consider a user who cannot perceive images and the content provides no description, such as alt text. In this situation, visual content is not usable because it is not accessible. Create content for people with diverse abilities People can experience difficulties with access because of ongoing, temporary and situational barriers. Government content needs to be designed so it does not create barriers to access. Poor design causes people to experience ongoing, temporary or situational difficulties. This can limit the extent and duration of access to online content in many ways. Accessibility is how you can avoid setting up barriers for people with diverse abilities. When you design content, it needs to serve people with: age-related conditions changing abilities disability health issues cognitive, neurological and learning disabilities. Usable content accommodates this range of human experience. Release notes Example Using sight to read: A senior executive has an inflamed optic nerve that limits their field of vision. They may experience a temporary barrier to access. A commuter on public transport cannot read on their phone because the screen reflects their surroundings. They may experience a situational barrier to access. The digital edition recognises accessibility as an integral aspect of government content. The sixth edition mentioned the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) but did not go into detail about how to implement accessibility in relation to writing and editing. Content Guide had an overview on accessibility that referred to specific success criteria in WCAG. About this page References ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) (2020) Accessibility statement, ABC website, accessed 4 December 2020. Australian Inclusive Publishing Initiative (2019) Inclusive publishing in Australia: an introductory guide, AIPI website, accessed 5 November 2020. 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It influences how they interact with each other and how they approach education, work and government. Low literacy can make it hard to access government services and information. Factors that affect literacy in English include: where people live their linguistic background their education how old they are their abilities and limitations how they access information. Accessibility requirements User need: I can read and understand text, even if the content includes unusual words, shortened forms, or features languages other than English. Fundamentals: Write in plain language. This helps all users and is essential for some. 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). Avoid (or explain) unusual words, phrases, idioms and so on. Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution

Expand all acronyms on their first use. Avoid using double negatives. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criteria: 3.1.5 Reading level – level AAA 3.1.3 Unusual words – level AAA 3.1.4 Abbreviations – level AAA Reading levels in Australia 'Reading level' is the level of education someone needs to be able to read text. It is one way to measure literacy. In Australia: about 44% of adults read at literacy level 1 to 2 (a low level) 38% of adults read at level 3 about 15% read at level 4 to 5 (the highest level). People at a reading level 1 read at a primary school equivalent level. They can understand short sentences. Australian adult reading levels Reading level Percentage of adults at each level (%) Pre-primary level (below level 1) 3.7 Pre-year 1 to year 6 (level 1) 10.0 Year 7 to year 10 (level 2) 30.0 Years 11 and 12 (level 3) 38.0 Certificate IV (level 4) 14.0 Diploma and above (level 5) 1.2 Note: Percentages do not add to 100. Sources: Reading level statistics are from ABS (2013). Australian school-level equivalents for each OECD classification level are from ABS et al. (2017). Education and literacy People with higher literacy – as measured by reading level – generally have had access to a better education. Many factors influence people's access to education, including where they live. Post-school education is easier to access if you live in a major city. For example, people in cities are more likely to have a bachelor degree than people in regional areas. But there are also areas of disadvantage in the major cities. An education doesn't guarantee a reading level that matches the qualification. For example, about 30% of Australians have a diploma or higher, but only 1.2% of Australians can read at that level. Many people maintain their high-school reading level even if they go on to tertiary studies. Clear content helps all users Regardless of literacy levels, all users want to be able to interact with government easily. Respect their time by writing in plain language. Check that your content is a reading level 2 (Australian year 7 equivalent). This level also helps users with higher literacy. Users with higher education also prefer content that's easy to read. People with the highest literacy levels tend to be time-poor and have the most to read. The preference for plain English increases with: a person's level of education the complexity of the topic. Content for general consumption needs to be accessible by everyone, regardless of literacy. Specialist content is more accessible for technical users when written in plain language. Understanding users Before you start writing, do user research. Don't assume that everyone can access, read and understand what you write. Always make it simple for people to get what they need to do with government done. People might need an alternative to the digital service. Digital Service Standard requirements You must understand the needs of all users of your service and create content they can access to meet the Digital Service Standard: Criterion 1. Understand user needs Criterion 9. Make it accessible. Ensure that people who use the digital service can also use the other available channels, if needed, without repetition or confusion. Do user research to understand how people interact with government services or information. Ensure users with low literacy have equal access. Criterion 12. Don't forget the non-digital experience Release notes The digital edition has more detail and updates statistics, compared to both the sixth edition and Content Guide information on this topic. About this page Evidence Campbell KS et al. (2017) 'Plain-style preferences of US professionals', IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, 60(4): 1–12, accessed 12 October 2022. 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design content that matches how users read. Use short sentences and simple structure. Simple language, structure and design helps all users To create usable content, take into account how people read and what makes content easy to read. You can increase usability with: legible page design readable language comprehensible structure. People read text in different ways. How they read depends on: how well they already understand the subject how familiar the vocabulary is. Digital Service Standard requirements You must understand the needs of all users of your service and create content they can access to meet the Digital Service Standard: Criterion 1. Understand user needs Criterion 9. Make it accessible. People skim headings and page structure To help people understand the type of content, use a clear structure. People want to find the information they need. They skim over the headings to find ‘signposts’ that confirm the content is relevant. Before reading the text, they look at other elements such as: headings Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution links images tables lists. Layout and typography are also important. A clear visual structure with an easy-to-read font is quicker to scan and read. The way people read content on a screen is different to how they read in print. On a smaller screen, such as a phone, people are likely to scan the entire screen before focusing on text or other elements. On other devices, people usually start at the centre of the screen and scan to the left and to the right. Structure the page to make the most useful content stand out. If people are looking for specific information, they are likely to scan the text as a whole to find what they need. They will look for links, a specific term, a number or an address. For this reason, present information in an accepted pattern such as: an address block underlined hyperlinks. Accessibility requirements User needs: I can find and navigate the content and determine where I am on the webpage. I can change the content's presentation without losing information or structure. Fundamentals: Write clear page titles. This is the first thing a screen reader user will hear and should align with the first heading on the page. Organise content with a clear structure using section headings. Describe the topics or the following section in the heading. Make sure users can navigate through all content in the intended order, regardless of the technology they're using. Use the same navigation elements across the service. Don’t rely on colour alone to structure pages. Don’t rely on sensory characteristics such as shape, size, visual location, orientation or sound to explain things. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criteria: 2.4.2 Page titled – level A 2.4.6 Headings and labels – Level AA 2.4.10 Section headings – level AAA 1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A 1.3.2 Meaningful sequence – level A 1.3.3 Sensory characteristics – level A Print considerations People read print content more thoroughly. On a double page of print without any headings or images, people usually read from top left to bottom right. When they’re reading non-fiction, people need headings to help them find information. They also scan illustrations, tables, headings and other elements before reading the text. Often they do this in a sweeping curve counterclockwise from the top right before they decide what, if anything, to read. Content with too many unfamiliar words slows readers down Some readers can scan text and quickly find what they need. They don’t focus on every word. Instead, they take in all the meaning at once. As a result, they don’t need to read individual words such as ‘the’ to understand a sentence (but they see all the words). Other readers have to work harder to understand individual words. They will find reading easier if you use more familiar words. Familiar words that are spelled as they sound are easier to read than unfamiliar words that are not spelled as they sound. People read more slowly if they find: too many unfamiliar words too many long words unfamiliar or complex sentence structures. If the content is difficult, people slow down and focus on unfamiliar words. They might backtrack to try to understand the meaning. This can cause difficulty with comprehension. Complex sentences are hard to read Complex sentences are harder to read than simple ones. People pay attention to content only for as long as they need to. They are not likely to read everything. People will take seconds to decide from the page title and first few headings if the content is relevant. Once people are on a page, they might scan only a fifth of the content before deciding whether to read in detail. Accessibility requirements User needs: I can read and understand text, even if the content includes unusual words, shortened forms, or features languages other than English. Fundamentals: Write in plain language. This helps all users and is essential for some. 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). 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 3.1.3 Unusual words – level AAA 3.1.4 Abbreviations – level AAA Rhythm changes can help or hinder reading People need to be able to read as smoothly and quickly as possible. They build a rhythm as they read a line of text. They automatically go to the beginning of the next line and begin reading. Help people build reading rhythm with: short sentences new paragraphs line breaks. Varying rhythm can help or hinder comprehension. Sentence length Short sentences are easier to read because they limit the scope of an idea. But most readers like the variety and rhythm of a mixture of sentence lengths. For most readers, aim for an average sentence length of 15 words per sentence. Long sentences should have no more than 25 words. Paragraphs and line breaks Paragraphs give people a rest before launching into a new idea. They also help people quickly find an idea in the writing. Line breaks also package information. Used well, they are an effective way to keep people focused and interested. Line breaks are used to: Example Short sentences are great. But not always. Vary sentence length. It helps people stay engaged. help people focus on one idea at a time draw attention to a point – this is why a paragraph of one short sentence can be so effective. Line breaks disrupt the eye as it moves along a line. Poorly used line breaks either: break ideas in the wrong place – for example, by creating too many short lines let ideas run together – for example, by creating long lines. Variations in rhythm Variations need to support comprehension. For example, you can use a change of rhythm for emphasis: to make a point or draw the reader's attention to a certain word. You can vary rhythm using: headings, lists and other elements that give structure punctuation marks parenthetical information – set off using brackets, commas or dashes. Each of these variations can interrupt a reading rhythm. Reading rhythm is also interrupted by: unfamiliar words capital letters changes in font or typeface, such as italics images. Any variation or interruption in rhythm can affect comprehension. Release notes The digital edition has an online focus for how people find information and how people read. It does not directly address how people find information in printed material. It has similar information on scanning and reading print and digital content. The sixth edition had information on how people find information online and in print. It included information on indexing that is not part of the digital edition’s Live release. The digital

edition omits some information from the sixth edition on eye movement. The sixth edition explained how readers absorb information. It included information about context and patterning, attention spans, style and layout, and images (called 'illustrations'). It referred to the use of moving images to get users' attention. This information sits on other pages Example BLOCKS OF CAPITAL LETTERS ARE HARD TO READ. Use capital letters appropriately to help people understand written English. in the digital edition, which are linked to types of structure. The Content Guide did not address this topic, but had related information on writing for search engines and navigation labels. About this page References Baron NS (2017) 'Reading in a digital age', Phi Delta Kappan, 99(2):15–20, doi:10.1177/0031721717734184. Cain K and Parrila R (2014) 'Theories of reading: what we have learned from two decades of scientific research', Scientific Studies of Reading, 18(1):1–4, doi:10.1080/10888438.2013.836525. 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Last updated This page was updated Monday 24 June 2024. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/inclusive-language Inclusive language Use language that is culturally appropriate and respectful of the diversity of Australia's peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Age diversity Cultural and linguistic diversity Gender and sexual diversity People with disability Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Use culturally appropriate and respectful language when writing with, for or about First Nations people. Age diversity Refer to age only if it is necessary. Use respectful language and consistent style if age is relevant. Cultural and linguistic diversity Australians have different cultural backgrounds and speak many languages. Use inclusive language that respects this diversity. Gender and sexual diversity https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/make-content-accessible Make content accessible People can experience ongoing, temporary or situational barriers to access information they need. Help them by designing accessible and inclusive content. Make content accessible Accessibility is about inclusion. Government services and products need to be available to everyone. This means creating inclusive content. Inclusive content recognises: Australia's diversity the diversity of technology Australians use to engage online. For example, inclusive content accommodates: cultural and linguistic diversity among users diversity of abilities among users how users interact with technology in different contexts. The Australian Government's aim is that all government services are digital first. This aim is described in the Government Digital Strategy. Australian Government digital services must be usable and accessible – a requirement under the Digital Service Standard. Follow accessibility guidance in context Style Manual topics give you the guidance you need to follow to create accessible content. Where there are specific accessibility requirements or guidance, the Style Manual provides callouts to make it clear what you need to do. Example This is an example of an accessibility callout. Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Style Manual guidance In addition to this contextual guidance, the Style Manual also provides information on: designing for accessibility and inclusion applying the principles of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) the responsibilities of government agencies. This guidance supports agencies in meeting accessibility requirements. The Style Manual does not provide technical guidance or support for developers and site owners on meeting specific accessibility requirements. Release notes The digital edition recognises accessibility as an integral aspect of government content. The sixth edition mentioned the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) but did not go into detail about how to implement accessibility in relation to writing and editing. Content Guide had an overview on accessibility that referred to specific success criteria in WCAG. About this page References ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) (2020) Accessibility statement, ABC website, accessed 4 December 2020. Australian Inclusive Publishing Initiative (2019) Inclusive publishing in Australia: an introductory guide, AIPI website, accessed 5 November 2020. Australian Taxation Office (2020) Digital inclusion guide, ATO website, accessed 25 November 2020. Interaction Design Foundation (n.d.) Usability, IDF website, accessed 5 November 2020. 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W3C WAI (2020), What's new in WCAG 2.2 [working draft], W3C website, accessed 26 November 2020. W3C WAI (2015) 'Writing for web accessibility', Tips

for getting started, W3C website, accessed 5 November 2020. Last updated This page was updated Friday 7 July 2023. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/agency-responsibilities-and-commitments Agency responsibilities and commitments Accessibility is a mandatory standard for government agencies. Test your content against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) success criteria. Agencies should commit to improving their performance against the standard. Use WCAG to guide your agency about accessibility 'WCAG' stands for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. WCAG 2.2 is the current version. The Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C) released version 2.2 in October 2023. WCAG is a stable standard to meet specific needs of people with disability. The standard acknowledges its limitations in meeting needs for people with cognitive and learning disabilities. The standard is integrated with Style Manual guidance to help you create inclusive content. Meet WCAG level AA, but aim higher Accessibility is a mandatory government standard. WCAG is a baseline accessibility standard for Australian Government content. Test your content against the WCAG success criteria. You need to meet the level A criteria to meet level AA. Your agency will need to make its own assessment about whether content achieves a WCAG level AA standard. You'll find the WCAG success criteria that relate to any given Style Manual topic on the relevant page. Not all level AA success criteria are covered in the Style Manual. You will need to refer to WCAG to check if there are more criteria to consider for a specific piece of content. Aiming higher than the level AA standard will improve usability. The Style Manual relates the level AAA standard to some topics. This promotes the aim that government content meets the highest WCAG standard whenever possible. Include an accessibility statement Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution An accessibility statement gives users: information about how you've addressed WCAG information about the technical specifications you've tested evidence of a commitment to accessibility. For example, your statement might mention how your agency is working on its implementation of the standard. Include a page on your site that explains the extent your service or product complies with WCAG. You can check how the Style Manual measures up to level AA in its accessibility statement. Other accessibility guidance and standards W3C has a working draft of recommendations that will expand on WCAG: Making content usable for people with cognitive and learning disabilities. You may also need to refer to other relevant W3C standards. For procurements, check Accessibility requirements suitable for public procurement of ICT products and services (AS EN 301 549:2016). Refer to the digital sourcing Consider First policy, which applies to non-corporate Commonwealth entities. Legal and policy frameworks Accessibility is integral to Australian Government policy for digital transformation, and written into the Digital Service Standard. Legal requirement Failure to provide equal access to government services (including information) can be a failure of obligation under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. Australia has obligations under international frameworks, including: the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities the World Intellectual Property Organization Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled (Marrakesh Treaty). These international frameworks are relevant to Australia's domestic policy settings through the National Disability Strategy. Release notes The digital edition recognises accessibility as an integral aspect of government content. The sixth edition mentioned the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) but did not go into detail about how to implement accessibility in relation to writing and editing. Content Guide had an overview on accessibility that referred to specific success criteria in WCAG. About this page References ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) (2020) Accessibility statement, ABC website, accessed 4 December 2020. Australian Inclusive Publishing Initiative (2019) Inclusive publishing in Australia: an introductory guide, AIPI website, accessed 5 November 2020. Australian Taxation Office (2020) Digital inclusion guide, ATO website, accessed 25 November 2020. Interaction Design Foundation (n.d.) Usability, IDF website, accessed 5 November 2020. 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W3C WAI (2020), What's new in WCAG 2.2 [working draft], W3C website, accessed 26 November 2020. W3C WAI (2015) 'Writing for web accessibility', Tips for getting started, W3C website, accessed 5 November 2020. Last updated This page was updated Friday 15 December 2023. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/apply-accessibility-principles Apply accessibility principles User needs are at the heart of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). When you take user needs into account, applying accessibility principles becomes simpler, though not necessarily easier. Use WCAG principles to meet user needs The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 guidelines can be expressed as user needs. These needs feature throughout the Style Manual. The following lists group user needs (guidelines) under WCAG principles. Principle: content is perceivable Any user can perceive the content. User needs: I can understand any information contained in an image. (Guideline: text alternatives) I can access equivalent information to anything contained in a video or audio file. (Guideline: time-based media) I can change the content's presentation without losing information or structure. (Guideline: adaptable) I can easily control how I see and hear distinctions if colour or sound convey meaning. (Guideline: distinguishable) Principle: content is operable Any user can operate the navigation and interface. User needs: I can operate the content using only a keyboard. (Guideline: keyboard accessible) I can control any features that involve timing so I have enough time to read and use the content. (Guideline: enough time) I can use the content without experiencing a seizure or physical reaction. (Guideline: seizures and physical reactions) I can find and navigate the content and determine where I am on the webpage. (Guideline: navigable) I can operate the webpage with something other than a keyboard, like a pointer. (Guideline: input modalities) Principle: content is understandable Any user can understand the information

and the interface. Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution User needs: I can read and understand text, even if the content includes unusual words and shortened forms,or features languages other than English. (Guideline: readable) I can predict the webpage's appearance and how I will operate the content. (Guideline: predictable) I can avoid making any mistakes with my inputs, and correct any that I might make. (Guideline: input assistance) Principle: content is robust Assistive technologies can interpret the content. User need: I have confidence the markup language supports my use of software and assistive technology to access the content. (Guideline: compatible) Follow Style Manual guidance on accessibility requirements Look for accessibility requirements as you check guidance for different topics. Callout boxes in the Style Manual relate user needs to fundamental actions you can take to ensure content is accessible by design. Callouts also include references to WCAG criteria that link to technical details (level A, level AA and level AAA success criteria). The Style Manual also includes links to other external resources about accessibility. Release notes The digital edition recognises accessibility as an integral aspect of government content. The sixth edition mentioned the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) but did not go into detail about how to implement accessibility in relation to writing and editing. Content Guide had an overview on accessibility that referred to specific success criteria in WCAG. About this page References ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) (2020) Accessibility statement, ABC website, accessed 4 December 2020. 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W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) (2020) Accessibility fundamentals, W3C website, accessed 5 November 2020. W3C WAI (2017), 'Diverse abilities and barriers', Accessibility fundamentals, W3C website, accessed 23 November 2020. W3C WAI (2019), W3C accessibility standards overview, W3C website, accessed 23 November 2020. W3C WAI (2020), What's new in WCAG 2.2 [working draft], W3C website, accessed 26 November 2020. W3C WAI (2015) 'Writing for web accessibility', Tips for getting started, W3C website, accessed 5 November 2020. Last updated This page was updated Friday 15 December 2023. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/design-accessibility-and-inclusion Design for accessibility and inclusion How we design has a direct influence on what we design. Inclusive design means that the products and services we create work for everyone. Design for all The idea of 'design for all' has its roots in human-computer interaction studies. This body of knowledge offers practical methods to improve people's experience of digital content. The Style Manual promotes some of these methods, in line with the Digital Service Standard, such as: understanding needs through user research embedding accessibility as a foundation using consistent and responsive design. The goal is inclusive design that meets a diverse range of needs. Inclusive design considers user experience in a range of situations – for example, on different devices and for time-poor users. Do user research Find out more about user research for content. This aspect of inclusive design is core to Style Manual guidance. As part of your user research, test content to gain: input from the users you're designing for views and feedback from a diverse and representative users. You can make content accessible for one user, but it will benefit others in different situations. For example, user research can help you understand: a person who uses their mobile and needs simple menu options a time-poor executive who needs content that's easy to scan a person who needs to fill in a form, but English is not their first language. Accessibility is a common thread in each of these situations. Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Combine your user research with accessibility techniques to design usable content. Ask what makes content usable Usability and accessibility are closely linked. People will use content that accommodates their needs (usable content). They turn away from content that is alienating or frustrating to use. Accessible content is a foundation to address broader user needs. For example, page structure feeds into assistive technology. But good page structure also improves readability. You can think of accessibility as a necessary step to create usable content. Consider a user who cannot perceive images and the content provides no description, such as alt text. In this situation, visual content is not usable because it is not accessible. Create content for people with diverse abilities People can experience difficulties with access because of ongoing, temporary and situational barriers. Government content needs to be designed so it does not create barriers to access. Poor design causes people to experience ongoing, temporary or situational difficulties. This can limit the extent and duration of access to online content in many ways. Accessibility is how you can avoid setting up barriers for people with diverse abilities. When you design content, it needs to serve people with: age-related conditions changing abilities disability health issues cognitive, neurological and learning disabilities. Usable content accommodates this range of human experience. Release notes Example Using sight to read: A senior executive has an inflamed optic nerve that limits their field of vision. They may experience a temporary barrier to access. A commuter on public transport cannot read on their phone because the screen reflects their surroundings. They may experience a situational barrier to access. The digital edition recognises accessibility as an integral aspect of government content. The sixth edition mentioned the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) but did not go into detail about how to implement accessibility in relation to writing and editing. Content Guide had an overview on accessibility that referred to specific success criteria in WCAG. About this page References ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) (2020) Accessibility statement, ABC website, accessed 4 December 2020. Australian Inclusive Publishing Initiative (2019) Inclusive publishing in Australia: an introductory guide, AIPI website, accessed 5 November 2020. 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W3C WAI (2020), What's new in WCAG 2.2 [working draft], W3C website, accessed 26 November 2020. W3C WAI (2015) 'Writing for web accessibility', Tips for getting started, W3C website, accessed 5 November 2020. Last updated This page was updated Friday 7 July 2023. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/literacy-and-access Literacy and access Literacy can be a barrier to access for Australian users. Writing to an Australian year 7 level makes content usable for most people. Literacy affects access to government services and information Literacy is a person's ability to read and write. It is also how well they can access written text in digital and print formats. The effect of literacy on people's lives is profound. It influences how they interact with each other and how they approach education, work and government. Low literacy can make it hard to access government services and information. Factors that affect literacy in English include: where people live their linguistic background their education how old they are their abilities and limitations how they access information. Accessibility requirements User need: I can read and understand text, even if the content includes unusual words, shortened forms, or features languages other than English. Fundamentals: Write in plain language. This helps all users and is essential for some. 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). Avoid (or explain) unusual words, phrases, idioms and so on. Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Expand all acronyms on their first use. Avoid using double negatives. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criteria: 3.1.5 Reading level – level AAA 3.1.3 Unusual words – level AAA 3.1.4 Abbreviations – level AAA Reading levels in Australia 'Reading level' is the level of education someone needs to be able to read text. It is one way to measure literacy. In Australia: about 44% of adults read at literacy level 1 to 2 (a low level) 38% of adults read at level 3 about 15% read at level 4 to 5 (the highest level). People at a reading level 1 read at a primary school equivalent level. They can understand short sentences. Australian adult reading levels Reading level Percentage of adults at each level (%) Pre-primary level (below level 1) 3.7 Pre-year 1 to year 6 (level 1) 10.0 Year 7 to year 10 (level 2) 30.0 Years 11 and 12 (level 3) 38.0 Certificate IV (level 4) 14.0 Diploma and above (level 5) 1.2 Note: Percentages do not add to 100. Sources: Reading level statistics are from ABS (2013). Australian school-level equivalents for each OECD classification level are from ABS et al. (2017). Education and literacy People with higher literacy – as measured by reading level – generally have had access to a better education. Many factors influence people's access to education, including where they live. Post-school education is easier to access if you live in a major city. For example, people in cities are more likely to have a bachelor degree than people in regional areas. But there are also areas of disadvantage in the major cities. An education doesn't guarantee a reading level that matches the qualification. For example, about 30% of Australians have a diploma or higher, but only 1.2% of Australians can read at that level. Many people maintain their high-school reading level even if they go on to tertiary studies. Clear content helps all users Regardless of literacy levels, all users want to be able to interact with government easily. Respect their time by writing in plain language. Check that your content is a reading level 2 (Australian year 7 equivalent). This level also helps users with higher literacy. Users with higher education also prefer content that's easy to read. People with the highest literacy levels tend to be time-poor and have the most to read. The preference for plain English increases with: a person's level of education the complexity of the topic. Content for general consumption needs to be accessible by everyone, regardless of literacy. Specialist content is more accessible for technical users when written in plain language. Understanding users Before you start writing, do user research. Don't assume that everyone can access, read and understand what you write. Always make it simple for people to get what they need to do with government done. People might need an alternative to the digital service. Digital Service Standard requirements You must understand the needs of all users of your service and create content they can access to meet the Digital Service Standard: Criterion 1. Understand user needs Criterion 9. Make it accessible. Ensure that people who use the digital service can also use the other available channels, if needed, without repetition or confusion. Do user research to understand how people interact with government services or information. Ensure users with low literacy have equal access. Criterion 12. Don't forget the non-digital experience Release notes The digital edition has more detail and updates statistics, compared to both the sixth edition and Content Guide information on this topic. About this page Evidence Campbell KS et al. (2017) 'Plain-style preferences of US professionals', IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, 60(4): 1–12, accessed 12 October 2022. 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Classification of Education 2011 (ISCED 2011) to Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED) concordance [PDF 731 KB], Department of Education, Australian Government, accessed 7 November 2019. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018) 'Australia's health 2018', Australia's health series no. 16, catalogue number AUS 221, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 7 November 2019. Australian Public Service Commission (2016) APS employment data 30 June 2019 release, APSC website, accessed 7 November 2019. Grotlueschen A, Mallows D, Reder S and Sabatni J (2016) 'Adults with low proficiency in literacy or numeracy 2016', OECD education working papers No. 131, Organisation for Economic Co- operation and Development website, accessed 7 November 2019. Iles V and Osmond P (2019) 'Ring, ring. Who's still there? An analysis of callers to the Reading Writing Hotline', Fine Print, 42(2):3–7. Kim S (2018) 'Literacy skills gaps: A cross-level analysis on international and intergenerational variations', International Review of Education, 64(1):85–110, doi:10.1007/s11159-018-9703-4. Loranger H and Moran K (23 April 2017) 'Writing digital copy for domain experts', Nielsen Norman Group website, accessed 13 October 2022. McHardy J, Wildy HJ and Chapman ES (2018) 'How less-skilled adult readers experience word- reading', Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 41(1):5, accessed 13 October 2022. Moran K (5 April 2020) 'How people read online: new and old findings', Nielsen Norman Group website, accessed 13 October 2022. Neilson J (13 March 2005) 'Lower-literacy users: writing for a broad consumer audience', Neilson Norman Group, accessed 7 November 2019. OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2016) Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), OECD website, accessed 7 November 2019. 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You can increase usability with: legible page design readable language comprehensible structure. People read text in different ways. How they read depends on: how well they already understand the subject how familiar the vocabulary is. Digital Service Standard requirements You must understand the needs of all users of your service and create content they can access to meet the Digital Service Standard: Criterion 1. Understand user needs Criterion 9. Make it accessible. People skim headings and page structure To help people understand the type of content, use a clear structure. People want to find the information they need. They skim over the headings to find 'signposts' that confirm the content is relevant. Before reading the text, they look at other elements such as: headings Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution links images tables lists. Layout and typography are also important. A clear visual structure with an easy-to-read font is quicker to scan and read. The way people read content on a screen is different to how they read in print. On a smaller screen, such as a phone, people are likely to scan the entire screen before focusing on text or other elements. On other devices, people usually start at the centre of the screen and scan to the left and to the right. Structure the page to make the most useful content stand out. If people are looking for specific information, they are likely to scan the text as a whole to find what they need. They will look for links, a specific term, a number or an address. For this reason, present information in an accepted pattern such as: an address block underlined hyperlinks. Accessibility requirements User needs: I can find and navigate the content and determine where I am on the webpage. I can change the content's presentation without losing information or structure. Fundamentals: Write clear page titles. This is the first thing a screen reader user will hear and should align with the first heading on the page. Organise content with a clear structure using section headings. Describe the topics or the following section in the heading. Make sure users can navigate through all content in the intended order, regardless of the technology they're using. Use the same navigation elements across the service. Don't rely on colour alone to structure pages. Don't rely on sensory characteristics such as shape, size, visual location, orientation or sound to explain things. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criteria: 2.4.2 Page titled – level A 2.4.6 Headings and labels – Level AA 2.4.10 Section headings – level AAA 1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A 1.3.2 Meaningful sequence – level A 1.3.3 Sensory characteristics – level A Print considerations People read print content more thoroughly. On a double page of print without any headings or images, people usually read from top left to bottom right. When they're reading non-fiction, people need headings to help them find information. They also scan illustrations, tables, headings and other elements before reading the text. Often they do this in a sweeping curve counterclockwise from the top right before they decide what, if anything, to read. Content with too many unfamiliar words slows readers down Some readers can scan text and quickly find what they need. They don't focus on every word. Instead, they take in all the meaning at once. As a result, they don't need to read individual words such as 'the' to understand a sentence (but they see all the words). Other readers have to work harder to understand individual words. They will find reading easier if you use more familiar words. Familiar words that are spelled as they sound are easier to read than unfamiliar words that are not spelled as they sound. People read more slowly if they find: too many unfamiliar words too many long words unfamiliar or complex sentence structures. If the content is difficult, people slow down and focus on unfamiliar words. They might backtrack to try to understand the meaning. This can cause difficulty with comprehension. Complex sentences are hard to read Complex sentences are harder to read than simple ones. People pay attention to content only for as long as they need to. They are not likely to read everything. People will take seconds to decide from the page title and first few headings if the content is relevant. Once people are on a page, they might scan only a fifth of the content before deciding whether to read in detail. Accessibility requirements User needs: I can read and understand text, even if the content includes unusual words, shortened forms, or features languages other than English. Fundamentals: Write in plain language. This helps all users and is essential for some. 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). 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 3.1.3 Unusual words – level AAA 3.1.4 Abbreviations – level AAA Rhythm changes can help or hinder reading People need to be able to read as smoothly and quickly as possible. They build a rhythm as they read a line of text. They automatically go to the beginning of the next line and begin reading. Help people build reading rhythm with: short sentences new paragraphs line breaks. Varying rhythm can help or hinder comprehension. Sentence length Short sentences are easier to read because they limit the scope of an idea. But most readers like the variety and rhythm of a mixture of sentence lengths. For most readers, aim for an average sentence length of 15 words per sentence. Long sentences should have no more than 25 words. Paragraphs and line breaks Paragraphs give people a rest before launching into a new idea. They also help people quickly find an idea in the writing. Line breaks also package information. Used well, they are an effective way to keep people focused and interested. Line breaks are used to: Example Short sentences are great. But not always. Vary sentence length. It helps people stay engaged. help people focus on one idea at a time draw attention to a point – this is why a paragraph of one short sentence can be so effective. Line breaks disrupt the eye as it moves along a line. Poorly used line breaks either: break ideas in the wrong place – for example, by creating too many short lines let ideas run together – for example, by creating long lines. Variations in rhythm Variations need to support comprehension. For example, you can use a change of rhythm for emphasis: to make a point or draw the reader's attention to a certain word. You can vary rhythm using: headings, lists and other elements that give structure punctuation marks parenthetical information – set off using brackets, commas or dashes. Each of these variations can interrupt a reading rhythm. Reading rhythm is also interrupted by: unfamiliar words capital letters changes in font or typeface, such as italics images. Any variation or interruption in rhythm can affect comprehension. Release notes The digital edition has an online focus for how people find information and how people read. It does not directly address how people find information in printed material. It has similar information on scanning and reading print and digital content. The sixth edition had information on how people find information online and in print. It included information on indexing that is not part of the digital edition's Live release. The digital edition omits some information from the sixth edition on eye movement. The sixth edition explained how readers absorb information. It included information about context and patterning, attention spans, style and layout, and images (called 'illustrations'). It referred to the use of moving images to get users' attention. This information sits on other pages Example BLOCKS OF CAPITAL LETTERS ARE HARD TO READ. Use capital letters appropriately to help people understand written English. in the digital edition, which are linked to types of structure. The Content Guide did not address this topic, but had related information on writing for search engines and navigation labels. About this page References Baron NS (2017) 'Reading in a digital age', Phi Delta Kappan, 99(2):15–20, doi:10.1177/0031721717734184. Cain K and Parrila R (2014) 'Theories of reading: what we have learned from two decades of scientific research', Scientific Studies of Reading, 18(1):1–4, doi:10.1080/10888438.2013.836525. 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Last updated This page was updated Monday 24 June 2024. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/inclusive-language Inclusive language Use language that is culturally appropriate and respectful of the diversity of Australia's peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Age diversity Cultural and linguistic diversity Gender and sexual diversity People with disability Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Use culturally appropriate and respectful language when writing with, for or about First Nations people. Age diversity Refer to age only if it is necessary. Use respectful language and consistent style if age is relevant. Cultural and linguistic diversity Australians have different cultural backgrounds and speak many languages. Use inclusive language that respects this diversity. Gender and sexual diversity https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/inclusive-language/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Use culturally appropriate and respectful language when writing with, for or about First Nations people. There is no single Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity First Nations people are often called Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. But there is significant diversity within these 2 groups. There is a wide range of nations, cultures and languages across mainland Australia and throughout the Torres Strait. Given this diversity, respectful language use depends on what different communities find appropriate. 'Aboriginal' is a broad term that groups nations and custodians of mainland Australia and most of the islands, including Tasmania, K'gari, Palm Island, Mornington Island, Groote Eylandt, Bathurst and Melville Islands. 'Torres Strait Islander' is a broad term grouping the peoples of at least 274 small islands between the northern tip of Cape York in Queensland and the south-west coast of Papua New Guinea. Many Torres Strait Islander peoples live on the Australian mainland. There are also 2 Torres Strait Islander communities at Bamaga and Seisia, within the Northern Peninsula Area of Queensland.

Authoritative guidance lives with the relevant community or individual There is a legacy of writing about First Nations people without seeking their guidance about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Age diversity Cultural and linguistic diversity Gender and sexual diversity People with disability Writing and designing content Grammar, punctuation and conventions Content types Structuring content Referencing and attribution references and terminology. Educational texts and official websites can be inaccurate when written without consultation. It's important to consult with traditional owners, local elders, community and content experts. Consultation is essential when writing about sensitive matters like cultures and history. Consultation protocols and respectful language use depend on the preferences of the peoples involved. As a result, there are very few hard rules. Respectful content and language use will always depend upon proper consultation. Respectful language use starts with the basics Basic respectful language means using: specific terms, like the name of a community, before using broader terms plurals when speaking about collectives (peoples, nations, cultures, languages) present tense, unless speaking about a past event empowering, strengths-based language. Language that can be discriminatory or offensive includes: shorthand terms like 'Aborigines', 'Islanders' or acronyms like 'ATSI' using terms like 'myth', 'legend' or 'folklore' when referring to the beliefs of First Nations people blood quantums (for example, 'half-caste' or percentage measures) 'us versus them' or deficit language possessive terms such as 'our', as in 'our Aboriginal peoples' 'Australian Indigenous peoples', as it also implies ownership, much like 'our'. Many texts have referred to First Nations people in the past tense, for example: 'The Aboriginal language existed for hundreds of years.' 'Torres Strait Islanders once congregated at this place.' This use of past tense continues the historical erasure of First Australians. The 2 statements also show a lack of understanding about diversity within either group. Statements to redress the historical erasure and inaccuracy would read: 'There is no such thing as "the Aboriginal language", it would be like saying "the European language". There are literally hundreds of First Nations languages that exist today, and have been spoken for millennia.' 'The people of Iama (Yam Island) in the Torres Strait have been living there for thousands of years.' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have always been here. They are still undertaking cultural activities. Be conscious of this and work to change the habit. A Welcome to Country is not the same as an Acknowledgement of Country Welcome to Country is an important ceremony for many First Australians. An Acknowledgement of Country is a way of showing respect. Both are distinct practices with different requirements and meanings. Always capitalise both. A Welcome to Country is a ceremony to welcome people onto the land of the custodians. A local traditional owner performs a Welcome to Country. The welcome can take many forms. It might offer safe passage to visitors or outline any responsibilities while on country. Providing a Welcome to Country is a paid service. A traditional owner can assign a proxy if they are unable to attend unexpectedly, though this is rare. An Acknowledgement of Country is something anyone can do. It is a way a person of any descent can pay respect to the local community and nation(s). It acknowledges the custodians of the land on which a meeting is being held. And it recognises the local community's ongoing connection to, and care for, country. Some organisations also include acknowledgements in email signatures, websites and other materials. Both are simple but important ways of paying respect. They redress the erasure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on their own lands. First Nations diversity is reflected throughout Australia Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples live in urban places. Historical stereotypes of 'traditional' peoples are inaccurate and can be offensive. A common misconception is if people have fair skin or live in a city they can't be a First Nations person. This could not be more wrong. For a long time, policies dictated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who they could marry, and where they could live. Terms like 'half-caste' or 'part Aboriginal' reflect these policies. These terms are deeply offensive and hurtful. Peoples were also forcibly removed to other locations. In every location in Australia, remote, regional or urban, there are traditional custodians. There may also be many different peoples currently living there. When writing about any particular place, make sure to be inclusive of all First Nations people living on country. Naming protocols are complicated, specificity is often more respectful Always ask for people's preferences about what they want to be called or how they want to identify. It is usually more respectful to be specific. Use the following hierarchy based on what you are writing. If writing about: a specific group, use their nation, island or community name many Aboriginal nations, there may be a regional term that is better, such as 'Murris' or 'Kooris' many Torres Strait Islander peoples or islands, there may be a regional term that is more appropriate, such as Kulkalgal (encompassing the central islands of Masig, Poruma, Warraber and Iama) both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, use terms such as 'First Nations people', 'First Australians' or 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples'. The issue with general terms and when to use them 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal' are broad terms imposed on First Australians without consultation. These are not words they chose for themselves. While the term 'Indigenous Australians' is in common use, many First Australians may not be comfortable with it. Using 'Indigenous Australians' to refer to First Australians is relatively recent. Its use became popular through international discussions, where the term 'indigenous' is appropriate (with a lower case 'i'). But it is a blanket term that homogenises a wide array of peoples and cultures. This can cause offence. Due to the common use of 'Indigenous Australians' in our society, there may be times when you can't avoid the term. It can come up in discussions with government organisations, in the names of some organisations or in grant applications. If you must use it, remember to only do so when writing generally about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The term should always appear as 'Indigenous Australians' in the first instance, always with a capital 'I'. Afterward you can use 'Indigenous', capitalised, so long as the context is correct and clear. Using 'Indigenous' alone is inaccurate. Some people use Aboriginal 'and/or' Torres Strait Islander. This is a good idea when the audience isn't clear or specific. It's also important to realise that some individuals identify with both groups. Style for First Australian languages needs to recognise continuing cultures Hundreds of distinct First Nations languages and dialects are alive and spoken today. Never refer to them as 'extinct'. Many communities are working to revive their languages. The preferred term to describe these languages is 'sleeping'. Spelling Written sources are often viewed as 'better' or more 'reliable' in Australia. But spellings for words from First Australian languages are inconsistent across many sources. Many colonial attempts to document First Nations languages and cultures introduced inaccuracy and misrepresentation. This includes inaccurate spellings for names, nations and locations. First Nations cultures are oral-based traditions. Oral sources must have precedence. Follow the Example 'Indigenous Australians' is a broad term and covers a

large array of peoples. Often Indigenous peoples themselves do not identify using this term, they will use their local community, island or language group. Indigenous peoples also have regional terms that they use for specific geographical locations, such as ‘palawa’ or ‘Noongar’ to name a couple. spellings that local traditional owners, elders or community members use for words from their languages. Consultation is essential. You can use a style sheet to record terms you have checked with the relevant community. Italics Do not italicise names or words from First Nations languages. They are Australian languages, not foreign languages. Capitalisation and meaning There are few firm rules for capitalisation, as different peoples have their own preferences. Always ask the relevant community’s preferences and usages, and follow their advice. Many First Nations people have developed their own dialects of English as well as creole/Kriol languages. This means common nouns used in Standard Australian English can shift into proper nouns at times. The information on this page follows the convention of minimal capitalisation. But there are many First Australians who have their own preferences, and these should always take precedence. Examples of words that are sometimes capitalised include Elders, Country or Traditional Custodians. Important cultural practices are also capitalised. For example, Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country. Some words in Standard Australian English sound the same in Aboriginal English dialects and in Torres Strait dialects, such as Yumpla Tok. But the meaning can be very different. Words like deadly, country, elder and law are good examples. Listen carefully to the context these words are being placed in and ask for clarity if you need it. First Nations spirituality is easily misused or misrepresented Example For Standard Australian English, ‘dreaming’ has a very particular meaning. For some Aboriginal peoples, there is also another meaning. Within some communities, the Dreaming means something very different. It refers to a range of systems of spiritual beliefs. This term is complex. It should always be capitalised when used in this way. Some peoples still use ‘the Dreamtime’. But, it has fallen out of use with many, as it implies a timeframe or ‘past’, which is not accurate. Some peoples use terms that don’t have an English equivalent. Some First Australians’ beliefs are being used in disrespectful ways. For example, the use of ancestral beings such as the Rainbow Serpent, or Wandjinas as a characters in ‘fictional’ stories, art or other forms of media. Most often they are used without permission, and portrayed in deeply hurtful ways. Sometimes wider Australian society has denigrated these beliefs. For example, climbing Uluru in direct contradiction to requests from the traditional custodians not to do so. Both instances show a lack of understanding or respect for others’ beliefs. And unfortunately, there’s a legacy of willful ignorance in this country that is only now being addressed. As with any religion or spiritual belief, words like ‘myth’ or ‘legend’ are minimising and hurtful. It is not necessary to believe in or understand someone else’s beliefs to be respectful of them. Strengths-based language respects continuous cultures and connections Content about First Nations people has often focused on ‘problems’. This has 2 outcomes: making First Australians ‘the problem’ or continuing a deficit discourse. Neither is acceptable. It’s important to acknowledge the many wrongs and ongoing injustices that stem from our shared history. And it's not about ignoring issues. But it is just as important to acknowledge the strength of those First Australians whose cultures survive and thrive today. Make sure to: Use empowering, strengths-based language. Tell positive stories. Emphasise ongoing connections to community, culture and country. The difference between 2 outcome statements above: The first has a strengths-based emphasis. The latter perpetuates a deficit discourse. Example A bunyip is a being that many Aboriginal peoples believe is real. Yet many Australians speak of it using terms such as ‘myth’ or ‘legend’. They also use it without permission, and appropriate it for their own purposes. Appropriating others’ beliefs and treating them in this way is disrespectful. Write this The program supports First Nations people to achieve their goals. Not this The program seeks to address the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander problems within the community. Be careful not to perpetuate patronising or paternalistic language use. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures are millennia old. They are not ‘in need’ of being ‘rescued’ or ‘saved’. It is about working together, not doing things ‘for them’ or ‘to them’. Also, setting up a dichotomy of ‘us' and ‘them’ perpetuates division and exclusion. This language use is not acceptable. Consultation is a must Consultation starts with elders of any given community. They might not be living on their traditional lands, or there might be multiple groups to consult. If it’s not clear who you need to talk to, there are many community organisations that exist today and can help. These include land councils, housing, medical, legal or social organisations. These groups will likely have a direct link to traditional owners and/or elders they can help you contact. There is clear information about communities within the region on the Torres Strait Regional Authority's website. They are able to do this because it is a geographically small area. Mainland Australia is much larger, and there is no single body that can offer guidance for all communities. Cross-cultural communication is not easy. Some basic starting points include: Communicate clearly without jargon or acronyms. Understand that community concerns will take precedence over your request. Make sure to build in plenty of time around the request to support this. When receiving a response, listen. Body language is also important, so pay attention to what is not said. Understand that silence is an important part of First Australians communication. Do your research. It is normal to want to avoid offending or upsetting people. In any process mistakes will happen. If this occurs, you might have to ask for clarity. Do not rush to fill any silence. Listen closely, apologise and try to learn from it. When working in this manner, always give the group final control. Make sure to return whatever is taken from the community, or ensure a returned benefit. This includes knowledge and stories. For full guidance around consultation visit AIATSIS Ethical Research Guidelines. Forming a working relationship with a specific group is wonderful. But understand that this does not translate into knowledge about any other groups. Working with content experts, such as a First Nations editor or liaison officer, is invaluable. People in these roles can play an important role as a cultural translator. Sorry business Sorry business is an important grieving process when someone passes. It involves not only immediate family, but the entire community. If a person has passed, approval must be sought from the family around the use of their name and image. There might be some avoidance protocols you need to adhere to. Some communities are okay these days with the use of a name, an image, or both. Others still request the use of neither. The community will have a way to refer to someone in this case and can give guidance. Always adhere to these requirements for all community members. If in doubt, ask. Australian audiences are familiar with standard warnings about use of names, images or voices of deceased people in many publications and media. This is a respectful acknowledgement of sorry business practices and beliefs, and is meant to warn others. Using a standard warning does not replace respectful consultation with the community. Permissions The

permissions process is vital and differs from standard copyright procedures. As well as consulting with elders and/or traditional owners, there are other steps to take. When seeking permissions for the use of any item, individuals sometimes need to provide approvals too. This is not a firm rule, but one example of how things can change. Always follow the guidance of the appropriate elders or community members. Use of images Many historical images lack any contextual information. It can be impossible to trace the names of peoples or locations that feature in the images. As a result, it can be inappropriate and offensive to publish them. Avoid using photographs where people are unnamed. Illustrations and photographs should include diverse, dynamic and contemporary representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Visual representations will depend on context. Just like use of terms in text, images should be specific to the particular nation, region or community that relates to the content. Release notes The digital edition significantly revises and updates guidance on content that relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It provides more comprehensive guidance than both the sixth edition and the Content Guide. For example, the sixth edition described the term 'Indigenous' as 'widely acceptable' as a subset of the broader term 'Australian'. The digital edition cautions that use of the term 'Indigenous' can Example You have images of a group of people you wish to print. You are already in consultation with the elders or relevant family groups in the community and they are happy with what you have. You then learn that you also have to ask the individuals within any image for approval. be inaccurate without proper context. The digital edition offers more options for general terms than the sixth edition around 'precise and inclusive language for collective references' to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The sixth edition based recommendations about preferred terms on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission advice. The digital edition recommends consulting directly with relevant communities and individuals. It states, 'Respectful content and language use will always depend upon proper consultation.' 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. This page was updated in June 2023 when the term 'First Nations Australians' was replaced by 'First Nations people'. This reflects a change in language usage. About this page References AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) (n.d.) AUSTLANG, AIATSIS Collection website, accessed 3 October 2019. AIATSIS (2015) Guidelines for the ethical publishing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors and research from those communities, Aboriginal Studies Press, accessed 1 October 2019. AIATSIS (2012) Guidelines for ethical research in Australian Indigenous studies, AIATSIS website, accessed 3 October 2019. Arts Law Centre of Australia (n.d.) Indigenous cultural and intellectual property, Arts Law Centre of Australia website, accessed 2 October 2019. Australia Council for the Arts (2007) Writing: Protocols for producing Indigenous Australian writing, Australia Council for the Arts, accessed 1 October 2019. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2016), Communicating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences, PM&C website, accessed 3 October 2019. Eades D (2013) Aboriginal ways of using English, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra. Reconciliation Australia (n.d.) 'A guide to using respectful and inclusive language and terminology', Terminology guide, Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education online platform, accessed 2 October 2019. Pascoe B (2012) The little red yellow black book: an introduction to Indigenous Australia, 3rd edn, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra. Queensland Government (7 June 2023) Traditional name restored to world's largest sand island [media release], Queensland Government, accessed 14 June 2023. Torres Strait Regional Authority (n.d.) The Torres Strait, TSRA website, accessed 7 April 2020. Last updated This page was updated Wednesday 5 July 2023.