https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content Structuring content Design content with a structure that helps the user navigate and understand. Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution Types of structure Structure supports the user as they search for information. Use the type of structure that suits the content and how people will need to consume it. Inverted pyramid structure Hierarchical structure Narrative structure Sequential structure Headings Headings help users scan content and find what they need. Organise content using clear heading levels. Begin each heading with keywords and keep it to the point. 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. 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. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/types-structure Types of structure Structure supports the user as they search for information. Use the type of structure that suits the content and how people will need to consume it. Structure content to help the user to navigate and understand Structure helps people find information. It helps people to understand and use content by: preparing them for what they will read helping them navigate and scan content helping them remember what they've read. Structure also helps search engines. They use structure to find and rank content in a search results listing. Accessibility requirements User needs: I can change the content's presentation without losing information or structure. I can find and navigate the content and determine where I am on the webpage. Fundamentals: Write clear page titles. The title is the first thing a screen reader user will hear and is the first item to appear in search results. Organise content in a clear order using section headings. Describe the topics or the following section in the headings. Narrative structure Sequential structure Headings Links Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution Make sure all users can navigate through all content in the intended order, regardless of the technology they're using. Use the same navigation elements across services. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criteria: 1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A 2.4.2 Page titled – level A 2.4.6 Headings and labels – level A 2.4.10 Section headings – level AAA Pick the type of structure that works for the user Use a structure that matches expectations for the type of content you're creating: To group content into topics or connected ideas, prioritised by level of importance, use a hierarchical structure. People will scan content for relevance to them. Some will use screen readers to list headings in order to understand the content at a high level. Hierarchical structure is economical for people with low attention span, who are time-poor or need to use assistive technologies. To present a sequence of steps or events, use a sequential structure. People will need to know or do something with the content that is presented as instructional and ordered. Sequential structure helps people know where they are in a process towards a given result. To guide people from beginning to end, use a narrative structure. People will be interested in knowing the entire story. They will expect signposts that suggest where they are in the journey for ease of reference. Avoid unconventional or inconsistent structures. They make people work harder to find and understand content. Do user research to understand who will be using the content and their level of literacy. Your organisation might have templates for content such as reports, letters and emails. Structural elements are built into those templates. Design headings and other elements to help the user scan the page Once you have decided on the type of structure you need to use, plan the structural elements. Use a logical hierarchy or sequential steps for headings. Write a topic sentence for each paragraph. Display important information in lists, callout boxes, tables and illustrations. Structure your content by writing about one idea at a time: Start with the most important idea first. Group related ideas under headings. Organise ideas into short paragraphs. Make sure ideas flow from one paragraph to the next. Use a logical order for sentences. Release notes The digital edition canvasses types of structure. It focuses on the inverted pyramid, and narrative structure is new. The sixth edition and the Content Guide were silent on the inverted pyramid and narrative structure. The sixth edition had advice on inductive and deductive patterns of writing, and on linear and non-linear structures. These are not covered in the digital edition. The digital edition builds on a short paragraph from the sixth edition about sequential structure. It also has more concise information on hierarchical structure. The Content Guide did not have advice on these topics. About this page References Andrews M (7 November 2014) 'Types of content structure', Story Needle, accessed 30 May 2020. Andrews M (11 October 2017) 'Structural metadata: key to structured content', Story Needle, accessed 30 May 2020. Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019) Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra. General Services Administration (n.d) 'Structure the content', 18F Content Guide, 18F Content Guide website, accessed 30 May 2020. GOV.UK (2019) 'Writing for GOV.UK', Content design: planning, writing and managing content, GOV.UK, accessed 30 May 2020. Jenkins S (31 October 2019) 'New data analysis product could help agencies design better services', The Mandarin, accessed 30 May 2020. Khalifa A (2017) 10 content structures that you can use on any platform today, Ahmed Khalifa website, accessed 30 May 2020. Lynch PJ and Horton S (2016) Web style guide, Web Style Guide website, accessed 30 May 2020. Mackenzie J (2011) The editor's companion, 2nd edn, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne. Moran K (20 March 2016) 'How chunking helps content processing', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. Moran K (5 April 2016) 'How people read online: new and old findings', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. Perelman LC Barrett E and Paradis J (n.d.) 'Topic sentences', in Mayfield electronic handbook of technical & scientific writing, Mayfield Publishing Company, accessed 30 May 2020. Rushkin A, Thompson N and Murray D (2017) 'Towards cultural translation of websites: a large- scale study of Australian, Chinese, and Saudi Arabian design preferences', Behaviour & Information Technology, 36(4):351–63, doi:10.1080/0144929X.2016.1234646. Search Engine Land (2019) 'Site architecture and search engine success factors', Essential guide to SEO: how to master the science of SEO, Search Engine Land website, accessed 30 May 2020. Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) 'Content structure', Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca, accessed 30 May 2020. Last updated This page was updated Tuesday 21 June 2022. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/headings Headings Headings help users scan content and find what they need. Organise content using clear heading levels. Begin each heading with keywords and keep it to the point. Write headings that are clear and short Headings organise information. Clear headings are specific to the topic they describe. Keep them brief. They are signposts for people and for search engines. Many people skim through headings to check whether a page is relevant before they read it in detail. Search engines use headings to analyse and rank content. Accessibility

requirements User needs: I can change the content's presentation without losing information or structure. I can find and navigate the content and determine where I am on the webpage. Fundamentals: Write clear page titles. This is the first topic 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. Clearly describe the topics or the following section in the headings. Make sure all users can navigate through all content in the intended order, regardless of the technology they are using. Use the same navigation elements consistently across services. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criteria: 1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A 2.4.2 Page titled – level A 2.4.6 Headings and labels – level AA 2.4.10 Section headings – level AAA State the main point Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution Write headings that tell the user what is in the content below it. Headings should state the main point. This helps users find and use content in search results and on social media. Use words that accurately describe the content. Don't use empty words or phrases (for example, 'more' or 'related information'). Only include information in the section that is relevant to the heading. If the information isn't relevant, move it or rewrite the heading. Use fewer than 70 characters Write headings that are no more than 70 characters (including spaces). Longer headings are more difficult to read and can be confusing. They might also suggest that you have too many ideas in a section. Avoid questions as headings Using questions pushes your main idea towards the end of the heading. Starting a heading with 'why', 'how' or 'what' makes it slower for the user to read. They have to read the whole heading before finding relevant keywords. Use keywords to start headings Start headings and subheadings with keywords that help people to make a connection. People scan-read headings to know the relevance of the content. If they use assistive technologies, they might use the tab key to read from heading to heading. Others who use screen readers might generate a list of headings for quick navigation. The keywords should relate to the main content below the heading. Pay special attention to the first 2 or 3 words. These might be the only words someone reads to decide whether to continue to scan the page or to read the text. Using keywords at the start of a heading is called 'frontloading'. Frontloading makes it easier for people to assess the heading's relevance – either on a web page or in search results. It also helps search engines find your content. Like this Learn how to drive Not this More information Write this Organise heading levels in a logical order Heading hierarchy is the relationship between main headings and subheadings. The hierarchical structure shows users how topics fit together. A clear and logical heading hierarchy shows readers where to find information and how important it is. Keep each section concise and use headings to chunk information so it works well on screen for the user. Heading levels include main titles, headings and subheadings: Level 1 headings are titles of webpages or titles of chapters in a book or printed report. Level 2 headings are main headings. Level 3 headings are subheadings. Level 4 headings are sub-subheadings (headings under subheadings). Don't skip heading levels Write headings in a complete organised hierarchy. A complete hierarchy helps people scan the content to find the information they need. Screen reader users need to be able to rely on heading level hierarchy to find relevant content. Use one level 1 heading Use just one level 1 heading per webpage. Make it unique to your site. This helps users understand the content and find it using search engines. The level 1 heading is also a good place to include target keywords needed for search engine optimisation. Print considerations In documents, use level 1 headings (or 'Heading 1' style) for the main sections, such as part titles. Make the headings relate Every heading and subheading must relate to the heading above it so the grouping of information is logical and clear for users. Use keywords to start headings Not this Write a heading starting with the main keywords Avoid level 5 and deeper heading levels Try to use only 3 or 4 heading levels at the most. A simpler structure is easier to read. You can use deeper heading levels (level 4 and below) for very complex documents, but try to avoid it. Deep and complex hierarchies of headings are a sign that you are probably trying to do too much on a webpage or in a chapter. It is likely that you will lose the reader. Space out headings Separate each heading from the next one by some text, even if it's only a sentence. This helps create a clear distinction between ideas. Create at least 2 headings for each level Give each heading level in a section at least one other heading at the same level. This avoids the appearance of stranded ideas. Use numbered headings only for steps Use numbered headings only when they relate to a series of steps. Numbered headings can help users through a sequential structure. Like this H1: Apply for a drivers licence H2: Pass the theory test H3: Learn the road rules H3: Book a theory test H2: Pass the driving test H3: Practise for the test H3: Book the driving test Not this H1: Pass the driving test H3: Learn the road rules H4: Pass the theory test H5: Practise for the test H2: Book theory test H2: Pass the driving test Print considerations In print, you can use numbered headings to help people cross-reference information: If you use numbered headings, use them only in the body. Don't use numbered headings in the preliminary pages or endmatter in a report. Don't number more than the first 3 heading levels. Be consistent: use a parallel structure All headings in a level should be consistent. They should have the same: overall message (for example, they are all steps in a process) grammatical form (called 'parallel structure'). Two common forms are: noun phrases (for example, 'effective headings' and 'punctuation and capitalisation') instructions (for example, 'keep headings short' and 'be consistent'). Use unique formatting for each level of heading Format headings so the heading levels are visibly different. This helps users scan the text. People should be able to tell the difference between heading levels at a glance. Formatting options include: font weights and sizes that are distinct from one another – a larger, bolder font for main headings and a smaller, lighter font for lower-level subheadings colour to help people scan the headings – but don't rely on colour as the only way to differentiate heading levels spacing above a heading to help people see the visual break from one section to the next. Don't add an underline Don't underline headings or any other text. Underlined text looks like a hyperlink, which can confuse users. It also makes it harder to read letters with descenders (for example, 'p', 'y' and 'g' in 'Applying for government support'). Apply HTML elements, tags and styles to headings Use styles, tags and HTML elements to identify headings in digital content. Correctly styled and tagged headings: make it easy to create consistent headings help software build an automatic table of contents are needed for accessibility of digital content help search engines understand the topic that you're writing about. Print considerations Correctly styled headings make it easier for graphic designers to know how to lay out the publication, including what weighting to give each heading. The reader should see at least one heading on each double-page spread in a printed document. Don't leave a heading at the bottom of the page with no text below it. Send the heading to the top of the next page so it stays with the content below it. HTML elements Use the correct HTML

element for the heading level. Your content management system should have inbuilt heading styles that you can apply to text. System heading styles Apply correct inbuilt heading styles so they can be automatically added to navigation and contents pages. If your organisation uses templates, use the template styles. Print considerations Some organisations have their own heading style guidelines. If no guidelines apply, use a 'Heading 1' style for the main sections in the document. The title of a document uses the 'Title' style. Write all headings in sentence case and use minimal punctuation Example A page about paying your tax might use these headings: H1 = 'Lodging your tax return' (the page title) H2 = 'Individual tax return' (a heading for a main section) H3 = 'Lodging online' (a subheading) H4 = 'Creating an account' (a sub-subheading) Use sentence case for headings to help people read the text more easily. This means you should use a capital letter only for: the first letter of the first word the first letter of any proper nouns letters in acronyms and initialisms. Don't write headings in all capital letters as users could misread words. For example, 'ACT' could be 'act' (the verb) rather than the initialism for the Australian Capital Territory. If you work for an organisation that uses all capitals for headings, make sure any abbreviations are easy to understand. Don't use a full stop to end headings Even if the heading is a sentence, it doesn't need a full stop at the end. Avoid using shortened forms in headings Don't use a shortened form in a heading unless it is better known than the full term (for example, 'DNA' and 'CSIRO'). Digital Service Standard requirements To ensure the content works on all devices, use responsive design methods. Many people do not use a desktop computer or printed material to access services and information. Test content on a mobile device first. Release notes The digital edition focuses on writing headings for online content, but includes print considerations. It builds on content from the sixth edition and has new guidance on tags, styles and frontloading. It recommends against using isolated headings. The Content Guide mentioned frontloading, short headings and heading hierarchies. The digital edition has new content on tags, styles and frontloading. About this page References Content Design London (2020) 'Headings and titles', 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. General Services Administration (n.d.) 'Headings', 18F Accessibility Guide, 18F website, accessed 29 May 2020. Loranger H (9 August 2015) 'Headings are pick-up lines: 5 tips for writing headlines that convert', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. Lynch PJ and Horton S (2016) Web style guide, Web Style Guide website, accessed 29 May 2020. Moran K (20 March 2016) 'How chunking helps content processing', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. New Zealand Government (2020) 'Headings and subheadings', Content design guidance, Digital.govt.nz, accessed 30 May 2020. Oxford University Press (2016) New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford. Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) '5.1: write useful page titles and headings', Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca, accessed 30 May 2020. University of Chicago (2017) Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) (2020) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) overview, W3C website, accessed 29 May 2020. WHATWG (Web Hypertext Application Technology Working Group) (2020) '4.3.6: the h1, h2, h3, h4, h5, and h6 elements', HTML: living standard, WHATWG website, accessed 4 June 2020. Last updated This page was updated Monday 22 August 2022. 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. Kaley A (30 June 2019) 'Popups: 10 Problematic Trends and Alternatives', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 20 January 2021. Loranger H (23 July 2017) 'Homepage links remain a necessity', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 7 June 2020. McGovern G (22 January 2012) 'Tips for writing great links', New Thinking, gerrymcgovern.com, accessed 7 June 2020. Mozilla (n.d.) ': The Anchor element', MDN Web Docs, accessed 27 January 2021. New Zealand Government (2020) 'Links', Content design guidance, Digital.govt.nz, accessed 7 June 2020. Nielsen J (2 March 2002) 'Deep linking is good linking', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 7 June 2020. Schade A (7 May 2017) 'Anchors OK? Re-assessing in-page links', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 7 June 2020. Sherwin K (13 December 2015) '"Learn more" links: you can do better', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 7 June 2020. Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) 'Links', Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca, accessed 7 June 2020.

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. Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019a) Course notes and exercises: English grammar for writers, editors and policymakers, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra. Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019b) Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian owls marsh birds crakes grebes snipes. [A multilevel list with hollow bullets] National University, Canberra. Flann E, Hill B and Wang L (2014) The Australian editing handbook, Wiley, Milton. Loranger H (9 April 2017) '7 tips for presenting bulleted lists in digital content', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 29 May 2020. Lynch PJ and Horton S (2016) Web style guide, Web Style Guide website, accessed 29 May 2020. Mackenzie J (2011) The editor's companion, 2nd edn, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne. McMurrey DA (n.d.) Online technical writing: lists, Chemnitz University of Technology, accessed 29 May 2020. 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. Last updated This page was updated Tuesday 23 July 2024. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/text-boxes-and-callouts Text boxes and callouts Text boxes, pull-quotes and sidebars draw attention from body text. Make sure they are accessible to everyone. Limit the use of text boxes and callouts You can draw attention to information in content by using text boxes and callouts (pull-quotes and sidebars). Before you include a text box or callout in your content, consider how it will help people understand or use the information. Don't overuse text boxes or callouts: they become a distraction. Avoid putting content in a text box or callout just because you can't make it fit into the flow of the text. Text boxes Text boxes sit close to the text they support. Text boxes should contain a summary, examples or an expansion of ideas in the body of the text. This is because people: scan text boxes before they read the body text often read text boxes separately from the main body of the text. Use text boxes to set information apart from the content. You can use text boxes for information that is useful but not part of the main content, for example: summaries checklists examples case studies quotes links to related information definitions. Pull-quotes Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution Pull-quotes are a type of callout. They are often in the form of an incomplete quote and are set apart with distinct formatting. They are not the same as 'block quotations'. Pull-quotes are a device to draw the user back into the content. Sidebars Sidebars are a type of callout. They sit beside the main content and are more common in print publications. Use text boxes for supporting content, not main text Text boxes do more than highlight information. They also make it clear that it shouldn't be read as part of the main text. Use the same presentation for the same type of content. For example, present example text boxes consistently, but differently to summary information. Use the same rules for capitalisation, punctuation and lists as other text. Longer text boxes should have a heading or title to show people the purpose of the text box at a glance. Make it distinct from the other headings in the text so you don't interrupt the heading hierarchy. In technical or long-form content, text boxes often contain short articles that support the main body of the text. Examples include case studies and descriptions of processes. They often contain images. Number text boxes if they feature repeatedly in content. Refer to numbered text boxes in the body text. You can use an appropriate identifier, such as 'Box 1' or 'Case study 1'. Make text boxes accessible in HTML Make sure boxes are readable by all users and on all devices. For text boxes in HTML, use the element. You can also use the attribute to define an ARIA complementary landmark. Use this when it sits outside the content. Alternatively, use the attribute and assign a name if the content needs to sit within the section of a page. For more information about formatting, visit the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) ARIA landmarks example. Example 'engaging with the user is vital in government content' Accessibility requirements User needs: I can change the content's presentation without losing information or structure. I can find and navigate the content and determine where I am on the webpage. Fundamentals: Organise content in a clear order using section headings. Choose colours and fonts that are readable. The design must be able to work well on mobile devices. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criteria: 1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A 1.3.2 Meaningful sequence – level A 2.4.10 Section headings – level AAA Don't use text boxes in Microsoft Office documents You should not use text boxes in Word and PowerPoint. They are not accessible for most users of screen readers. In Word, text boxes can sit above or below the

‘document layer’ that contains the page text – they are floating objects that can't carry a semantic structure. These features mean that not everyone using a screen reader can: read floating objects understand how box text relates to page text read the box text and page text in the correct order. Instead of text boxes, use borders and paragraph styles to highlight content visually. If these styles don't work for your content, there are other solutions. A one-by-one table is an option. If your document has complex formatting, accessible PDF (Portable Document Format) might be a better option. Complex Office documents require careful design. To ensure accessibility, get advice from an accessibility professional. Release notes This digital edition has an online focus for text boxes and callouts, including when and how to use them. The sixth edition mentioned text boxes and side panels for printed content. The Content Guide did not mention them. About this page References Casement D (30 January 2020) ‘MS Word accessibility: floating objects/text boxes’, MDBS Digiknow blog, accessed 30.07.21. GOV.UK (n.d.) ‘Inset text’, Design system, GOV.UK, accessed 20 May 2020. New Zealand Government (2021) Accessibility for Microsoft Word documents, Digital.govt.nz, accessed 1 March 2021. NSW Government (2022) ‘Call-out box guidelines’, NSW Department of Education website, accessed 22 December 2022. NSW Government (2022) ‘Word documents’, Digital service toolkit, Digital.NSW website, accessed 12 December 2022. UC Santa Cruz (2018) ‘HTML code to insert call-out boxes in your web page’, Advanced WCMS topics, UC Santa Cruz website, accessed 3 June 2020. University of Wisconsin (17 April 2015) ‘Using callouts effectively’, UWSA Blog, accessed 3 June 2020. W3C (2020) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) overview, W3C website, accessed 29 May 2020. W3C ARIA Authoring Practices Task Force (2016) ARIA landmarks example, W3C website, accessed 29 May 2020. WHATWG (Web Hypertext Application Technology Working Group) (2020) ‘4.3.5: the aside element’, HTML: living standard, WHATWG website, accessed 4 June 2020. Last updated This page was updated Thursday 22 December 2022.
https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/types-structure Types of structure Structure supports the user as they search for information. Use the type of structure that suits the content and how people will need to consume it. Structure content to help the user to navigate and understand Structure helps people find information. It helps people to understand and use content by: preparing them for what they will read helping them navigate and scan content helping them remember what they’ve read. Structure also helps search engines. They use structure to find and rank content in a search results listing. Accessibility requirements User needs: I can change the content's presentation without losing information or structure. I can find and navigate the content and determine where I am on the webpage. Fundamentals: Write clear page titles. The title is the first thing a screen reader user will hear and is the first item to appear in search results. Organise content in a clear order using section headings. Describe the topics or the following section in the headings. Narrative structure Sequential structure Headings Links Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution Make sure all users can navigate through all content in the intended order, regardless of the technology they're using. Use the same navigation elements across services. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criteria: 1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A 2.4.2 Page titled – level A 2.4.6 Headings and labels – level A 2.4.10 Section headings – level AAA Pick the type of structure that works for the user Use a structure that matches expectations for the type of content you're creating: To group content into topics or connected ideas, prioritised by level of importance, use a hierarchical structure. People will scan content for relevance to them. Some will use screen readers to list headings in order to understand the content at a high level. Hierarchical structure is economical for people with low attention span, who are time-poor or need to use assistive technologies. To present a sequence of steps or events, use a sequential structure. People will need to know or do something with the content that is presented as instructional and ordered. Sequential structure helps people know where they are in a process towards a given result. To guide people from beginning to end, use a narrative structure. People will be interested in knowing the entire story. They will expect signposts that suggest where they are in the journey for ease of reference. Avoid unconventional or inconsistent structures. They make people work harder to find and understand content. Do user research to understand who will be using the content and their level of literacy. Your organisation might have templates for content such as reports, letters and emails. Structural elements are built into those templates. Design headings and other elements to help the user scan the page Once you have decided on the type of structure you need to use, plan the structural elements. Use a logical hierarchy or sequential steps for headings. Write a topic sentence for each paragraph. Display important information in lists, callout boxes, tables and illustrations. Structure your content by writing about one idea at a time: Start with the most important idea first. Group related ideas under headings. Organise ideas into short paragraphs. Make sure ideas flow from one paragraph to the next. Use a logical order for sentences. Release notes The digital edition canvasses types of structure. It focuses on the inverted pyramid, and narrative structure is new. The sixth edition and the Content Guide were silent on the inverted pyramid and narrative structure. The sixth edition had advice on inductive and deductive patterns of writing, and on linear and non-linear structures. These are not covered in the digital edition. The digital edition builds on a short paragraph from the sixth edition about sequential structure. It also has more concise information on hierarchical structure. The Content Guide did not have advice on these topics. About this page References Andrews M (7 November 2014) ‘Types of content structure’, Story Needle, accessed 30 May 2020. Andrews M (11 October 2017) ‘Structural metadata: key to structured content’, Story Needle, accessed 30 May 2020. Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019) Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra. General Services Administration (n.d) ‘Structure the content’, 18F Content Guide, 18F Content Guide website, accessed 30 May 2020. GOV.UK (2019) ‘Writing for GOV.UK’, Content design: planning, writing and managing content, GOV.UK, accessed 30 May 2020. Jenkins S (31 October 2019) ‘New data analysis product could help agencies design better services’, The Mandarin, accessed 30 May 2020. Khalifa A (2017) 10 content structures that you can use on any platform today, Ahmed Khalifa website, accessed 30 May 2020. Lynch PJ and Horton S (2016) Web style guide, Web Style Guide website, accessed 30 May 2020. Mackenzie J (2011) The editor’s companion, 2nd edn, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne. Moran K (20 March 2016) ‘How chunking helps content processing’, Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. Moran K (5 April 2016) ‘How people read online: new and old findings’, Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. Perelman LC Barrett E and Paradis J (n.d.) ‘Topic sentences’, in Mayfield electronic handbook of technical & scientific writing,

Mayfield Publishing Company, accessed 30 May 2020. Rushkin A, Thompson N and Murray D (2017) ‘Towards cultural translation of websites: a large- scale study of Australian, Chinese, and Saudi Arabian design preferences’, Behaviour & Information Technology, 36(4):351–63, doi:10.1080/0144929X.2016.1234646. Search Engine Land (2019) ‘Site architecture and search engine success factors’, Essential guide to SEO: how to master the science of SEO, Search Engine Land website, accessed 30 May 2020. Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) ‘Content structure’, Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca, accessed 30 May 2020. Last updated This page was updated Tuesday 21 June 2022. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/types-structure/inverted-pyramid Inverted pyramid The inverted pyramid starts with what the user most needs to know. Order the rest of the page from most to least important information. Use the inverted pyramid for most content The basic structure of the inverted pyramid is: a heading details in order, from the most to the least important. The most important idea comes first or ‘above the fold’. This is the top part of a screen or a newspaper, where people can see the main idea at a glance. This structure helps users scan content on any device. It also helps optimise the page for search engines. Narrative structure Sequential structure Headings Links Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution Example Start with what the user most needs to know To structure your content as an inverted pyramid: Write the main idea in as few words as possible. It can be a summary, a conclusion or recommendation, or the action someone needs to take. Describe the main ideas in headings. Under each of the top-level headings, group the content under subheadings. This helps people find supporting information. Write supporting paragraphs. Organise the information in order of importance. For long-form content, use a summary or a list of recommendations in the preliminary pages. This helps people read the main information with ease. Design pages based on how the user scans People start at the top of a page and decide within seconds whether to go past the initial view. The headline and the first few lines provide the main reason for staying (or leaving). As people An inverted pyramid is a structure for a piece of content: important detail comes first read through the content, they might also scan pictures or other headings, but they could also stop reading at any time. The inverted pyramid works because people pay more attention when they first see the content. Their interest tends to wane in the middle, and sometimes they never reach the end. Journalists know that’s how readers behave and structure content accordingly. To structure a paragraph using the inverted pyramid, start with a topic sentence. Use the rest of the paragraph to explain the topic sentence. Release notes The digital edition canvasses different types of structure. It promotes the use of the inverted pyramid for digital content. The sixth edition and the Content Guide were silent on the inverted pyramid. About this page References Avieson J (1980) Applied journalism in Australia, Deakin University, Geelong. Brech J (18 July 2013) ‘Inverted pyramid style’, Web Wise Wording, accessed 30 May 2020. Chandler D and Munday R (2020) ‘Inverted pyramid’, A dictionary of media and communication, 3rd edn, Oxford University Press. Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019) Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra. Fessenden T (15 April 2018) ‘Scrolling and attention’, Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. Schade A (1 February 2015) ‘The fold manifesto: why the page fold still matters’, Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. Schade A (11 February 2018) ‘Inverted pyramid: writing for comprehension’, Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. Last updated This page was updated Thursday 2 September 2021. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/types-structure/hierarchical-structure Hierarchical structure A hierarchy sorts content into categories and levels. This structure can give users a picture of how items or topics fit together. Show how categories relate to one another Hierarchies structure content by category. They show how different categories relate to each other, and how they relate to the main idea or theme. This structure is the basis for the information architecture of many websites. It also suits organisational charts and other visual content that ranks items in a hierarchy of relationships. To structure content hierarchically: Plan the headings. Decide what information fits under each heading. Plan subheadings. Keep the hierarchy shallow – use no more than 4 heading levels. Check the headings for consistency and logic. Accessibility requirements User needs: I can change the content's presentation without losing information or structure. I can find and navigate the content and determine where I am on the webpage. Fundamentals: Write clear page titles. The title is the first thing a screen reader user will hear and is the first item to appear in Narrative structure Sequential structure Headings Links Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution search results. Organise content in a clear order using section headings. Describe the topics or the following section in the headings. Make sure all users can navigate through all content in the intended order, regardless of the technology they're using. Use the same navigation elements across services. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criteria: 1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A 2.4.2 Page titled – level A 2.4.6 Headings and labels – level A 2.4.10 Section headings – level AAA Release notes The digital edition is based on the sixth edition topic, but is more concise. The Content Guide did not address the topic. About this page References Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019) Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra. Lynch PJ and Horton S (2016) ‘Information architecture’, Web style guide, Web Style Guide website, accessed 30 May 2020. Shibata H and Hori K (2005) ‘Cognitive support for the organization of writing’, New Generation Computing, 26(2):97–124, doi:10.1007/s00354-008-0037-9. University of Washington (n.d.) Patterns of organization, University of Washington, assessed 30 May 2020. Usability.gov (2020) Organization structures, Usability.gov, accessed 30 May 2020. Last updated This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/types-structure/narrative-structure Narrative structure Narrative structure can suit long-form content, like technical writing or academic journals. Users expect a beginning, middle and end. Use narrative structure for long-form content Narrative structure is common in reports, books and technical writing. It generally works better for long-form content than it does for digital content in HTML. This structure is used with some success in long-form blogs. Narrative structure starts with general statements about the topic. The middle explains or discusses new ideas. The conclusion summarises the main ideas and makes recommendations. This structure can cause people to miss important ideas: The main points are not easy to find. People usually need to read from beginning to end to understand the context, even if there is only one main thing they need from the content. To help users, you can summarise the main findings in the introduction. Write a beginning, middle and end Narrative structure has: a beginning – the introduction a middle – the arguments,

discussions and explanations an end – conclusion or recommendations. Signpost each part with headings. Narrative structure Sequential structure Headings Links Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution Academic writing also uses this structure. It starts with an introduction, followed by the methods, a discussion and conclusion. An abstract summarises the article in many academic journals. People tend to read the abstract and the conclusion of a research paper first, before they decide if they want to read the whole paper. Release notes The digital edition material on narrative structure is new. It does not mention linear and non- linear structures. The sixth edition had advice on linear and non-linear structures. It did not mention narrative structure. The Content Guide did not cover this topic. About this page References Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019) Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra. Moran K (5 April 2020) 'How people read online: new and old findings', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. Schade A (1 February 2015) 'The fold manifesto: why the page fold still matters', Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. Shibata H and Hori K (2005) 'Cognitive support for the organization of writing', New Generation Computing, 26(2):97–124, doi:10.1007/s00354-008-0037-9. Last updated This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/types-structure/sequential-structure Sequential structure Sequential structure follows a clear order to make it easy for users to follow step by step. It can suit instructions or a report of an event. Use a sequential structure to explain steps or a specific order A sequential structure shows a process, a series of steps or an order of events. Use a sequential structure for: instructions – such as how-to guides, recipes and directions step-by-step content formats – such as forms reports of events – such as incident reports, histories and case studies. This type of structure helps users understand how items in the sequence relate to each other. Use the right writing style. For example, instructions and transactions are more direct and use the imperative. Reports of events usually use the past tense of the verb. Narrative structure Sequential structure Headings Links Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution Example Instructions Complete step 1 before moving to step 2. [The verb 'complete' is in the imperative mood.] Incident report The support worker placed the transfer board under the client's left upper leg. [The verb 'placed' is in the past tense.] Accessibility requirements User needs: I can change the content's presentation without losing information or structure. I can find and navigate the content and determine where I am on the webpage. Fundamentals: Write clear page titles. The title is the first thing a screen reader user will hear and is the first item to appear in search results. Order the content in a sequence that is meaningful for the user. Organise content in a clear order using section headings. Describe the topics or the following section in the headings. Make sure all users can navigate through all content in the intended order, regardless of the technology they're using. Use the same navigation elements across services. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criteria: 1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A 1.3.2 Meaningful sequence – level A 2.4.2 Page titled – level A 2.4.6 Headings and labels – level A 2.4.10 Section headings – level AAA Split processes into balanced steps Dividing a process into a sequence of steps can be challenging. Create the right number of steps. Too few steps might mean you have left out important information or grouped too many actions under one heading. Too many steps might mean you have divided the process into steps so small they are meaningless. If the process is very complex, group steps into broader stages of the process. The broad stages can fit into a higher-level sequential structure, or into topics using a hierarchical structure. This combination of structures can help users revisit a topic. If you use a combination of structures, design menu and link items based on how users find their way through the content. Be consistent in the language, style and design of headings at the same level across the content. For example, in a course registration process, a student might decide to choose a different course session after entering their personal details. Start with the most important information – the course selection – so people don't waste time trying to find it. Example Course options Write clear instructions users can follow For instructional and transactional content, people want to know what they need to do. They don't need long explanations of the process. If an explanation is needed, consider: how you can help people keep their focus what the minimum amount of information is whether a link would be more useful. If users need a lot of extra information to do a task, you might have tried to include too much in a single step. You need to break the task into smaller steps. Release notes The digital edition builds on a short paragraph from the sixth edition about sequential structures. The Content Guide did not mention this topic. About this page References Dixon JC and Bolitho B (2005–2019) Report writing, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra. Lynch PJ and Horton S (2016) 'Information architecture', Web style guide, Web Style Guide 1. Select the course 2. Select the session Personal details 1. Enter your name 2. Enter your contact details 3. Enter any dietary requirements Payment 1. Select the payment method 2. Enter details 3. Select submit 4. Print the receipt website, accessed 30 May 2020. Shibata H and Hori K (2005) 'Cognitive support for the organization of writing', New Generation Computing, 26(2):97–124, doi:10.1007/s00354-008-0037-9. University of Washington (n.d.) Patterns of organization, University of Washington, accessed 30 May 2020. Usability.gov (2020) Organization structures, Usability.gov, accessed 30 May 2020. Last updated This page was updated Monday 6 September 2021. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/headings Headings Headings help users scan content and find what they need. Organise content using clear heading levels. Begin each heading with keywords and keep it to the point. Write headings that are clear and short Headings organise information. Clear headings are specific to the topic they describe. Keep them brief. They are signposts for people and for search engines. Many people skim through headings to check whether a page is relevant before they read it in detail. Search engines use headings to analyse and rank content. Accessibility requirements User needs: I can change the content's presentation without losing information or structure. I can find and navigate the content and determine where I am on the webpage. Fundamentals: Write clear page titles. This is the first topic 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. Clearly describe the topics or the following section in the headings. Make sure all users can navigate through all content in the intended order, regardless of the technology they are using. Use the same navigation elements consistently across services. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines success criteria: 1.3.1 Info and relationships – level A 2.4.2 Page titled – level A 2.4.6 Headings and labels – level AA 2.4.10 Section headings – level AAA State the main point Lists Paragraphs Tables Text boxes and callouts Referencing and attribution Write headings that tell the user what is in the content below it. Headings should state

the main point. This helps users find and use content in search results and on social media. Use words that accurately describe the content. Don't use empty words or phrases (for example, 'more' or 'related information'). Only include information in the section that is relevant to the heading. If the information isn't relevant, move it or rewrite the heading. Use fewer than 70 characters Write headings that are no more than 70 characters (including spaces). Longer headings are more difficult to read and can be confusing. They might also suggest that you have too many ideas in a section. Avoid questions as headings Using questions pushes your main idea towards the end of the heading. Starting a heading with 'why', 'how' or 'what' makes it slower for the user to read. They have to read the whole heading before finding relevant keywords. Use keywords to start headings Start headings and subheadings with keywords that help people to make a connection. People scan-read headings to know the relevance of the content. If they use assistive technologies, they might use the tab key to read from heading to heading. Others who use screen readers might generate a list of headings for quick navigation. The keywords should relate to the main content below the heading. Pay special attention to the first 2 or 3 words. These might be the only words someone reads to decide whether to continue to scan the page or to read the text. Using keywords at the start of a heading is called 'frontloading'. Frontloading makes it easier for people to assess the heading's relevance – either on a web page or in search results. It also helps search engines find your content. Like this Learn how to drive Not this More information Write this Organise heading levels in a logical order Heading hierarchy is the relationship between main headings and subheadings. The hierarchical structure shows users how topics fit together. A clear and logical heading hierarchy shows readers where to find information and how important it is. Keep each section concise and use headings to chunk information so it works well on screen for the user. Heading levels include main titles, headings and subheadings: Level 1 headings are titles of webpages or titles of chapters in a book or printed report. Level 2 headings are main headings. Level 3 headings are subheadings. Level 4 headings are sub-subheadings (headings under subheadings). Don't skip heading levels Write headings in a complete organised hierarchy. A complete hierarchy helps people scan the content to find the information they need. Screen reader users need to be able to rely on heading level hierarchy to find relevant content. Use one level 1 heading Use just one level 1 heading per webpage. Make it unique to your site. This helps users understand the content and find it using search engines. The level 1 heading is also a good place to include target keywords needed for search engine optimisation. Print considerations In documents, use level 1 headings (or 'Heading 1' style) for the main sections, such as part titles. Make the headings relate Every heading and subheading must relate to the heading above it so the grouping of information is logical and clear for users. Use keywords to start headings Not this Write a heading starting with the main keywords Avoid level 5 and deeper heading levels Try to use only 3 or 4 heading levels at the most. A simpler structure is easier to read. You can use deeper heading levels (level 4 and below) for very complex documents, but try to avoid it. Deep and complex hierarchies of headings are a sign that you are probably trying to do too much on a webpage or in a chapter. It is likely that you will lose the reader. Space out headings Separate each heading from the next one by some text, even if it's only a sentence. This helps create a clear distinction between ideas. Create at least 2 headings for each level Give each heading level in a section at least one other heading at the same level. This avoids the appearance of stranded ideas. Use numbered headings only for steps Use numbered headings only when they relate to a series of steps. Numbered headings can help users through a sequential structure. Like this H1: Apply for a drivers licence H2: Pass the theory test H3: Learn the road rules H3: Book a theory test H2: Pass the driving test H3: Practise for the test H3: Book the driving test Not this H1: Pass the driving test H3: Learn the road rules H4: Pass the theory test H5: Practise for the test H2: Book theory test H2: Pass the driving test Print considerations In print, you can use numbered headings to help people cross-reference information: If you use numbered headings, use them only in the body. Don't use numbered headings in the preliminary pages or endmatter in a report. Don't number more than the first 3 heading levels. Be consistent: use a parallel structure All headings in a level should be consistent. They should have the same: overall message (for example, they are all steps in a process) grammatical form (called 'parallel structure'). Two common forms are: noun phrases (for example, 'effective headings' and 'punctuation and capitalisation') instructions (for example, 'keep headings short' and 'be consistent'). Use unique formatting for each level of heading Format headings so the heading levels are visibly different. This helps users scan the text. People should be able to tell the difference between heading levels at a glance. Formatting options include: font weights and sizes that are distinct from one another – a larger, bolder font for main headings and a smaller, lighter font for lower-level subheadings colour to help people scan the headings – but don't rely on colour as the only way to differentiate heading levels spacing above a heading to help people see the visual break from one section to the next. Don't add an underline Don't underline headings or any other text. Underlined text looks like a hyperlink, which can confuse users. It also makes it harder to read letters with descenders (for example, 'p', 'y' and 'g' in 'Applying for government support'). Apply HTML elements, tags and styles to headings Use styles, tags and HTML elements to identify headings in digital content. Correctly styled and tagged headings: make it easy to create consistent headings help software build an automatic table of contents are needed for accessibility of digital content help search engines understand the topic that you're writing about. Print considerations Correctly styled headings make it easier for graphic designers to know how to lay out the publication, including what weighting to give each heading. The reader should see at least one heading on each double-page spread in a printed document. Don't leave a heading at the bottom of the page with no text below it. Send the heading to the top of the next page so it stays with the content below it. HTML elements Use the correct HTML element for the heading level. Your content management system should have inbuilt heading styles that you can apply to text. System heading styles Apply correct inbuilt heading styles so they can be automatically added to navigation and contents pages. If your organisation uses templates, use the template styles. Print considerations Some organisations have their own heading style guidelines. If no guidelines apply, use a 'Heading 1' style for the main sections in the document. The title of a document uses the 'Title' style. Write all headings in sentence case and use minimal punctuation Example A page about paying your tax might use these headings: H1 = 'Lodging your tax return' (the page title) H2 = 'Individual tax return' (a heading for a main section) H3 = 'Lodging online' (a subheading) H4 = 'Creating an account' (a sub-subheading) Use sentence case for headings to help people read the text more easily. This means you should use a capital letter only for: the first letter of the first word the first letter of any proper nouns letters in

acronyms and initialisms. Don’t write headings in all capital letters as users could misread words. For example, ‘ACT’ could be ‘act’ (the verb) rather than the initialism for the Australian Capital Territory. If you work for an organisation that uses all capitals for headings, make sure any abbreviations are easy to understand. Don’t use a full stop to end headings Even if the heading is a sentence, it doesn’t need a full stop at the end. Avoid using shortened forms in headings Don’t use a shortened form in a heading unless it is better known than the full term (for example, ‘DNA’ and ‘CSIRO’). Digital Service Standard requirements To ensure the content works on all devices, use responsive design methods. Many people do not use a desktop computer or printed material to access services and information. Test content on a mobile device first. Release notes The digital edition focuses on writing headings for online content, but includes print considerations. It builds on content from the sixth edition and has new guidance on tags, styles and frontloading. It recommends against using isolated headings. The Content Guide mentioned frontloading, short headings and heading hierarchies. The digital edition has new content on tags, styles and frontloading. About this page References Content Design London (2020) ‘Headings and titles’, 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. General Services Administration (n.d.) ‘Headings’, 18F Accessibility Guide, 18F website, accessed 29 May 2020. Loranger H (9 August 2015) ‘Headings are pick-up lines: 5 tips for writing headlines that convert’, Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. Lynch PJ and Horton S (2016) Web style guide, Web Style Guide website, accessed 29 May 2020. Moran K (20 March 2016) ‘How chunking helps content processing’, Nielsen Norman Group, accessed 30 May 2020. New Zealand Government (2020) ‘Headings and subheadings’, Content design guidance, Digital.govt.nz, accessed 30 May 2020. Oxford University Press (2016) New Oxford style manual, Oxford University Press, Oxford. Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (2020) ‘5.1: write useful page titles and headings’, Canada.ca content style guide, Canada.ca, accessed 30 May 2020. University of Chicago (2017) Chicago manual of style, 17th edn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) (2020) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) overview, W3C website, accessed 29 May 2020. WHATWG (Web Hypertext Application Technology Working Group) (2020) ‘4.3.6: the h1, h2, h3, h4, h5, and h6 elements’, HTML: living standard, WHATWG website, accessed 4 June 2020. Last updated This page was updated Monday 22 August 2022.