

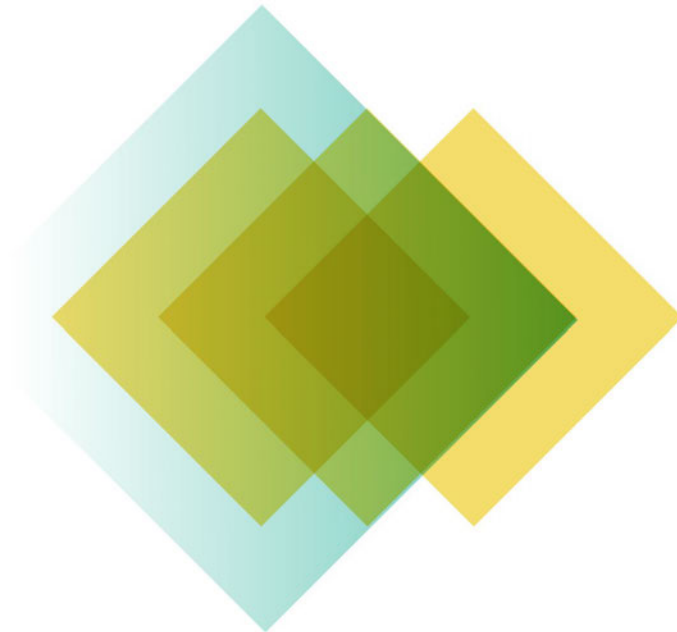


Australian Government

Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

Style Guide

Prepared by Strategic Communications



16 June 2021

Audience: OAIC staff, contractors and suppliers

Location: Intranet

Review date: 30 June 2022

Version	Name	Changes	Date
0.1	Catherine Carpenter	Initial draft	8 April 2021
0.2	Catherine Carpenter	Revision post-consultation	11 June 2021
1.0	Catherine Carpenter	Cleared by Deputy Commissioner	16 June 2021

Copyright

This is the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner Style Guide.

Welcome to the new OAIC Style Guide

The Strategic Communications team is pleased to share the new OAIC Style Guide, which replaces the 2012 Writing style guide. The Style Guide provides comprehensive guidance whether you're writing a webpage, report, submission or presentation. We encourage you to familiarise yourself with the content of our Style Guide – and use it to resolve your queries about writing style.

We welcome your feedback on the Style Guide. Tell us how we can make the Style Guide more helpful – and let us know what's missing – by emailing us at corporate@oaic.gov.au.

Structure

The OAIC Style Guide has been structured in the same way as the Australian Government digital [Style Manual](#) which was released in September 2020.

Style Guide content has been linked to the digital Style Manual so you can access more detailed information easily.

Blue boxes summarise content sections.

Yellow boxes highlight useful information and tips.

Grey boxes provide examples.

Links in the Style Guide point to:

1. Further guidance in the Style Guide
2. Guidance in the digital [Style Manual](#)

Legal citations

This Style Guide contains guidance on how to cite legal material which is tailored to the content we publish, such as guidance and advice, reports and assessments. See [Legal material](#) below.

For specific guidance on how to cite legal material in legal writing and research, you may wish to use the 4th edition of the [Australian Guide to Legal Citation](#) (AGLC4).

Contents

Part A: Format, writing and structure	5
Clear language and writing style	5
Plain language and word choice	5
Abbreviations	7
Acronyms and initialisms	8
Contractions	10
Latin shortened forms	11
Sentences	12
Types of words	14
Voice and tone	15
Inclusive language	18
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	18
Age diversity	19
Cultural and linguistic diversity	19
Gender and sexual diversity	20
People with disability	22
Structure	23
Types of structure	23
Headings	24
Links	26
Lists	27
Paragraphs	29
General conventions, editing and proofreading	30
Part B: Style rules and conventions	30
Editing and proofreading	30
Italics	30
Punctuation and capitalisation	32
Spelling	33
Names and terms	35
Australian place names	35
Government terms	36
Commercial terms	38
Dates and time	38
Organisation names	41

Numbers and measurement	44
Choosing numerals or words	44
Currency	46
Measurements and units	46
Ordinal numbers	47
Percentages	47
Punctuation marks	49
Apostrophes	49
Brackets and parentheses	52
Colons	54
Commas	55
Dashes and en dashes	60
Exclamation marks	63
Ellipses	63
Forward slashes	64
Full stops	64
Hyphens	66
Question marks	70
Quotation marks	71
Semicolons	73
Referencing and attribution	75
Author–date	75
Documentary–note	75
Legal material	76
Titles, honours, forms of address	89
Awards and honours	89
Judiciary	89
Members of Australian parliaments and councils	90
Appendices	92
Appendix A: Plain language word choices	92
Appendix B: Abbreviations	94
Appendix C: OAIC templates	97

Style tips

OAIC style	Reference
Do not use full stops in abbreviations, for example 'p 7' not 'p. 7'.	p 7
When pluralising shortened forms, add 's' without an apostrophe. For example, 'MPs' and 'NPPs', not 'MP's' and 'NPP's'.	p 8
Only use acronyms and initialisms where necessary and always spell them out when first used. Do not swap between the acronym and the full form.	p 9
When writing about the agency, use 'OAIC' after spelling the name out in full on first mention. Use 'we' and 'our' not 'it' and 'its' when referring to the OAIC.	p 17
Do not use full stops in acronyms and initialisms e.g. 'APPA' not 'A.P.P.A.'.	p 31
Use minimal capitalisation.	p 31
Choose 'program' not 'programme', 'focused' not 'focussed'.	p 33
Use 'Australian Government' not 'Federal Government' or 'Commonwealth Government'.	p 35
Use a colon for time, for example, 10:00am.	p 39
Use numerals for 2 and above unless you are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • starting a sentence • writing a fraction • quoting a figure of speech • writing a media release. 	p 43
Use an en dash (also called an 'en rule') rather than a hyphen between numbers to show a date range, for example '2008–09', not '2008-09'.	p 60
Use single quotation marks, not double quotation marks, except when referring to a quote within a quote.	p 71
Try to minimise use of semicolons. Do not use semicolons at the end of bullet and numbered list items.	p 73
Use italics for the first mention of the title of an Act and roman type for subsequent mentions. Bills are never italicised.	p 79

Part A: Format, writing and structure

Clear language and writing style

Use plain language.

Write short and simple sentences in active voice.

Choose words that are familiar to the user.

Only use abbreviations, contractions, acronyms and initialisms that the user understands.

In long documents, consider providing a table of shortened forms or a glossary.

Plain language and word choice

Plain language can express complex ideas. Engage people with words they can understand quickly. Clarify expressions people might be unfamiliar with.

Writing in plain language helps all people and is essential for some.

Use everyday words

Choose words that people are familiar with. Unfamiliar words make content harder to read and understand. When you write:

- explain unusual words
- expand all acronyms on their first use
- avoid using double negatives.

Use active language

Use active language wherever possible.

Use personal pronouns (like 'we', 'you', 'us') when it suits the voice and tone.

A direct, active voice and tone helps to engage users. Active voice and tone makes it clear who must do what.

Write this

We will assess your application in 30 days.

Not this

Applications are assessed in 30 days.

Passive voice

Only use the passive when:

- you have to be diplomatic and the active would sound too direct
- you have one subject that you would otherwise repeat endlessly.

Use inclusive language

People can relate to content when it uses [inclusive language](#). Choose words that respect all people, including their rights and their heritage.

Use language that is culturally appropriate and respectful of the diversity of Australia's peoples.

Only refer to age when it is relevant and necessary.

Use gender-neutral language and preferred pronouns.

Focus on the person, not the disability. Mention disability only if it is relevant and necessary.

Choose simple words, not complicated expressions

There is usually more than one way to express something. Find the simplest, clearest option.

Replace longer words and phrases with simpler alternatives. See [Appendix A: Plain language word choices](#).

Keep words and phrases with special meaning to a minimum

People can be unfamiliar with words you need to use, for example:

- [official titles](#)
- [Acts of parliament](#)
- [names of organisations](#).

For names and terms with special meaning, follow [style rules and conventions](#).

Be selective about shortened forms, such as [abbreviations](#), [acronyms](#) and [initialisms](#).

Shorten only words and phrases that are well known or used many times in your content.

Always consider user needs and avoid using shortened forms when writing for the public which may be seen as jargon.

The Australian Privacy Principles are principles-based law.

Consumer Data Right

The Consumer Data Right was introduced on 1 July 2020. To help consumers become familiar with the concept, government agencies have been asked to use the term in full wherever possible. The initialism 'CDR' may be used to refer to specific elements of system – for example, the CDR Rules, CDR Privacy Safeguards and CDR data – or where space for content is limited, such as in headings.

Shortened forms can help people read and understand content, but too many can be difficult to follow. In content with many specialist terms, reserve shortened forms for the most frequently used terms only. Spell out other terms in full.

Spell out shortened forms the first time you use them. In a long publication, spell them out at the beginning of each section.

The Notifiable Data Breaches (NDB) scheme began on 22 February 2018.

Abbreviations

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

Limit the use of abbreviations

Abbreviations contain the first single letter or first few letters of a word. They don't include the last letter of a word.

cont (for continued)

fig (for figure)

p (for page)

tel (for telephone)

para (for paragraph)

co (for company)

Abbreviations are generally not good for readability and can be misunderstood. Avoid using them in general text where possible.

Abbreviations are useful in very limited circumstances:

- in a table or chart, where space is unavailable for the full form of the word – provide a note under the table or chart giving the full form
- when using ‘cont’ to show continuing text in another part of content (for example, on another page of a print newsletter) – the full form of the word is more helpful where space allows.

Don’t put a full stop after most abbreviations

Don’t place a full stop after an abbreviation unless it ends the sentence.

See [Organisation names](#)

See [Months and days of the week](#)

Unlike other shortened forms, some Latin shortened forms have full stops.

Place full stops after each letter in ‘i.e.’ and ‘e.g.’ so that screen readers can announce them. Do not use a comma after ‘e.g.’ or ‘i.e.’ in a sentence.

Add ‘s’ to create plural abbreviations

Add an ‘s’. There is no need for an apostrophe.

APPs

MPs

Acronyms and initialisms

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

See [Appendix B: Abbreviations](#)

Choose acronyms and initialisms people will recognise.

Acronyms are terms that comprise initial letters and you can pronounce as a word.

Qantas

Anzac

TAFE

Initialisms are terms that comprise initial letters and you pronounce as letters, not a word.

CDR
GST
NDIS

Acronyms and initialisms are common in formal content. If understood by users, they can make content easier to use.

CSIRO for ‘Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation’

Explain acronyms and initialisms to all users

People unfamiliar with certain terms might not understand their shortened forms. Acronyms and initialisms might also be misread by screen readers.

Spell out acronyms and initialisms the first time you use them. In a long publication, spell them out at the beginning of every section.

The Department of Veterans’ Affairs (DVA) sent a letter to the client in June.

Check the correct shortened form for government organisations

The names of government departments are often shortened, but not always in the same way.

DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade)

Home Affairs (Department of Home Affairs)

Rather than using acronyms or initialisms, it can be easier for people if you:

- spell out the agency’s name in full the first time you use it
- then use the generic name (‘department’, ‘agency’, ‘bureau’) afterwards.

For content with lots of acronyms and initialisms, provide a glossary at the end or on a separate webpage. Use a hyperlink in the text to help people access the glossary.

Don’t end acronyms and initialisms with a full stop

Don’t place a full stop after the acronym or initialism unless it ends a sentence.

Use capitals for most acronyms and initialisms

If the acronym or initialism represents common nouns, don't begin each word of the full form with a capital letter.

'privacy impact assessment' for PIA

'privacy management plan' for PM

'tax file number' for TFN

If the acronym or initialism represents a proper noun, start each word with a capital letter (excluding words such as 'of' and 'and').

OPC [Office of Parliamentary Counsel]

Avoid plural and possessive forms on the first use

Avoid using the plural or possessive of an acronym or initialism when you define it. This makes it easy for users to recognise the shortened form in later content.

It's compulsory for certain businesses to have an Australian Business Number (ABN). The Australian Business Register manages applications for ABNs. [There's no need to use an apostrophe before the 's' for ABNs as the term is plural, not possessive.]

The Australian National University (ANU) has a new student policy. The ANU's policy is popular with its staff and students. [Use an apostrophe before the 's' to show that the ANU owns the policy.]

Contractions

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

Shorten single words and grammatical phrases with care

Single-word contractions use the first and last letters of a word and sometimes other letters in between. Avoid using contractions of single words in more formal content such as ministerial briefings. The exceptions are contractions such as 'Dr' and other titles.

Cth for 'Commonwealth'

Ltd for 'Limited'

Don't place a full stop after contractions. The exception is when the contraction ends a sentence and isn't followed by another punctuation mark.

Number is shortened to 'no.' in legislation titles and a full stop is used after the contraction. This is an exception to the rule that a full stop should not be placed after a contraction unless the contraction ends the sentence.

Grammatical contractions join 2 words. They use an apostrophe to show that there are missing letters.

aren't (are not)

don't (do not)

isn't (is not)

it's (it is)

See [Apostrophes show contractions](#)

Grammatical contractions are not generally used in formal content. You can use them in less formal content which aims to create:

- a conversational tone (for example, in a newsletter)
- a friendly or collaborative tone (for example, in manuals).

Don't end contractions with full stops

Don't place a full stop after contractions. The exception is when the contraction ends a sentence and isn't followed by another punctuation mark.

Latin shortened forms

Use English rather than Latin shortened forms, except in some cases.

Rather than using 'e.g.' or 'i.e.' write the English words out in full. Write 'for example' and 'that is' instead, particularly in more formal publications.

Where you need to show an error in a quotation, use '[sic]' which means 'in the original'. Place it directly after the error.

Written late at night, the report began, 'The office was previously in Melberne [sic].'

Sentences

Clear sentences in active voice improve readability. Keep sentences short to help people scan content.

Write plain language sentences

Keep sentences to an average of 15 words and no more than 25 words, especially for digital content. Too many words, phrases and clauses affect people's ability to scan sentences. Sentences over 25 words can usually be broken up using different techniques, like using lists.

Use active voice

Use active rather than passive voice. Active voice helps users understand who is doing what. It can also help people know exactly what their responsibility is.

Eligible students can access the subsidy by completing the application. [Active voice]

The subsidy can be accessed by completing the application. [Passive voice]

The difference is clearest with action verbs:

- Active voice: the grammatical subject is performing the action in a sentence.
- Passive voice: the grammatical subject is undergoing the action.

Active voice: The student filed the application. ['The student' is the grammatical subject, who did the filing. 'The application' is the object.]

Passive voice: The application was filed by the student. ['The application' is the grammatical subject, but did not do the filing.]

Construct positive, unambiguous sentences

Words, phrases and sentences can have more than one meaning. Write exactly what you mean and construct your sentences so there is no ambiguity. Write sentences so they are positive rather than negative.

Like this

Include these documents when you apply.

Not this

You can't submit your application if you don't include these documents.

Avoid double negatives

Double negatives can lead to misunderstandings, so avoid them.

Write this

It was acceptable ...

Not this

It was not unacceptable ...

Eliminate unnecessary words

Make each word work for its place in the sentence. Sentence structure is clearer if each word plays a necessary role. Clear sentences improve readability.

Be precise

Avoid unnecessary words. Keep the words needed to make meaning clear.

Avoid using 'there is' and 'there are' when they only add extra words and not meaning.

Vary sentence structure

Vary your sentence structure to suit the content.

Sentence structures can be simple, compound or complex.

Simple sentence structures are easier to scan. People understand meaning through the order of words in a sentence. A simple sentence construction has fewer parts to take in.

Compound and complex sentences can add variety and flow to your writing. Sentences should still be easy to scan, even using these structures.

Complex structure is harder to follow, regardless of a person's literacy level. Complex structures take more effort to read, even if they are punctuated properly.

Build simple phrases and clauses

Sentences consist of phrases and clauses. Each group of words carries out a different function.

Some common constructions used in bureaucratic writing are complex and unnecessary. They add words but not meaning.

Instead of bureaucratic language, use plain language and word choice.

Types of words

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

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

Words are grouped by function

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

You can group words into different types depending on the way they function. See the digital Style Manual for guidance on:

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

Voice and tone

Writing style is a result of voice and tone. Adjust your style to meet user needs. It influences whether and how people engage with content.

Adapt writing style with tone and voice

Writing style describes the way you express ideas in content. The tone and voice you use influence the writing style for any type of content.

Tone is the way you express ideas. It includes the words you use, the way you put them together and their level of formality.

Voice captures who is writing – a persona people understand when they engage with the content. Voice can be objective and institutional or personal and friendly.

Adapt tone and voice to engage users, so the content can meet their needs. For example, briefs for ministers will use a different tone and voice to a speech or information on a website.

Choose how formal tone should be

The appropriate level of formality depends on what the relationship is between content and its user. There are 3 levels of formality:

- formal
- standard
- informal.

A formal tone creates a distance between the content's persona and the user.

An informal tone suggests a relationship that is more casual and intimate.

A standard tone sits between these 2. It is appropriate for most government content.

Formal tone

Formal tone:

- doesn't use contractions
- is literal – words are used with their dictionary meaning
- doesn't use metaphor, slang or idioms
- often uses the third person (he, she, they, them).

Legal writing, policies, reports and ministerial letters often adopt a formal tone. You can also use it in emails and letters when you have not yet met the person you are writing to.

Standard tone

Standard tone combines formal and informal tone. Most people find standard tone easiest to understand.

Standard tone:

- can use contractions and personal pronouns
- doesn't use metaphors, idioms or slang.

You will probably use standard tone for most government content. This includes:

- emails and letters
- online government services
- corporate communications
- media releases
- articles.

Informal tone

Informal tone uses contractions and [personal pronouns](#).

Informal tone can use metaphors and idioms, which can have a negative effect on [inclusion](#). Metaphors and idioms are not plain language.

You should not use slang when writing on behalf of government.

Informal tone is used in social media and blogs. Your writing might also become more informal as you get to know the people you are writing to.

You can lighten the tone of your writing, especially for the public, by including personal pronouns, such as 'we' and 'our'. This will also help you to create a more inclusive tone.

Where you are writing to a specific reader, such as in a letter, consider using 'I' and 'you'.

Using a lighter tone does not mean leaving out technical language that is essential to your content.

The government voice

A basic government voice is a 'definitive source' and is respectful, clear and direct, objective and impartial.

A respectful writing style:

- uses inclusive language
- expresses ideas in everyday words
- 'speaks' to people – using the pronoun 'you', for example

- doesn't use inflammatory language, such as name-calling or sarcasm
- doesn't speak down to people, but isn't too familiar either.

A clear and direct writing style:

- is in plain language
- uses active voice
- is concise
- structures ideas
- makes it easy for people to understand what they need to know or do.

Objective and impartial writing:

- relies on facts
- doesn't include opinion
- is balanced and non-biased.

The difference between fact and opinion can be subtle.

Viewpoint affects perception of whether information is neutral or impartial. Adjectives and adverbs can also affect whether the information comes across as fact or opinion.

Mixing personal pronouns with 'the OAIC' will bring variety and warmth to your writing.

On our website and in our corporate publications, we use 'we' and 'our' when referring to the OAIC, instead of using 'its' which sounds more formal.

We use 'organisation or agency' and not 'entity' on our website. We use 'they' and not 'it' when referring to an organisation or agency in the third person.

Inclusive language

Use language that is culturally appropriate and respectful of the diversity of Australia's peoples.

Only refer to age when it is relevant and necessary.

Use gender-neutral language. Find out the user's preferred pronoun.

Focus on the person, not the disability. Mention disability only if it is relevant and necessary.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Use culturally appropriate and respectful language when writing with, for or about First Nations Australians.

There is no single Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity

First Nations Australians are often called Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. But there is significant diversity within these 2 groups.

There is a wide range of nations, cultures and languages across mainland Australia and throughout the Torres Strait. Given this diversity, respectful language use depends on what different communities find appropriate.

'Aboriginal' is a broad term that groups nations and custodians of mainland Australia and most of the islands, including Tasmania, Fraser Island, Palm Island, Mornington Island, Groote Eylandt, Bathurst and Melville Islands.

'Torres Strait Islander' is a broad term grouping the peoples of at least 274 small islands between the northern tip of Cape York in Queensland and the south-west coast of Papua New Guinea. Many Torres Strait Islander peoples live on the Australian mainland. There are also 2 Torres Strait Islander communities at Bamaga and Seisia within the Northern Peninsula Area of Queensland.

Respectful language use starts with the basics

Basic respectful language means using:

- specific terms, like the name of a community, before using broader terms
- plurals when speaking about collectives (peoples, nations, cultures, languages)
- present tense, unless speaking about a past event
- empowering, strengths-based language.

Language that can be offensive includes shorthand terms like 'Aborigines', 'Islanders' or acronyms like 'ATSI' and possessive terms such as 'our', as in 'our Aboriginal peoples'.

The digital Style Manual significantly revises and updates guidance on content that relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

For example, the sixth edition described the term ‘Indigenous’ as ‘widely acceptable’ as a subset of the broader term ‘Australian’. The latest, digital edition cautions that use of the term ‘Indigenous’ can be inaccurate without proper context.

See digital Style Manual: [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#)

Age diversity

Refer to age only if it is necessary. Use respectful language and consistent style if age is relevant.

If age is relevant, follow style conventions

Question whether age is relevant. Avoid referring to a person’s age or an age group if it’s not relevant.

If you need to mention age, follow style conventions:

- when the reference to age comes before a noun, punctuate it with hyphens
- unless the age reference begins a sentence, use numerals.

A 39-year-old man faces court today on several charges.

You can withdraw your super once you’re 65, even if you’re still working.

Fourteen-year-old Jasmine Greenwood is the youngest Australian on the Paralympic Games squad.

Cultural and linguistic diversity

Australians have different cultural backgrounds and speak many languages. Use inclusive language that respects this diversity.

Speak to the person, not their difference

Use inclusive language. You can use the general term ‘multicultural communities’ to write about people from different cultural backgrounds.

People writing for government sometimes use the term ‘culturally and linguistically diverse’ (CALD) communities. Avoid using the acronym unless you’re speaking to a specialist audience.

Use respectful and inclusive language that talks to the person, not their difference. In Australia, it's the law. Commonwealth laws include:

- [*Racial Discrimination Act 1975*](#)
- [*Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986*](#)
- [*Public Service Act 1999*](#).

Use the terms 'given name' and 'family name'

Many naming systems around the world differ from those used in English-speaking countries. Given names come before family names in English-speaking countries. In some Asian cultures, people write the family name first.

When you ask people their name, don't ask for 'Christian name', 'first name', 'forename' or 'surname'. Instead, ask for their:

- given name
- family name.

Gender and sexual diversity

Inclusive language conveys gender equality and is gender-neutral. Respect peoples' preferences around gender and sexual identity with pronoun choice and job titles.

Use gender-neutral language

Use terms that recognise gender equality. Avoid terms that discriminate on the basis of a person's gender or sexual identity.

Our use of language reflects changes in society. There is wide agreement about using language to support equality between all genders.

It is unlawful to discriminate against a person under the [*Sex Discrimination Act 1984*](#). This discrimination relates to their:

- sex
- marital or relationship status
- actual or potential pregnancy
- sexual orientation
- gender identity
- intersex status.

Pronoun choice

Learn the user's preferred pronoun. If it's not clear and you can't ask them, choose gender-neutral pronouns.

The singular 'they' is gender-neutral. It avoids specifying a person's gender.

You can use 'they' or 'them' when you would otherwise use a singular personal pronoun such as:

- 'he'
- 'she'
- 'him'
- 'her'.

You can also use 'themselves' or 'themselves' instead of 'himself' or 'herself'. 'Themselves' is an extension of using 'they' for a single person.

The use of gender-neutral pronouns to refer to a person of unknown gender has a long history. Usage now covers people who either:

- don't wish to identify as a particular gender
- identify as non-binary or gender-fluid.

There are many ways to avoid using gender-specific pronouns.

You must provide copies of the application to your referees. [Use the second-person pronouns ('you' and 'your') with direct tone and active voice.]

Candidates must provide copies of the application to their referees. [Use a plural pronoun. The pronoun 'their' relates to a plural subject 'candidates'.]

Every candidate must provide copies of the application to referees. [Leave the pronoun out altogether.]

Avoid gender-specific job titles

Avoid using job titles that end in '-man' or '-woman'.

Avoid using the traditional terms for jobs that end in '-man' e.g. policeman, foreman.

You should also avoid job terms that specify women e.g. actress, waitress.

The digital Style Manual contains new guidance on inclusive language around gender and sexual diversity. It adds advice on the distinctions between gender, sex and sexuality, on LGBTIQ+ communities and on the use of the title 'Mx'.

See the digital Style Manual: [Gender and sexual diversity](#)

People with disability

Disability does not define people. Use inclusive language that respects diversity.

Focus on the person, not the disability

Mention disability only when it's relevant to the content.

When you are writing about people with disability, focus on the person. Use person-first language for Australian Government content.

people with disability [Person-first language]

disabled person [Identity-first language]

Be responsive if you get feedback on the language you've used. It can guide user research around language that respects individual or community preferences.

Use respectful and inclusive language that talks to the person – not their difference.

Commonwealth laws include:

- [*Disability Discrimination Act 1992*](#)
- [*Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986*](#)

Structure

Design content with a structure that helps the user navigate and understand. Users are often familiar with the [inverted pyramid structure](#).

Structure the content using front-loaded headings and short paragraphs limited to one idea. Use lists to make content easier to scan.

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.

Pick the type of structure that works for the user

Avoid unconventional or inconsistent structures. The OAIC has a range of Microsoft Word templates for documents such as memos, executive briefs, agendas and minutes.

There are also 2 generic templates. The 'Long document template' is designed for documents that use up to 6 levels of headings. The 'Short document template' allows for 2 heading levels.

Structural elements are built into the OAIC templates to aid consistent structure.

See [Appendix C: OAIC templates](#).

Design headings 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. When you write:

- start with the most important idea first
- group related ideas under headings
- organise ideas into short paragraphs.

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.

State the main point

Write headings that tell the user what is in the content below it. Headings should state the main point. This helps users find content in search results.

Write this

Learn how to drive

Not this

More information

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

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 webpage or in search results. It also helps search engines find your content.

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’).

Write all headings in sentence case and use minimal punctuation

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 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’).

Links

Links can help users navigate content. Include links when they support user journeys. Write link text that is accurate and accessible.

Link to HTML content by default – only link to a file (e.g. a PDF) if an HTML version is not available. Always provide the document title, file type and file size (where possible).

Link to HTML content whenever possible

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.

When linking to files, include document title, file type and size

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) (where possible).

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.

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.

Write this

Find out about our upcoming meetings on our **Eventbrite page**.

Not this

Click here to find out about our upcoming meetings.

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 phrase (lead-in) 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).

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.

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.

Write this	Not this
<p>I will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read more emails • go to meetings • be punctual. 	<p>I will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading more emails • going to meetings • punctual
<p>[The last item is an adjective while other list items begin with verbs.]</p>	

Punctuate lists according to style

Unnecessary punctuation makes your list look cluttered. Current government style is for minimal punctuation.

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. If you are not breaking up a paragraph or a sentence, consider a stand-alone list. Stand-alone lists use a heading, not a lead-in. Start each item with a capital letter. Don't add full stops to the end of any items (even the last item).

Avoid using a multilevel list

Multilevel lists group information into a hierarchy. The levels explain how each item relates to other list items.

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.

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](#).

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.

Part B: Style rules and conventions

General conventions, editing and proofreading

Make editing and proofreading part of creating content. The OAIC uses the *Macquarie Dictionary* for spelling.

Use minimal punctuation and the principle of minimal capitalisation.

Use italics only for limited purposes.

Editing and proofreading

Editing and proofreading help ensure consistency so content meets user needs and expectations.

For guidance on the difference between substantive editing, copyediting and proofreading, see the digital Style Manual: [Editing and proofreading](#)

Italics

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

Limit use of italics

Don't use italics for:

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

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

A title or name in italic type shows that it is formal and complete. Shortened versions of the title and common titles are in roman type. Follow the [detailed Style Manual guidance for referencing and attribution](#).

Published works

Use italics for the [titles of these published works](#):

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

Unpublished works are in roman type.

Full titles of Acts and legal cases

Use italics for primary legislation and legal cases but not for delegated legislation or bills.

See [Legal material](#)

Set off most foreign words and phrases

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

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

Stress words with special emphasis, but rarely

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

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

Emphasis in quotations

Sometimes, you might want to add italics to quotations to bring attention to particular words or phrases. If you do this, write 'emphasis added' in square brackets following the italicised text.

Punctuation and capitalisation

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

Include a single space after a full stop. Never use double spaces.

Use minimal punctuation to make meaning clear

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

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

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

To use minimal punctuation:

- don't add full stops to the ends of headings, page headers, footers or captions
- don't use a semicolon at the end of each item in a bullet list
- unless each item is a full sentence or the last item in a list, don't use a full stop for items in bullet lists
- don't use full stops between letters in an acronym or initialism
- don't use a full stop at the end of most abbreviations.

Minimal punctuation helps all users to understand content.

Use the correct spacing around punctuation marks

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

Include a single space after a punctuation mark at the end of a sentence (full stop, exclamation mark or question mark).

Never use double spaces. Check each document for double and multiple spaces and delete them.

Minimise capitals for common nouns and adjectives

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

Common nouns and adjectives don't use initial capitals, with few exceptions. For example, adjectives often have capitals when they refer to a [national, religious or linguistic group](#).

Follow the guidance on capitals for titles and government terms

Follow the conventions for using capitals in this Style Guide.

See [Titles, honours, forms of address](#)

See [Government terms](#)

Spelling

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

Macquarie Dictionary

The OAIC follows *Macquarie Dictionary* spelling.

You should be automatically logged into the *Macquarie Dictionary* when you are working in the office.

To log in at home go to macquariedictionary.com.au and enter the following:

Username:

Password:

s 47E(d)

The Australian Government standard is to use Australian English spelling and not American spelling. The only time you should use a 'z' instead of an 's' is for a proper noun e.g. World Health Organization.

The exception to this rule is quoted material, when you should use the spelling in the published original.

Australian English in Microsoft Word

To prevent Microsoft Word from Americanising your spelling and converting 's' to 'z' go to the Review tab, click on Language and then Set Proofing Language. Select English (Australia) and click on Set As Default. OAIC templates are set to default to Australian English spelling. See [Appendix C: OAIC templates](#).

Preferred spellings

The OAIC's preferred spellings are listed below in Table 1. It is recommended to use a style sheet for each publishing project to ensure consistency.

Table 1: Preferred spellings

Word	Notes
Act	Always capital when referring to an Act of parliament
adviser	not advisor
ageing	not aging
benefited	not benefitted
case law	two words
chair, co-chair	not chairman or chairperson
cooperation	not co-operation
coordination	not co-ordination
dataset	one word
decision-making	but decision maker
enquiry/enquiries	but Commission of Inquiry
enrol	not enroll
evidence base	but evidence-based policy
face-to-face	hyphenated
factsheet	one word
focused	not focussed
health care	noun (healthcare for adjective)
in-house	hyphenated
judgement	not judgment (unless referring to a court decision)
liveable	not livable
per cent	two words
policy maker	two words
program	not programme
targeted	not targetted
triated	not trialed
webpage	one word

Names and terms

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

Use italics for some medical terms, plants and animals, and official names of ships, aircraft and other vehicles.

Australian place names

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

You can check the spelling of a place name using the Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping website [Australian Place Names dataset](#).

Don't use a full stop after the shortened forms of the names of Australian states and territories.

Shorten names for states and territories in 4 situations

Spell out the names of Australian states and territories in formal content.

You can use shortened forms when:

- the name is used as an adjective
- space is limited e.g. the title of an Act of parliament
- the full name would result in repetition
- you are writing an address.

The WA Government has reopened the Eyre Highway. ['WA' is used as an adjective.]

Don't use a full stop after the shortened forms. This rule applies to the initialisms (NSW, WA, ACT and NT), abbreviations (Vic and Tas) and the contraction (Qld).

When more than one state or territory is mentioned, they are generally listed in:

- in alphabetical order (ACT to WA)
- by population size (NSW to NT).

Other orders might be more suitable for some content. For example, content might include a list of states and territories ordered by total annual rainfall or number of enrolled voters. Use the order that fits with context and helps people understand your content.

Shortened names for states and territories (by population size)

NSW
Vic
Qld
WA
SA
Tas
ACT
NT

Government terms

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

Use initial capitals for formal names and titles

Use initial capitals only for the formal names and titles of government entities and office holders. Use lower case for generic references.

There are some exceptions to this rule:

- Budget (unless you are using it as an adjective or as a plural)
- Cabinet
- Commonwealth
- Crown
- Treasury.

Australian Government

Refer to the national government of Australia as the 'Australian Government'. Use an initial capital for both words only when they occur together.

Always use Australian Government. Do not use Commonwealth Government or Federal Government.

Departments and agencies

Use initial capital letters only for the formal names of government departments and agencies. Check the names of departments and agencies in the [government online directory](#).

Don't use capital letters for generic mentions. For example, use:

- 'the agency' instead of 'the Agency'
- 'the commission' instead of 'the Commission'
- 'the department' instead of 'the Department'.

Use a shortened form of the name only if the department or agency uses it regularly in their own content.

If you cite a source written by an organisation that has since changed its name, use the name published in the source. This might not be the organisation's current name.

The [Flipchart of Commonwealth entities and companies](#) (PDF) is a handy 2-page reference guide, organised by portfolio, that lists departments and agencies with links to the relevant websites.

The [List of Commonwealth entities and companies](#) (PDF) is a 30-page document, organised by portfolio, which provides ABNs, enabling legislation and other governance-related details for departments and agencies, as well as links.

The Department of Finance produces the [flipchart and list](#) and the dates reflect when the documents were updated, not when the change occurred.

More information about government bodies can be found at [Types of Australian Government bodies](#) and [Australian Government Organisations Register](#).

Government programs and agreements

Use initial capitals for the full names of:

- government programs
- treaties
- protocols and similar agreements.

National Aged Care Advocacy Program

Legislation

Use initial capitals for these terms when referring to specific legislation:

- Act
- Ordinance
- Regulation
- Bill.

Use lower case for generic references to bills, regulations and ordinances.

Use initial capitals for all references to Acts.

Use government sources to check the titles of legislation, especially:

- the [Federal Register of Legislation](#)
- the Australian Parliament House list of [bills and legislation](#).

See [Legal material](#)

See [Delegated legislation](#)

Commercial terms

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

For guidance see the digital Style Manual:

[Use initial capitals for commercial terms](#)

[Use a common word for a product if you can](#)

[Take care using product names](#)

Dates and time

Dates and times need to be readable. Write, abbreviate and punctuate dates and times consistently so people can understand your content.

Follow Australian conventions for dates

Australian style conventions apply to dates expressed in numerals and words, and in numeric formats.

Months and days

Months and days are proper nouns, so they start with an initial capital.

Use abbreviations only if space is limited, for example, in tables, illustrations, charts and notes. Ensure it is obvious to users which months or days you are referring to.

The standard abbreviations for the days of the week are:

Monday – ‘Mon’ or ‘M’
 Tuesday – ‘Tues’ or ‘Tu’
 Wednesday – ‘Wed’ or ‘W’
 Thursday – ‘Thurs’ or ‘Th’
 Friday – ‘Fri’ or ‘F’
 Saturday – ‘Sat’ or ‘Sa’
 Sunday – ‘Sun’ or ‘Su’.

The standard abbreviations for the months are:

January – ‘Jan’
 February – ‘Feb’
 March – ‘Mar’
 April – ‘Apr’
 May – retain as ‘May’
 June – retain as ‘June’ or shorten to ‘Jun’
 July – retain as ‘July’ or shorten to ‘Jul’
 August – ‘Aug’
 September – ‘Sept’
 October – ‘Oct’
 November – ‘Nov’
 December – ‘Dec’.

Full dates

In general, use numerals for the day and the year but spell out the month in words. Don’t include a comma or any other punctuation. When using full dates, don’t use ordinal numbers.

Write this

Friday 1 May 1997

Not this

May 1, 1997

Friday, 1 May 1997

1st May 1997

Use ‘from’ and ‘to’ in spans of years

Avoid en dashes in spans of years. Write the years out in full.

from 2015 to 2019

The exceptions are:

- financial years
- information in parentheses, such as terms of office and years of birth and death.

For these, use an en dash without any spaces on either side.

the 2020–21 financial year

Sidney Nolan (1917–1992) had 3 younger siblings.

Don't use an apostrophe for decades

Write the span of decades with an 's' on the end. Do not use an apostrophe.

2010s not 2010's

1980s not 1980's

Use numbers for the time of day when you need to be precise

In most documents, especially when you need to be precise, numbers give a clearer expression of time.

Use a colon between the hours and minutes. The use of a colon as the separator reflects a shift in contemporary Australian usage and avoids confusion with decimal numbers.

The bus leaves at 8:22am.

Write 'o'clock' only when quoting someone directly or transcribing a recording. Use numerals and the word 'o'clock'.

'The minister is speaking at about 10 o'clock,' they said.

Times using 'am' and 'pm'

Use 'am' and 'pm' in lower case. You can use 2 zeros to show the full hour, but they aren't essential.

9am or 9:00am

Noon, midday and midnight

Use ‘noon’, ‘midday’ or ‘midnight’ instead of ‘12am’ or ‘12pm’ to make it easier for people using your content to be certain of the time.

Time zones

You might also need to define which time zone you are referring to.

The Australian zones are:

CST (Central Standard Time)

CDT (Central Daylight-saving Time)

EST (Eastern Standard Time)

EDT (Eastern Daylight-saving Time)

WST (Western Standard Time).

We generally add an ‘A’ (to represent ‘Australian’) to the front to avoid confusion.

10:30am AEST

Organisation names

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

Write the name as the organisation writes it

Organisations determine how their names should be spelt and punctuated. This does not always follow the usual rules.

Write the name of the organisation the same way the organisation writes it. This rule applies except in rare cases when the organisation name is in all lower case. Use an initial capital for these names in general text. This helps people identify the name as a proper noun.

Some names start with a lower case letter but have a medial capital (for example, ‘eBay’). Write the name the same way, including to begin a sentence. A medial capital is enough to identify the name as a proper noun.

eSafety keeps tips on its website topical and up to date.

Pay attention to the use of capital letters, punctuation (such as apostrophes) and logograms (such as '&'). Make sure to include all words in the name. Don't add additional words.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [Note the lack of apostrophe for 'Nations' and the variant spelling of 'Organization'.]

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) [The ampersand is part of the initialism but not the spelt-out form.]

State Library Victoria [The name is not the 'State Library of Victoria'. It does not include a preposition.]

Meat & Livestock Australia [The ampersand is part of the name.]

Check the correct name of an organisation

The names of organisations can change. The most efficient way to confirm an organisation's name is to check its website, annual report or letterhead.

- For Australian Government entities, use the [government online directory](#). It includes the Australian Government organisations register and the directories of state and territory governments. There are also website directories for some local governments.
- Name searches are useful for company and business names, especially the [ABN lookup](#), [Australian Securities and Investments Commission registers](#) and the Australian Securities Exchange's [listed companies](#).

If you cite a source written by an organisation that has since changed its name, use the name that was published in the source. This may be the organisation's past name.

Before September 2013, the Department of Social Services was called the 'Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs'.

Shortened forms of the name

Use the organisation's shortened form only if the organisation regularly uses it in its own content.

For example, the Department of Home Affairs uses 'Home Affairs' as the shortened form. It would be inappropriate to use 'DHA' to refer to Home Affairs. However, Defence Housing Australia does use the initialism 'DHA', so using it to refer to that organisation would be appropriate.

Spell out the shortened form the first time, unless the organisation's name is known only by the shortened form.

In general text, use lower case for the definite article in the names of organisations

Some organisations use the definite article ‘The’ in their name with an initial capital. Use the full name, including ‘The’, in 2 situations:

- letters
- if the name appears in an alphabetical list (arrange by ‘The’ as the first word in the name)

Always use lower case ‘the’ in general text. This follows the practice of most organisations.

The University of Sydney [Correct name, not ‘University of Sydney’]

Next year the University of Sydney will renovate its science buildings. [General text uses lower case for ‘the’]

Put a possessive apostrophe in a name if the organisation does

Use an apostrophe only when it forms part of the official name of an organisation.

Actors’ and Entertainers’ Benevolent Fund Qld

In all other cases for organisation names, don’t use possessive apostrophes.

The apostrophe is disappearing from many organisational names, particularly from those that contain plural nouns ending in ‘s’. In these cases, the plural noun is descriptive rather than possessive.

Australian Securities and Investments Commission

Minerals Council of Australia

Australian Workers Union

We do not use possessive apostrophes for the names of our OAIC networks.

Information Contact Officers Network (Officers is descriptive)

Privacy Professionals Network (Professionals is descriptive)

Use the singular verb with organisation names

In formal writing we use a singular verb with organisation names. On our website and in social media, ‘they’ is acceptable for an organisation or agency.

Numbers and measurement

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

Generally write numerals for 2 and above. Note the few exceptions to the general rule of writing numbers as numerals including media releases.

Use words for ordinal numbers up to 'ninth' and for fractions.

Write mathematical relationships and operations as words, unless the symbols help the user. Use symbols for currency and percentages in most cases.

Choosing numerals or words

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

Use numerals for 2 and above in text

In text, the general rule is:

- Use numerals for '2' and above.
- Write the numbers 'zero' and 'one' in words.

Use words for 2 and above in these specific situations

There are exceptions to the general rule for using numerals in text.

Use words for numbers when:

- starting a sentence
- writing a fraction (two-thirds, three-quarters)
- writing a proper noun that includes a number written as a word
- writing a publication title that includes a number written as a word
- quoting a figure of speech
- writing a media release.

OAIC media releases and statements are an exception to the rule about using numerals instead of words. They follow the style used by most Australian media outlets which is to use words for numbers below 10. We also use double quotation marks in media releases.

Write all numbers as numerals in these specific situations

There are exceptions to using words for ‘zero’ and ‘one’.

Write all numbers as numerals:

- in units of measurement
- to show mathematical relationships – such as equations and ratios – and for decimals
- when you are comparing numbers
- in tables and charts
- for dates and times
- in a series of numbers
- in specific contexts – such as steps, instructions, age and school years
- in scientific content.

Date and times

Always use numerals for date and times. Use a colon between the hours and minutes.

Series of numbers

In any document that contains a lot of numbers, it is always better to write numbers as numerals.

Always use numerals for:

- a related group of items
- a discussion of statistics.

This is regardless of the size of the numbers involved.

The anthology includes 160 poems by 22 poets – 14 of whom were born in Australia, 4 in New Zealand, 3 in England and 1 in Austria.

If you have 2 series of numbers, for the sake of clarity you can use words for one series and numerals for the other.

Of the mothers of the 23 sets of triplets registered during the year, 8 had no previous children, 8 had one child and 7 had two previous children.

Choose between numerals or words for currency

Use numerals and symbols for amounts of money.

However, money can be written entirely in words for approximations and figures of speech.

Combine numerals and words for large rounded numbers

Numbers up to one million are easy to read as numerals. When you're using rounded numbers of 1,000 or more, use commas to separate numerals into groups of 3 (working right to left).

Use a combination of numerals and words for large numbers over a million when they are rounded. It is easier to read '2.5 million' than '2,500,000'.

The budget allocated \$50 billion to that initiative.

The organisation announced \$3 trillion in superannuation savings.

Currency

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

For guidance see the digital Style Manual:

[Quantify an amount of money with a symbol and numeral](#)

[Clarify when you are using Australian dollars](#)

[Reference non-Australian currencies for accessibility](#)

[Quantify large amounts of money](#)

[Use words for inexact amounts](#)

Measurements and units

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

For guidance see the digital Style Manual:

[Use the standard units of measurement](#)

[Write numerals with units of measurement](#)

[Use symbols for common units of measurement](#)

[Put a non-breaking space between numbers and units](#)

[Don't add 's' for plural forms](#)

[Compare measurements using the same units](#)

[Only use non-SI units if the user understands them](#)

[Avoid imperial units](#)

Ordinal numbers

Ordinal numbers such as first, second and third show the order and importance of things.

With large ordinals, spell out the number and include the suffix, for example, the millionth visitor.

Avoid using ordinals to order points in general text. Reword the content or use a numbered list instead. A list is easier for people to follow.

Exclude ordinals in dates, use plain numerals, for example, 12 February 2005.

Sort and compare the order of things using ordinals

Ordinal numbers show the order or position of something in a sequence.

Ordinals always have a suffix:

‘-st’ (‘first’, ‘21st’)

‘-nd’ (‘second’, ‘32nd’)

‘-rd’ (‘third’, ‘103rd’)

‘-th’ (‘fourth’, ‘15th’, ‘55th’ and so on).

Ordinal numbers to ‘ninth’

Write ordinal numbers up to ‘ninth’ in words.

the third example

the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month

Percentages

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

Use numerals with the percentage sign

Use the percentage sign next to a numeral in text. Don’t use a space between the number and the percentage sign.

15%

Use decimals rather than fractions with the percentage sign.

Write

The price of Tapis oil is up by 0.25%.

Not

The price of Tapis oil is up by $\frac{1}{4}$ %.

Avoid starting a sentence with the percentage. Reword the sentence if possible, or write the percentage out in words. You can use everyday words if a precise amount is not needed.

Use the correct form of the noun (percentage)

‘Per cent’ and ‘percentage’ aren’t the same. The term ‘per cent’ is an adverb. The noun form is ‘percentage’.

Statistics show the percentage of Australians with university degrees is increasing.

‘Per cent’ is written as 2 words in Australia. ‘Percent’ is not Australian spelling.

Don’t use percentages to describe change

Avoid using percentages to describe changes.

Tell people what the actual increase or decrease is.

Like this

The application fee is now \$70. This is a \$20 increase from 1 January 2020.

Not this

The application fee increased by 40% from \$50 to \$70 on 1 January 2020.

Be concise when writing about percentages

When you use many percentages in running text, put the figures in brackets (parentheses) or use a list to simplify the text.

In 2019, population size increased in New South Wales (32%), Queensland (20%) and Victoria (19%).

Punctuation marks

Style for punctuation supports accessibility and readability for users.

Write simple sentences with minimal punctuation. Use brackets, colons, semicolons or en dashes only to make the sentence clearer for the user.

Don't use exclamation marks in formal content. Avoid using forward slashes except for some specific uses.

Write direct speech in single quotation marks.

Apostrophes

Apostrophes show possession and contractions. Don't use them for descriptive phrases or plural nouns.

Don't use apostrophes for Australian place names involving possessives, for example, Kings Cross.

Use the apostrophe only when it forms part of the official name of the organisation, for example, National Farmers' Federation.

Apostrophes show possession

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

The apostrophe goes straight after the answer.

This is Ariaiah's desk.

This is the Murphys' submission to the inquiry. [More than one person called Murphy were part of a joint submission.]

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

Noun possession rules

The rules regarding the use of the possessive apostrophe are listed below in Table 2.

Table 2: Noun possession rules

Noun type	Rule	Examples
Singular noun	Add an apostrophe and s	the committee's report, ASIO's files
Plural nouns that end in letter 's'	Add an apostrophe only	both committees' reports, the Joneses' submission
Plural nouns that don't end in letter 's'	Add an apostrophe and s	children's education, the sheep's wool
Proper names ending in letter 's'	Add an apostrophe and another s, even if you don't pronounce the final s in the noun	Burns's report, James's profession, Ross's job, Louis's supervisor
More than one noun: individual possession	Add an apostrophe and s after each noun	Smith's and Miller's offices
More than one noun: joint possession	Add an apostrophe and s after the last noun only	Smith and Miller's report
Singular compound noun	Add an apostrophe and s after the compound	The Attorney-General's office
Plural compound noun	Add an apostrophe and s after the compound	The Attorneys-General's meeting

Descriptive phrases don't need apostrophes

Some nouns are descriptive rather than possessive. Don't use an apostrophe for these nouns.

They signed the visitors book. [Descriptive: a type of book]

She attended a directors meeting. [Descriptive: a type of meeting for directors]

Use the apostrophe to show possession.

Her visitor's book was lying on the table. [Possessive: the book her visitor owns]

The director's office was refurbished. [Possessive: the office where the director works]

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

6 weeks time

3 months wages

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

a day's work

the year's cycle

Apostrophes show contractions

Apostrophes show that you have omitted letters in contractions.

I haven't seen the report.

It's a busy day at the office.

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

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

It's time to give the committee its terms of reference.

Plural nouns don't have apostrophes

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

25 million Australians

the 2020s

committee reports

fresh avocados

Brackets and parentheses

Brackets can make it easier for the user to scan text. Use brackets when it would not change the meaning if you removed enclosed text.

Avoid using square brackets inside parentheses.

Don't use sets of parentheses inside each other. Instead, use square brackets if you must put parenthetical information within parentheses.

Use square brackets to show insertions in quotes.

Use brackets for text users can skip over

Brackets can help you break up information. They enclose parts of the sentence that aren't essential to the meaning. Sentences must be grammatically correct if you remove the text in brackets.

The most commonly used brackets are:

- parentheses
- square brackets.

Use brackets sparingly for:

- non-essential information
- shortened forms
- references
- insertions.

Use brackets only where they make content clearer to people. For example, always use brackets in author-date citations.

Too many brackets, or badly used brackets, can make a sentence more complex and difficult to understand. You can usually rewrite a sentence so the content in brackets can be its own sentence or can even be removed.

Put extra information in parentheses

Information in parentheses is less important than information that is between spaced en dashes or pairs of commas. Used well, parentheses can improve meaning and make content easy to scan.

Definitions

Parentheses enclose definitions.

Medicare (Australia's universal health insurance scheme) guarantees all Australians access to a wide range of health and hospital services.

Shortened forms

Parentheses introduce a shortened form after it has been spelt out in full. You can then use the shortened form through the rest of the page or publication.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is responsible for research funding and health guidelines.

Cross-references

Parentheses enclose cross-references to other parts of the content.

Australia's population increased by 350,000 people last year (Table 1).

Citations

Parentheses enclose citations in the author-date system of referencing.

China is Australia's largest trading partner (Smith 2019).

Extra detail

Parentheses enclose extra detail.

Our 2 biggest exports are iron ore (\$61.4 billion) and coal (\$60.4 billion).
The winning tenderer (which was a local company) signed the contract on Tuesday.

Clarification and asides

Parentheses enclose text that doesn't have a grammatical relationship to the rest of the sentence. This type of text includes extra information, clarifications and asides.

The department was in a heritage-listed building. (The building was designed by award-winning architect Enrico Taglietti.)

Whitlam's comments on the steps of Parliament House ('Well may we say ...') are still widely quoted.

Write brackets in the same type as the surrounding text

Brackets should be in the same type (roman, italics, bold) as the text around the brackets. This is regardless of the type of the text inside the brackets.

This is the same rule as for quotation marks.

The most recent review of defence policy (2016 Defence white paper) set the direction for the next 10 years. [In this example, the parentheses are not in italics because the surrounding text is not in italics.]

Colons

A colon draws the user's attention to text that follows. Add colons only if essential.

Use them to introduce lists and block quotes. Use a colon for time, for example, 10:00am.

Limit colon use

Use a colon only if you are sure it is needed. Incorrect use creates confusion for users.

Introduce examples and contrasts with colons

Use a colon to:

- introduce a word, phrase or clause that provides more detail
- introduce a question
- give an example
- summarise or contrast with what comes before it.

Use correct spelling: check a dictionary if you need to.

Our work is about answering this simple question: how?

We'll have to use a stronger tool: sanctions.

This is the guiding principle for our workplace: collaboration.

Start lists with a colon

Use a colon to introduce a list of words, phrases or clauses.

Pick any 2 of the 3: low price, high speed, high quality.

We need to:

- check Appendix A of the report
- ask Mary about the final chapter of her book
- rewrite our introduction.

Commas

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

Separate introductory words, phrases and clauses with a comma

A comma separates introductory words, phrases and clauses from the main clause of the sentence.

Many introductory phrases can be moved to the end of sentences without changing the meaning. In these cases, you don't need a comma before the phrase. This simpler structure can be easier to read.

During the meeting, we discussed Item 9.

We discussed Item 9 during the meeting.

Place a comma after adverbs and other introductory words

Use a comma after introductory words, such as greetings and adverbs, or when addressing someone. Using an introductory word gives it emphasis.

Yes, they went to the estimates hearing. [Affirmative emphasis]

Goodnight, and good luck. [Greeting]

Actually, that's an interesting point. [Adverb]

Excuse me, should I come with you? [Addressing someone]

You don't need a comma after an introductory word if the sentence is very short. This minimises punctuation in very short sentences.

Today I went to work.

Use a comma after phrases and clauses that change the whole sentence

Use commas after adverbial phrases and adverbial clauses. Adverbs – such as ‘first’ and ‘during’ – modify verbs, adjectives and other adverbs.

During the meeting, we discussed item 9. [Adverbial phrase]

Although they were shaking and sweating, the firefighters were relieved to feel the first drops of a downpour. [Adverbial clause]

Conditional clauses are adverbial clauses (for example, beginning with ‘if’, ‘unless’ or ‘until’). They should also have a comma after them if they start the sentence.

Unless the consultation starts early, it will not finish on time. [A conditional adverbial clause]

Avoid beginning a sentence with a string of numbers and dates

Use a comma after an introductory phrase that ends with a numeral and is immediately followed by another numeral. It doesn’t matter how short the sentence is.

Avoid this type of sentence structure because the string of numbers can be confusing.

Write this

There were 16.5 million people enrolled to vote in Australian elections on 18 April 2019.

Not this

On 18 April 2019, 16.5 million people were enrolled to vote in Australian elections.

Mark out non-essential information within a sentence

Commas isolate information in a sentence when it isn’t essential to:

- meaning
- grammatical structure.

Within a sentence, use a pair of commas to separate non-essential or supplementary information. Always check for the second comma where there should be a pair.

Generally, if you can take out part of the sentence and it is still grammatically correct, it should be between a pair of commas.

Check carefully. Using comma pairs can completely change the meaning of a sentence.

Elements that function as supplementary information include:

- non-essential clauses
- nouns that define the same thing
- question tags.

Set off non-essential clauses

Use commas around clauses that add information but aren't essential to the meaning of the sentence.

Don't use commas if the clause is essential for meaning.

If you can remove the clause and your sentence means the same thing, it's non-essential and should go between commas.

Non-essential clauses are also called 'non-restrictive' or 'non-defining' [clauses](#).

Non-essential

Introduced pests, such as varroa mite, threaten Australian honey production.

[All introduced pests threaten honey production. The varroa mite is just an example.]

Essential

Introduced pests from South Asia threaten Australian honey production.

[Only pests from South Asia threaten honey production. Other introduced pests don't affect honey production.]

Place commas around nouns that define the same thing they follow

Use a pair of commas when you have 2 noun phrases next to each other that define the same thing.

The strike took place in Whyalla, South Australia, in June 2014.

You should be able to take out the noun phrase between the comma pair and still have a grammatically correct sentence.

Use commas with the phrase 'for example'

Generally, use a comma before and after the phrase 'for example' in a sentence.

Some colours, for example, are difficult for people with colour blindness to distinguish.

If 'for example' begins a sentence, it is an introductory phrase. Follow it with a comma.

For example, some colours are difficult for people with colour blindness to distinguish.

If you're introducing a bullet list after 'for example', use a colon.

Some colours are difficult for people with colour blindness to distinguish, for example:

- red
- green
- orange
- brown
- blue
- purple.

Place commas between

Use commas to connect 2 or more principal clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction ('and', 'or', 'but', 'so').

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

Do not use this rule to create a sentence of more than 25 words. Shorter sentences are easier to read.

The Senate debated the Bill at length, but the party whips eventually called for a vote.

['But' is the coordinating conjunction. 'The Senate' and 'the party whips' are each the subjects of a principal clause.]

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

The company closed its Perth office and sacked the chief financial officer.

['The company' closed an office and sacked an executive officer. 'The company' is the subject of both clauses, joined using 'and'.]

The exception to this rule is when you have joined more than 2 principal clauses with the same subject.

The company closed its Perth office, sacked the chief financial officer, and opened a branch in Singapore.

[The verbs 'closed', 'sacked' and 'opened' each complement the same subject: 'the company'. Each complement completes a principal clause.]

Punctuate sentence lists and strings of adjectives

Separate items in lists of nouns or adjectives with commas

Use commas between items in a sentence list. Avoid using a comma before the last item in the list.

This rule applies to sentence lists and sentence fragments in bullet lists. Do not punctuate the end of a list item with a comma if it is in a bullet list.

The delegation visited Brisbane, Canberra and Adelaide.

The consultation involved businesses, sole traders and not-for-profits.

Restrict the use of the Oxford comma

If the last item combines 2 words or phrases with the word ‘and’, use a comma before that final item. This use of the comma is known as the ‘Oxford comma’ or ‘serial comma’.

The industries most affected are retail trade, wholesale trade, and accommodation and food services.

[‘Accommodation and food services’ is listed as a single industry category. It is set off in the list with an Oxford comma.]

The Oxford comma can prevent ambiguity in complex sentence lists. For example, use the Oxford comma before the last item if you’re using a defining phrase applicable only to that final item.

A defining phrase is essential to the meaning of the sentence. The following examples show how the Oxford comma can affect meaning, using the defining phrase ‘for stockfeed’.

The analysis outlined demand for barley, wheat and hay for stockfeed. [All crops are for stockfeed.]

The analysis outlined demand for barley, wheat, and hay for stockfeed. [Only the hay is for stockfeed.]

Use commas in numbers with 4 or more digits

Numbers with 4 or more digits (starting from 1,000) need a comma. Use commas for numerals in text and in tables.

You need to use a combination of words and numerals for large rounded numbers over a million. Large rounded numbers are punctuated with a decimal point.

This budget year will see a surplus of \$7.1 billion, equal to 0.4 per cent of GDP.

Don't use a space between the digits, because screen readers can read them as separate numbers.

The agency handles around 6,500 complaints each year.

When you are using numbers of 1,000 or more, use commas to separate the numerals into groups of 3 (working right to left).

1,000

17,275

505,607,400

Dashes and en dashes

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

Use the correct symbols for en dash and minus sign

En dashes are half the width of the font height. Use them as a type of punctuation.

Don't use an en dash instead of a minus sign. Screen readers will read dashes as dashes, not as the minus sign.

In Unicode, the en dash is U+2013.

To make sure screen readers read the minus sign, use the mathematical symbol for minus. In Unicode, this is U+2212.

Don't confuse the dash or the minus symbol for a hyphen.

Use phrases instead of en dashes for most spans and ranges of numbers

En dashes show a span or range when used with numerals, such as a range of values or a financial year.

Avoid this use in most text.

Dashes can affect readability unless a user changes default settings (punctuation verbosity settings). By default, screen readers won't generally read out dashes. This can affect people's ability to quickly understand ranges and spans.

That is why, in general text, it's better to use phrases for most spans and ranges of numbers. You can use en dashes in technical content, particularly if it's got a lot of specific spans and ranges of numbers.

Spans and ranges in general text

Avoid using en dashes for spans in paragraph text and headings. Instead, use the phrases:

- 'from' paired with 'to' – for example, 'from 57 to 65 years'
- 'between' paired with 'and' – for example, 'between Monday and Friday'.

Never mix 'from' or 'between' with an en dash.

The exceptions to this general rule are date ranges for:

- financial years
- terms of office
- lifespan (birth and death).

Date ranges in titles and headings should follow the general rule, except when:

- it would push the character count over 70 characters (including spaces)
- the dash is part of an existing heading or title that you are citing as a reference.

Join nouns with en dashes to show equal relationships

Use en dashes between 2 nouns that both retain their original meaning. These are called 'coordinate nouns'.

When describing something, coordinate nouns can function as [adjectives](#).

The Murray–Darling Basin [The Murray River and the Darling River combine to form the basin river system.]

A Sydney–Melbourne flight [Sydney and Melbourne combine to form a single travel route.]

If you used a hyphen instead, you create a compound noun. These cannot stand in for coordinate nouns.

Space en dashes in sentences to set off non-essential information

Spaced en dashes create a pause in a sentence to add extra meaning, similar to commas and brackets.

Use them rarely to use them effectively – for example, to draw attention to a new and important detail for your main idea. As a rule, don't make your [sentences](#) complex or long.

Insert an en dash using:

– Alt + 015

–Option + dash (Mac users)

En dashes inside a sentence

Spaced en dashes draw attention because they aren't as common as other punctuation marks. They help some people scan content by showing that information is non-essential or parenthetical.

Spaced en dashes can separate a clarification, an interruption, a correction, a short list or a summary from the rest of the text.

Always space punctuating en dashes with a single space on either side of the dash. Spaces allow automatic line breaks in front of or after the dash. Often, you need a pair of en dashes.

Three rivers – the Murray, Darling and Murrumbidgee – were discussed in the report.

If the parenthetical information is at the beginning or end of the sentence, you can use one dash.

There was no time to plan – a shortcoming that would later cost millions.

Make sure the rest of the sentence makes sense.

If you remove the content between the en dashes, the rest of the sentence must be a complete sentence.

The allies – the USA, Australia and New Zealand – signed the pact in 1951.

The allies signed the pact in 1951.

In a sentence with one en dash, one side of the dash must be a complete sentence.

Solar, wind, hydro and tidal power – all are viable options for renewable energy. ['All are viable options for renewable energy' is a complete sentence.]

Em dashes

Em dashes are the same width as the font height. Both en dashes and em dashes are grammatically correct and can be used to show:

- additional, amplifying and parenthetical material
- an abrupt change.

Spaced en dashes are Australian Government style and should be used in digital content.

The shift from em dash to en dash reflects contemporary writing practice and the new focus on digital content. The en dash is spaced so screen readers don't mistake an unspaced en for a hyphen.

Exclamation marks

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

Exclamation marks aren't part of the [Government voice](#).

Don't use exclamation marks in formal content, such as government reports or briefings.

Ellipses

Ellipses show users ideas or words are missing from a sentence or a quote. Make sure you don't change the intent of the original source.

Show missing words or ideas with ellipses

The ellipsis (plural 'ellipses') is a character of exactly 3 dots.

Use the ellipsis:

- if you omit words in quoted text
- to mark an unfinished phrase, clause or sentence.

Do not use a string of full stops

Use the symbol for the ellipsis. Don't use a string of full stops.

Insert an ellipsis using:

- the Unicode character U+2026
- the HTML code `…`

Add spaces around ellipses

Use a single space before and after each ellipsis.

Forward slashes

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

There is no need to include a space on either side of a forward slash. The exception to this is official dual places names. Check the Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping website [Australian Place Names](#) dataset.

Write shortened units of measurement with a forward slash, for example, 60km/h.

Always use an en dash for financial years, not a forward slash.

Limit the forward slash to specific uses

The forward slash is also known as the ‘solidus’ or just the ‘slash’.

Use forward slashes:

- in some shortened forms
- in mathematical expressions
- to present lines of poetry in running text
- instead of ‘per’, ‘an’ or ‘a’ when abbreviating units of measurement
- in web addresses
- in dates if you can’t write them out – for example, in tables
- in some place names.

Full stops

A full stop marks the end of a sentence, unless it is a question or exclamation. Users need them to scan text and to recognise decimal values.

Use a full stop after a web or email address where it ends the sentence.

Complete a sentence with a full stop

Full stops mark the end of a sentence that is not a question or an exclamation.

Following the same rule, use full stops at the end of the last item in a list that’s made up of sentence fragments.

The committee met yesterday. It discussed:

- office space
- working hours
- managers' salaries.

Use full stops with some numbers and shortened forms

Also use full stops:

- as the decimal point in numbers and currency – for example, '\$3.55'
- in numbering subsections and paragraphs in a document – for example, 'Section 7.3'
- in some Latin shortened forms and shortened forms used in referencing.

Don't use full stops with contractions or most abbreviations.

Ensure link text doesn't include a full stop

Use full stops at the end of sentences with link text, but don't include the full stop in the link itself.

The People and Culture team manages the [add a new employee form](#).

Write headings, measurements and captions without full stops

Don't use full stops in:

- headings
- stand-alone lists (stand-alone lists have a heading without a colon)
- page headers or footers.

Full stops do not go after:

- symbols or units of measurement (unless the symbol or unit is also at the end of a sentence)
- [captions and titles](#).

For guidance see the digital Style Manual:

[Don't add a full stop after hashtags, emojis or handles](#)
[Punctuate text messages \(SMS\) correctly](#)

Hyphens

Hyphens connect words and prefixes so meaning is clear to users.

Refer to the [Macquarie Dictionary](#) if you are not sure if you need to use a hyphen for spelling.

There are few firm rules about using hyphens

Hyphens clarify meaning by connecting words and parts of words into a single unit of meaning. Use hyphens to avoid ambiguity. Follow the accepted naming conventions for [compass points](#), [names of people](#) and [names of places](#).

Write certain prefixes with a hyphen

Hyphens are useful in some sets of words formed with prefixes such as:

- 'anti-'
- 'auto-'
- 'counter-'
- 'extra-'
- 'intra-'
- 're-'
- 'sub-'

They're especially useful for:

- doubled-up vowels
- clarifying new words that could be confused with existing ones.

A hyphen is used in some words with prefixes to distinguish them from words that would otherwise look the same.

're-cover' [cover again], but 'recover' [retrieve or regain]

're-creation' [create anew], but 'recreation' [leisure-related activity]

're-signed' [signed again], but 'resigned' [stepped down or acquiescent]

Sometimes a prefix such as 'non-', 'pre-' or 'anti-' acts on more than one word. If the phrase is already hyphenated, use a second hyphen to link the prefix to all words in the phrase.

non-English-speaking countries

an anti-harm-minimisation stance

Doubled-up vowels

Use a hyphen when the last letter of a single-syllable prefix is a vowel and the word that follows begins with the same vowel.

This practice is less important if a word is well known. For example, cooperate, coordinate.

de-emphasise

pre-eminent

re-enter

Capital letters

Hyphens link a prefix to a word that starts with a capital letter.

un-Australian activities

pro-European

Vowel combinations

Don't use hyphens if the 2 words end and start with different vowels. The combined word doesn't place the same vowel together.

prearrange
reallocate

Use a hyphen, however, if the prefix is attached to a single-syllable word beginning with a vowel. This punctuation means the vowels aren't read as one sound.

de-ice

Two-syllable prefixes ending in a vowel other than 'o' and followed by another vowel are often hyphenated. If the base word begins with a consonant, the term is usually written as one word.

anti-aircraft, antisocial
semi-official, semicircular

Two-syllable prefixes ending in 'o' are often attached without a hyphen, regardless of what the base word starts with.

macroeconomics, macrobiotic
radioactive, radiotherapy

Consonants

Two-syllable prefixes ending in a consonant are rarely followed by a hyphen.

hyperlink, hyperrealism
interactive, interrelated

'Co-' and 'ex-' prefixes

Regardless of whether the rest of the word starts with a vowel:

- Many words with the prefix 'co-', meaning 'joint', have hyphens after the 'co'.
- All words formed with 'ex-', meaning 'former', are hyphenated.

co-author, co-worker
ex-councillor, ex-president

Numbers and italics with prefixes

Use a hyphen if a prefix is followed by a number or an expression that's in italics.

post-1960

Write most suffixes without hyphens

Suffixes are normally attached directly to the base word without any hyphen. The commonest suffixes include:

- -able
- -ate
- -ation
- -fold
- -ful
- -ise
- -ish
- -ly
- -ment
- -ness
- -y.

Hyphenate some but not all compound words

A compound word consists of 2 or more words that carry a new meaning when used together.

Hyphens link elements of compound words as a phrase, but usually only when they are used before a noun as adjectives. Don't use hyphens when the phrase is after the noun in the sentence.

'the up-to-date accounts', but 'the accounts are up to date'

'an 11-year-old child', but 'a child who is 11 years old'

For guidance see the digital Style Manual: [Hyphenate some but not all compound words](#)

Repeat words instead of using a hanging hyphen

Hanging (or floating) hyphens connect 2 words to a base word or a number that they share.

pre- or post-1945

This can be difficult to follow, so it's clearer to repeat the words.

full-time and part-time positions

Question marks

Users expect direct questions and requests to end with a question mark.

Indirect questions, commands and rhetorical questions can take other punctuation.

Direct questions and requests end in a question mark

Direct questions end with a question mark. Most begin with one of these words:

- 'who', 'what', 'when', 'where', 'why', 'how', 'which', 'whose'
- 'are', 'is', 'was', 'were'
- 'has', 'have'
- 'did', 'do', 'does'
- 'can', 'will', 'could', 'would', 'should', 'might'.

These types of questions are called interrogative sentences.

Indirect questions and commands don't use a question mark

Indirect questions don't end with question marks, even if they include a word such as 'who' or 'does'.

Indirect questions are often used in headings.

Who we are [Heading]

How to submit a claim [Heading]

The digital Style Manual recommends to [avoid questions as headings](#), except for [Easy Read materials](#). A list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) may also feature questions in headings.

Spellcheckers often recommend that you change indirect questions to end with a question mark. This isn't always correct. It depends on whether you *are* asking a question.

Instructions and commands aren't framed as questions. They don't start with words such as 'what', 'are' or 'does', and don't end with a question mark.

Commands and instructions don't suggest that people have a choice.

Consider who your future colleagues might be.

Please upload your edits.

Quotation marks

Quotation marks draw attention to words and reference certain kinds of titles.

Write direct speech in single quote marks except in media releases.

For quotations within quotations, use double quotation marks inside single ones.

For long quotes, use block quotes without quotation marks.

Quote direct speech in single quote marks

We use single quotation marks. We only use double quotation marks for quotations within quotations. Single quotation marks are also known as 'quote marks', 'quotes', 'speech marks' or 'inverted commas'.

Use them to:

- show direct speech and the quoted work of other writers
- enclose the title of certain works
- draw attention to a word you're defining.

Short quotations of direct speech are enclosed in single quotation marks.

OAIC media releases and statements are an exception to the rule about single quotation marks. They follow the style used by most Australian media outlets which is to use double quotation marks. We also use words for numbers below 10 in media releases.

Draw attention to words using quotation marks

You can use quotation marks instead of italics to make words stand out from your sentence. Examples include:

- a technical term on its first mention in a non-technical document
- a word or phrase that has been coined or that you're using in a specific sense
- colloquial words, nicknames, slang, or ironic or humorous words and phrases, in formal writing.

You don't usually need to repeat the quotation marks the next time you use the word. They might be useful if the next mention is a long way from the first.

Another use of quotation marks is for words introduced by expressions such as 'titled', 'marked', 'the term' and 'defined as'.

The survey used the term 'companion animal' to describe assistance dogs in workplaces.

Keep quoted punctuation marks in the quote

Punctuation in and after quotation marks depends on the punctuation of the quoted text and how it is used in the content.

If the punctuation mark is part of the quoted text, place the punctuation mark before the closing quotation mark.

'Is it okay to ask a colleague out for a coffee?' I asked the HR section.

He asked, 'Has it arrived?'

If the punctuation mark is part of the sentence outside the quoted text, it follows the closing quotation mark.

She said that it was 'time to start work'.

Did the complainant at any time ask you to 'Please turn down the noise'?

If the quotation ends a sentence or is a sentence in its own right, place the final full stop before the final quotation mark.

She said, 'It's time to start work.'

'When we get the final figures,' the manager said, 'we'll know how it will affect our bottom line.'

The surrounding text determines the font (roman, italics or bold) of the quotation marks. If the content inside the quotation marks is in italics, but the sentence is in roman type, use roman type for the quotation marks.

She described it as ‘*weird*’. [The quotation marks are in roman type even though ‘weird’ is in italics.]

‘Wow,’ he said. [Both the quote marks and the quote is in roman type.]

Semicolons

Semicolons link sentences. They can complicate sentences for users if overused.

Do not use semicolons at the end of bullet and numbered list items.

Avoid using a semicolon to link sentences

Short, simple sentences are easier to read. Overusing semicolons makes writing more difficult to understand.

Semicolons can create a break that is stronger than a comma but weaker than a full stop. They can link 2 sentences that share or develop an idea. The information must be closely related.

He wrote a report for each group. The red report was for one group; the blue report was for the other.

Instead of a semicolon, it’s usually best to use either:

- a full stop followed by a new sentence
- a comma before the last item, followed by a [conjunction](#).

Sentences should be in plain language and no longer than 25 words. Don’t use a semicolon if all it does is make your sentence longer.

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

If you have to use a semicolon, write [full sentences](#) on both sides of the semicolon. Other than in some sentence lists, it’s incorrect to have a sentence fragment on one side of the semicolon.

Use a bullet or numbered list instead of semicolons in a complex sentence

Complex lists in sentences can be hard to read. If you can't use a bullet or numbered list, separate list items with:

- commas if the list is simple, such as a list of single words
- semicolons if the list is complex, such as a list of items that already contain commas or conjunctions.

In complex lists, you need semicolons to show what goes with what.

The successful applicant will demonstrate integrity, persistence and confidence; experience in projects of this type; and a sound understanding of interdepartmental relationships.

[Semicolons are needed, as some list items have a comma in them.]

It is almost always better to break a complex list into a bullet or numbered list to make it easier to read.

Referencing and attribution

Attribute other content so users can find original sources.

Government content uses 2 referencing systems.

Author–date uses in-text citations with the author’s name and the date of publication which means it is more accessible than the documentary–note system.

Documentary–note uses superscript reference markers (numbers or symbols) in the text which in digital content must be hyperlinked to the note for accessibility.

Legal material follows specific style conventions. For authoritative guidance see the 4th edition of the *Australian Guide to Legal Citation* (AGLC4).

Avoid Latin shortened forms in referencing systems.

Author–date

The referencing systems used by Harvard and the American Psychological Association (APA) are examples of the author–date system.

The author–date system includes details for author and date in the text with a full citation in a list of references. This system is the default for Australian Government content.

For guidance see the digital Style Manual: [Author–date](#)

Documentary–note

The Oxford referencing system is an example of the documentary–note system.

The documentary–note system uses a symbol or number in the text to mark detailed references in footnotes or endnotes. Choose this system only if it best suits the mode of publishing content and user needs.

For guidance see the digital Style Manual: [Documentary–note](#)

Legal material

There are different conventions for citing legal material. Follow one style consistently to help people read and use the information. The OAIC follows the guidance in Style Manual on how to cite legal material. For specific guidance on how to cite legal material in legal writing and research, you may wish to use the 4th edition of the *Australian Guide to Legal Citation* (AGLC4). OAIC legal writing includes privacy determinations, Information Commissioner review decisions and vexatious applicant declarations.

Cite legal material consistently and accurately

It's important to cite legal sources in a consistent and accurate way across government.

The digital Style Manual gives common guidance for different types of legal material, including:

- [bills and explanatory material](#)
- [Acts of parliament](#)
- [schedules](#)
- [delegated legislation](#)
- [cases and legal authorities](#)
- [treaties](#).

Use the correct legislation title

Unless it is obvious from the context:

- Put the title first when writing in-text citations, footnotes and endnotes.
- Follow the title with the rest of the citation.

Use the following databases to find the authorised titles of legislation from each Australian jurisdiction.

Commonwealth

- [Federal Register of Legislation](#)

States and territories

- [ACT Legislation Register](#)
- [NSW legislation](#)
- [Northern Territory legislation](#)
- [Queensland legislation](#)
- [South Australian legislation](#)

- [Tasmanian legislation](#)
- [Victorian legislation and parliamentary documents](#)
- [Western Australian legislation](#)

A useful way to track the history of legislation, particularly for historical material not published online is to use the Office of Parliamentary Counsel (OPC) [Legislation tables](#).

Bills and explanatory material

Cite bills and explanatory material using the right style to help people find the source material.

Style for bill titles is roman type, title case

A bill is a draft Act introduced into parliament. A bill becomes an Act when the Governor-General gives assent to the bill after the Senate and House of Representatives agree on its content.

Write the titles of bills in roman type, not italics.

Bills have a:

- short title (its name), which includes the year
- long title (a description).

In general, use the short title. Use title case (maximal capitalisation). There is no comma between the title and year.

Use lower case for generic references to bills, regulations and ordinances. Use initial capitals for all references to Acts.

Lower case is correct, unless the reference is to a specific bill

Always use an initial capital for the word 'Bill' when you write about a specific bill: 'the Bill', 'this Bill'.

If you are writing about 2 or more bills, use the lower case: 'the bills', 'these bills'.

If you write about a bill or bills generally, use the lower case: 'a bill', 'some bills'.

For bills, people are unlikely to find the lower case forms confusing. If there's any chance the text is unclear to users, use a capital 'B'.

The basic unit of a bill is a clause (cl)

Bills contain clauses, which become sections when bills become Acts. Clauses can be divided into subclauses, then into paragraphs and then into subparagraphs. Use lower case for these units of a bill unless they begin a sentence.

Long bills have clauses grouped into parts, divisions and subdivisions. Always use an initial capital for these units, for example ‘Part 1’.

Bills often contain schedules. These are not units but are components of bills, Acts and some delegated legislation.

Units below clause level

Commonwealth bills refer to units below clause level using the smallest unit of text. This is a convention used by the Office of Parliamentary Counsel in legislative drafting. Some jurisdictions cite at clause level. Be guided by the type of content you’re writing, and its purpose and audience.

These citations specify the smallest unit of text:

- clause 9
- subclause 9(4)
- paragraph 9(4)(a)
- subparagraph 9(4)(a)(ii).

Other jurisdictions might cite the subparagraph as ‘clause 9(4)(a)(ii)’. [A citation at clause level]

Shortened forms for units

The shortened forms of ‘clause’ and ‘clauses’ are ‘cl’ and ‘cls’. Write them in lower case and without a full stop.

The shortened forms of ‘subclause’ and ‘subclauses’ are ‘subcl’ and ‘subcls’.

The other units of bills mentioned above are also found in Acts.

You can use both the long and shortened forms of units for in-text citation and notes. To decide which to use, think about the type of content, its users and the amount of legal material cited in it. If the long form better helps people understand the text, use it.

Explanatory material titles use roman type, title case

Explanatory material includes explanatory memorandums and explanatory statements.

An explanatory memorandum is a document tabled in parliament with a bill. It explains the objective of a proposed law and how it will operate. The Australian Government has provided explanatory memorandums with all government bills since 1982.

An explanatory statement is a similar document that accompanies delegated legislation such as regulations and determinations.

Write titles in roman type. Use title case for the titles of explanatory material.

Acts of parliament

Refer to Acts of parliament using the correct style so people can find the source material. Choose when to cite the short and long titles, series numbers, jurisdiction and sections.

Style for Act titles is title case, not always italics

Use title case (maximal capitalisation) for the titles of Acts.

Use italics for the first mention of the title of an Act and roman text for subsequent mentions.

Use roman type for the titles of Acts in reference lists and other long lists. Blocks of italics are difficult to read.

The year the legislation is first enacted forms part of the title. Don't use a comma before the year.

Include all the words in the title. If the title begins with 'The', 'An' or 'A', make sure you include it.

If the Act's title has a number, include the number exactly as written. The contraction 'No.' retains the full stop, which is an exception to the [general rule for the shortened form for 'number'](#).

Supply Act (No. 1) 2019–2020

An Act has a short title (its name) and long title (a description). Both appear after the list of contents in the text of the Act. The long title appears as a heading before section 1 of the Act. The short title is named in section 1.

An Act relating to Currency, Coinage and Legal Tender [Long title]

Part I—Preliminary

1 Short title

This Act may be cited as the *Currency Act 1965*. [Short title]

At first mention, use the short title in italics

The first time you name the Act in text, use the short title in italics.

The *Currency Act 1965* established the Royal Australian Mint to produce Australia's circulating coins. The Act also sets restrictions on amounts that can be paid in coins as 'legal tender'.

After first mention, use the short title in roman type without the year

Always use the short title in italics the first time you cite the Act in your text.

If there are subsequent mentions of the Act, use the short title in roman type without the year.

Only add the shortened form in parentheses at the first mention if it does more than just remove the year or the word ‘Act’ from the title.

Or use the informal title in roman type

Often, Acts also have a shorter informal title. This is usually an initialism or acronym of the short title. At first mention, include the informal title in parentheses after the title. Use the informal title after that.

Use title case and roman type for the informal title.

... in the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act). ... Section 10 of the PGPA Act defines a Commonwealth entity as ...

Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act)

Each Act has a series number to use in citations

Acts are also identified by series. Every Act made in a year is given a number starting at 1.

The series appears in the text of the Act immediately under the title, for example ‘Act No. 137 of 1979’.

Using the series in general text helps people identify the particular Act and find it in the Legislation Register. Series are also used in annotations and in notes.

The *Australian Citizenship Act 2007*, by virtue of amendments made in 2013 (Act No. 57 of 2013), gives the Minister the discretionary power to ...

Jurisdiction is an important detail

Where confusion may arise, it may be helpful to identify the jurisdiction of an Act – that is, whether it is a Commonwealth or a state or territory Act – by inserting the abbreviation for the jurisdiction in roman type in brackets after the title.

Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)

Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)

An initial capital is correct, whether the reference is generic or not

Always use capitals for the words ‘Act’ and ‘Acts’ when you write about Acts of parliament.

The basic unit of an Act is a section (s)

An Act contains sections, which are often divided into smaller units called subsections. Subsections might be divided into paragraphs and subparagraphs.

The units of an Act may be written in long form or shortened form (an abbreviation or contraction), depending on the context. Never use a full stop after the shortened form.

In formal and standard content, the OAIC cites at section level and uses the shortened form 's' for section.

An exception to this approach is content primarily aimed at non-legal audiences where we use the long form 'section'. Examples include our NDB reports and COVIDSafe reports.

The Australian Information Commissioner can issue guidelines about the operation of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) under s 93A. [Website content]

If the Commissioner believes an offence relating to COVIDSafe or COVID app data may have been committed, under section 94U the Commissioner must discontinue that part of the investigation and inform the Australian Federal Police or Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions. [COVIDSafe Report May-November 2020]

Sections are usually grouped into parts, divisions and subdivisions. An Act only has subdivisions if there are divisions. Both the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* and the *Privacy Act 1988* are divided into parts and there are divisions within those parts. Some larger Acts – for example, the *Criminal Code Act 1995* – contain chapters.

Always use an initial capital for a specific reference to a 'Chapter', 'Part', 'Division' or 'Subdivision'.

Table 3: The units of an Act

Long form	Example	Shortened form	Example
Part	The Auditor-General's main functions and powers are defined in Part 4 of the Act.	Pt	... the <i>Auditor-General Act 1997</i> (Cth), Pts 4 and 6.
Division	... under Division 2 of Part 9 of the <i>Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act 2002</i> .	Div	... the LEPR, Div 2, Pt 9.
Subdivision	... under Subdivision 20-A of the <i>Commonwealth Tax Agent Services Act 2009</i> (TASA).	Subdiv	... the TASA, Subdiv 20-A.
section	Section 476B of the <i>Migration Act 1958</i> (Cth) provides ...	s	... the <i>Copyright Act 1968</i> , s 4.
subsection	Subsection 7(7) of the <i>Remuneration Tribunal Act 1973</i> .	subs	The <i>Remuneration Tribunal Act 1973</i> , subs 7(7) requires ...
subsections	Subsections 6 and 6A require the Tribunal to ...	subss	... to the Chief Minister of the ACT (subss 6, 6A).
paragraph	... is described in paragraph 21(3)(a).	para	... the offences as defined (para 11.2A(1)).
paragraphs	Paragraphs 17(1)(a)–(c) outline ...	paras	... produce documents when required (paras 17(1)(a)–(c)).
subparagraph	Subparagraph 2A (a)(iv) allows ...	subpara	... the <i>Crimes Act 1914</i> , subpara 2A(a)(iv).
subparagraphs	Under subparagraphs 8ZD(2)(b)(i)–(ii) ...	subparas	... the <i>Taxation Administration Act 1953</i> , subparas 8ZD(2)(b)(i)–(ii).

Citing units below section level

In content that discusses the operation and effect of certain subsections, paragraphs and subparagraphs citing at the smallest unit level may be appropriate. In a general discussion about the provisions of an Act citing at section level reduces complexity.

Be guided by the type of content you're writing, and its purpose and audience.

These citations specify the smallest unit of text:

- section 113V
- subsection 113V(4)
- paragraph 113V(4)(a)
- subparagraph 113V(4)(a)(ii).

For guidance see the digital Style Manual:

[Titles of Acts from other countries are in roman type](#)
[Reference to Australia’s Constitution needs capitalisation only](#)

Schedules

Refer to schedules that appear at the end of legislation using style conventions. Follow the drafting rules for amending and non-amending schedules so people can find the source information.

Schedules are components of legislation

Schedules are components (not units) of bills, Acts and some instruments. They appear at the end of legislation. Schedules are either amending or non-amending.

Amending schedules are more common. There are drafting rules about their use and the order in which each schedule appears.

Most amending schedules list amendments to other Acts, bills and instruments that will take effect when the legislation commences. Some contain other provisions such as savings and transitional arrangements.

Non-amending schedules have many different purposes. Units of non-amending schedules are named differently depending on the purpose. Non-amending schedules sometimes include text that could be contained in the body of the legislation as a section. In this case, the basic unit is a clause. Cite at schedule level, not the basic unit level, for most content.

Style for schedule titles is an initial capital

Use capital ‘S’ for long and shortened forms of named schedules.

Always capitalise ‘Schedule’ or ‘Schedules’ when you write the title of schedules or refer to particular schedules.

The shortened form is ‘Sch’ for singular and plural.

The basic unit of an amending schedule is an item

For most texts, you don't need to identify the units of different types of schedules or to decide how units should be cited. It is enough to cite at schedule level.

Amending schedules are divided into parts, then into divisions. Both are given arabic numerals – for example, Part 1 Division 3. Divisions contain items divided into subitems, which are given numbers in parentheses – (1), (2) and so on.

There is no shortened form for 'item' or 'subitem'.

Delegated legislation

Follow the correct style to cite delegated legislation made under the authority of an Act. This will help people find the source material.

Delegated legislation comes in many forms

Delegated legislation is made under the authority of an Act, not by the Act directly. For example, parliament may delegate this authority to a minister, statutory bodies or office holders.

Regulations are the most common type of delegated legislation. There are many others, including:

- determinations
- ordinances
- proclamations
- orders
- rules
- by-laws
- standards
- principles.

Some jurisdictions refer to delegated legislation as 'subordinate legislation', 'subsidiary legislation' or 'statutory rules'.

Some, but not all, types of delegated legislation are [legislative instruments](#). 'Legislative instrument' is defined in section 8 of the [Legislation Act 2003](#). All legislative instruments are registered on the [Legislation Register](#). Regulations are legislative instruments.

The Legislation Register also contains [notifiable instruments](#). These are not legislative, but are notices about legal matters of interest to the public. An example is the Order to Call Out the Australian Defence Force Reserves [No. 2], made during Australia's bushfire crisis in 2020.

Style for regulations titles is roman type, title case

Use title case (maximal capitalisation) and roman type for the titles of regulations.

Always capitalise ‘Regulations’ or ‘Regulation’ when you write the title of regulations and refer to particular regulations.

The basic unit of regulations is a regulation (reg)

Regulations are compilations made up of individual regulations. Each regulation might be divided into subregulations.

Use lower case when citing an individual regulation or subregulation, unless they begin a sentence.

Some titles are singular so check to make sure you write the title correctly. A singular regulation still contains regulations and subregulations.

Cite the title exactly without altering the spelling. The year forms part of the title. There is no comma between title and year.

Freedom of Information (Charges) Regulations 2019

Freedom of Information (Prescribed Authorities, Principal Officers and Annual Report) Regulations 2017

Healthcare Identifiers Regulations 2010

My Health Records Regulation 2012

Privacy Regulation 2013

The shortened forms of regulations and subregulations are:

- reg
- regs
- subreg
- subregs.

Other delegated legislation follows title case, no italics

Style for all other titles of delegated legislation is the same as for regulations.

Use roman type and title case for citations that give the full title.

Use an initial capital for a reference to a specific instrument. Use lower case for generic references.

Determinations

Use the long form ‘Determination’ for in-text citations and notes.

Remuneration Tribunal (Members of Parliament) Determination No. 2 2019, Part 6
Financial Management Determination 2019 (Tas)

Use a capital 'D' when you refer to a particular determination or to determinations.

Use a lower case 'd' when you write about generic determinations.

Orders

Use the long forms 'Order' and 'Orders' for in-text citations and notes.

Marine Order 44 (Safe Containers) 2019

Use a capital 'O' when you refer to a particular order or to orders.

Use a lower case 'o' when you write about generic orders.

Ordinances

Use the long forms 'Ordinance' and 'Ordinances' for in-text citations and notes.

Social Welfare Ordinance 1964 (NT)

Use a capital 'O' when you refer to a particular ordinance.

Use a lower case 'o' when you write about generic ordinances.

Ordinances became known as Acts after the Northern Territory (in 1978) and the Australian Capital Territory (in 1988) attained self-government.

Rules

A rule is made by judges or legislation setting out how a court will conduct its proceedings.

Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Rules

Competition and Consumer (Consumer Data Right) Rules 2020

My Health Records Rule 2016

National Health (Privacy) Rules 2018

Privacy (Credit Related Research) Rule 2014

Privacy (Persons Reported as Missing) Rule 2014

Privacy (Tax File Number) Rule 2015

Use a capital 'R' when you refer to a particular rule or rules.

Use a lower case ‘r’ when you write about generic rules.

Units for rules are ‘rules’ and ‘subrules’.

Use lower case for their shortened forms:

- r (rule)
- subr (subrule)
- rr (rules)
- subrr (subrules).

Cases and legal authorities

Cite cases, rulings and determinations using the correct style. Accuracy helps people find the source material. Specify the law report or online legal authority that hosts the relevant judgment or decision.

Style for case names is title case, not always italics

A case is a matter to be settled at law. It is also a proceeding in a court of law. Legal authorities are published sources of legal reasoning, doctrine and rulings made by courts and similar bodies.

The people or organisations named in the case are known as ‘parties’. Capitalise the names of the parties but use a lower case ‘v’ between the party names. There is no full stop after ‘v’.

Case names have this basic form: *Party v Party*.

Write the name of the case in italics. This rule is for case names that are mentioned briefly in general text.

Use roman type for cases in reference lists and other long lists. Blocks of italics are difficult to read.

Always write the names as they appear in your source.

The abbreviated title is in italics

Cases are often known by an abbreviated title. On first mention of the case name, follow it with the abbreviated title in parentheses. Write this title in italics and use title case. You can then use the abbreviated title throughout the content. Do not capitalise ‘the case’ or ‘this case’.

... the important case in the High Court, *Commonwealth v Tasmania (Tasmanian Dam Case)*.
The case saw the Commonwealth ...

For guidance see the digital Style Manual:

The full citation gives users detail they might need

Decisions are either reported or unreported

Civil and criminal case titles have different elements

Subsequent citations in notes use the first party

Pinpoint citations use 'at' for page and paragraph numbers

Decisions can differ between judges or magistrates

Titles for Commonwealth tribunal decisions are in italics

Titles for Tax Commissioner rulings have unique elements

Treaties

Treaties are made under international law. Follow the correct style to help people to access titles, series information and detailed citations.

For guidance see the digital Style Manual:

Treaty citations need the correct title and series information

Style for treaty titles is roman type, title case

Detailed citations for treaties have many elements

Authoritative reports

Case citations rely on authorised and unauthorised law report series. Use the correct abbreviations for Australian law report series.

For guidance see the digital Style Manual:

Cite an authorised law report if one is available

Use common abbreviations for authorised reports

Use standard abbreviations for unauthorised reports

Titles, honours, forms of address

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

Include the appropriate rank, qualification, post-nominal, honours and form of address.

Awards and honours

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

See the Department of Defence website [The Order of Wearing Australian Honours and Awards - List](#)

Use post-nominals in the correct order

There is an order in which to write the post-nominals. The rule is to write the highest honour first. The order is:

- post-nominals for honours and awards
- Queen's Counsel (QC) or Senior Counsel (SC) or Justice of the Peace (JP)
- university degrees and diplomas
- membership of professional associations
- membership of parliament.

Don't use:

- full stops or spaces within post-nominals
- commas before or between post-nominals.

Judiciary

Use the correct titles to refer to members of the judiciary. A full stop is no longer required when using 'The Hon' for judges and government officials.

Instructions for addressing judges and registrars are at:

- High Court – [How do I address a High Court judge?](#) (PDF 102KB)
- Federal Court – [How to address \[Federal Court\] judges & judicial registrars.](#)

See the digital Style Manual: [Judiciary](#)

Use the correct form to refer to judges and magistrates

Refer to judges of the following courts as ‘Justice’ and use the title ‘The Honourable’:

- High Court
- Federal Court
- Family Court of Australia
- supreme courts in the states and territories.

Judges of these courts retain the title ‘The Honourable’ for life.

Use the titles ‘Your Honour’, ‘His Honour’ or ‘Her Honour’ for judges of:

- district courts
- county courts.
- High Court and Federal Court

Members of Australian parliaments and councils

Refer to members of Australian parliaments and councils in the correct style.
See Parliament of Australia website instructions – [How to address Senators and Members](#)

Capitalise titles for current senators and members of the Australian Parliament

Write these titles as follows:

- the Prime Minister
- the President of the Senate
- the Speaker of the House of Representatives
- ministers (Senate)
- ministers (House of Representatives)
- assistant ministers (Senate)
- assistant ministers (House of Representatives)
- senators
- members (House of Representatives).

People elected to the upper house take the title ‘Senator’ before their given name.

Members of the House of Representatives take the initialism ‘MP’ after their name. Write it after any other post-nominals. Don’t use commas before or between post-nominals.

Address certain office holders of the Australian Parliament as ‘Honourable’

Use the title ‘Honourable’ for ministers (including the prime minister) and parliamentary secretaries in the Australian Parliament. The title is given to these office holders because they are members of the [Federal Executive Council](#). They retain the title for life.

The abbreviation for ‘Honourable’ is ‘Hon’ without a full stop.

Use the title ‘Senator’ before ‘the Honourable’ if the minister or parliamentary secretary is a member of the Senate. The presiding officers and former office holders of state parliaments

The President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives (the presiding officers) use the title ‘Honourable’.

‘Honourable’ is also given to members of the Australian Parliament who are:

- former members of state ministries
- former presiding officers of state parliaments.

Senator the Hon Scott Ryan, President of the Senate

The Hon Tony Smith MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives

Senator the Hon Kristina Keneally [Former premier of NSW]

Address the Attorney-General and Ministers correctly

In formal emails and letters to a minister:

- open with ‘Dear Attorney’ when writing to the Attorney-General
- ‘Dear Minister’ when writing to the Minister for Health and Aged Care.
- conclude with ‘Yours sincerely’.

You should not use a comma after either the salutation or the sign-off.

For guidance see the digital Style Manual:

[Use the appropriate form for members of state and territory parliaments](#)
[Address mayors and members of local governments with the correct title](#)

Appendices

Appendix A: Plain language word choices

Table A1: Words to avoid and plain language alternatives

Don't write this	Try this instead
a large number	many
advantageous	helpful
alleviate	ease, reduce
at present, at the present time, at this point in time	now
cease	stop, end, finish
constitute	is, forms, makes up
due to the fact that	due to, since, because
equitable	fair, equal, balanced
exhibit	show
for the purpose of	to
give consideration to	consider
henceforth	from now on, from today
hitherto	until now
in an effort to	to
in conjunction with	with
in regard to, in relation to	about
not later than	by
on numerous occasions	often
pertaining to	about

retain	keep
subsequent to	after
the majority of	most
thereafter	afterwards
until such time as	until, when
utilise	use
with a view to	to, so that
without further delay	now, immediately

Appendix B: Abbreviations

OAIC standard abbreviations

ACAPS	Australian Community Attitudes to Privacy Survey
APP	Australian Privacy Principles
APPA	Asia Pacific Privacy Authorities
CBPR	Cross Border Privacy Rules
CDR	Consumer Data Right
CR	Credit Reporting
DPI	Digital Platforms Inquiry
EDR	External Dispute Resolution
EM	Explanatory Memorandum
FCA	Federal Circuit Court
FOI	Freedom of Information
FOI Act	<i>Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth)</i>
IC review	Information Commissioner review
ICON	Information Contact Officer Network
IoT	Internet of Things
IP	Internet Protocol
IPPs	Information Privacy Principles
IPS	Information publication scheme
MAC	Media Access Control
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDB scheme	Notifiable Data Breaches scheme
NPPs	National Privacy Principles
OAIC	Office of the Australian Information Commissioner
PAA	Privacy Authorities Australia
PAW	Privacy Awareness Week
PCO	privacy contact officer
PI	personal information, as under the Privacy Act

PIA	privacy impact assessment
PID	Personal Information Digest
also PID	public interest disclosure (aka whistleblowing)
RFQ	request for quotation
RFT	request for tender
TFN	tax file number

Other common abbreviations

Government agencies

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
ACMA	Australian Communications and Media Authority
ADHA	Australian Digital Health Agency
AFSA	Australian Financial Security Authority
AGIMO	Australian Government Information Management Office
AGS	Australian Government Solicitor
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
ALRC	Australian Law Reform Commission
ASIC	Australian Securities and Investment Commission
ATO	Australian Taxation Office
CAG	Council of Attorneys-General
DVA	Department of Veterans' Affairs
IAC	Information Advisory Committee

Credit reporting

ACL	Australian Consumer Law
CIF	Credit information file
D&B	Dun and Bradstreet
TCS	Tasmanian Collection Service

Complaint bodies and tribunals

AAT	Administrative Appeals Tribunal
AFCA	Australian Financial Complaints Authority
FWO	Fair Work Ombudsman
SCT	Superannuation Complaints Tribunal
TIO	Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman

Industry associations

ABA	Australian Bankers Association
ACCI	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ADMA	Australian Direct Marketing Association
Cuscal	Credit Union Services Corporation (Australia) Ltd
DIGI	Digital Industry Group Inc

International organisations

APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
EDPB	European Data Protection Board
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICO UK	Information Commissioner's Office, UK
IGIS	Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security
ISO	International Standards Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UKAS	United Kingdom Accreditation Service

Appendix C: OAIC templates

Microsoft Word templates

The OAIC has a range of Microsoft Word templates for documents such as memos, executive briefs, agendas and minutes.

You can find our templates by clicking on the 'New' tab on the left-hand panel when you open Word and selecting 'Shared' files.

Some key features to help you put your document together include the OAIC ribbon elements and styles, which are explained in the body of the template document.

Generic templates

The 'Long document template' is designed for documents that use up to 6 levels of headings. Headings 3, 4, 5 and 6 should be used in proper hierarchy throughout the document. Heading 1 is always the main title of the document.

The 'Short document template' allows for 2 heading levels.

In both the long and short document templates, you can pick different Cover pages based on your publication type, such as Assessment or Report, Consultation, Guide or Submission. As well as simplifying document creation for you, this ensures we have a consistent visual brand identity for our agency.

You may wish to read our Brand Guidelines: [D2020/010770](#)

Custom templates

There are custom templates for legal decisions:

- FOI Reasons for Decision template
- Decision – vexatious applicant declaration template
- Privacy Determination and Reasons template.

Master slide deck

The master slide deck contains content we commonly share in external presentations and helps to ensure the OAIC's external messaging and tone are consistent.

The master slide deck is intended to be used as a starting point for presentations. The content may need to be adjusted to best suit different presentation topics and audiences. All presentations must be approved before delivery.

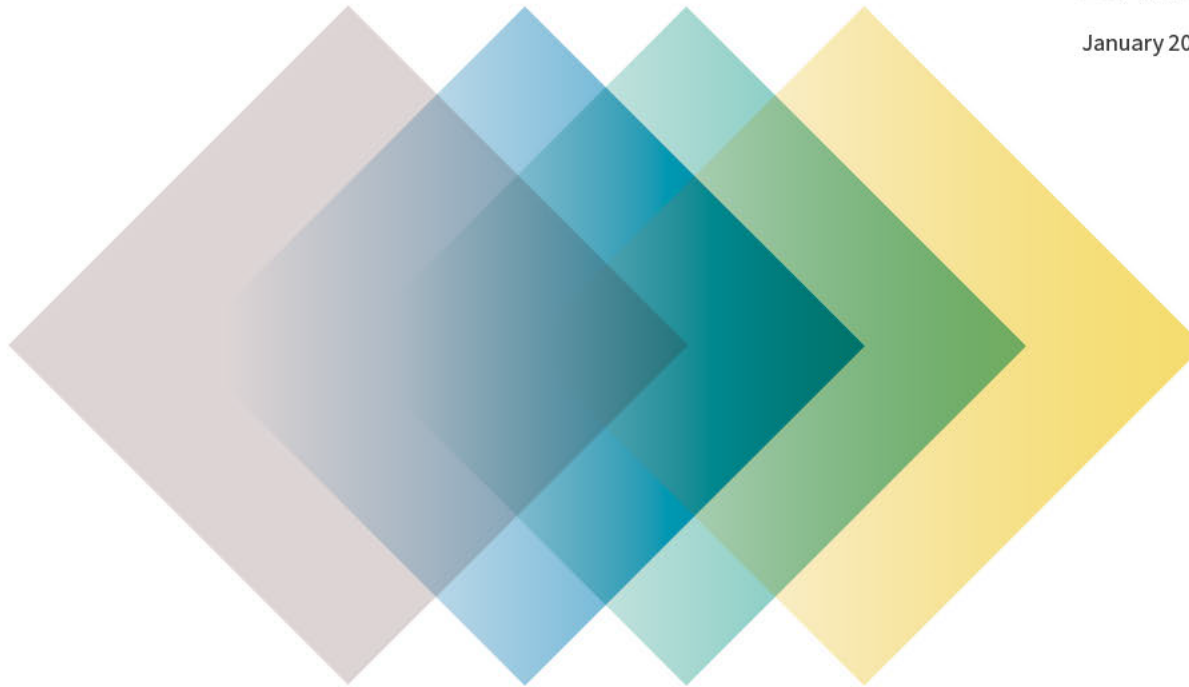
See the Master slide deck: [D2021/002622](#)



Australian Government
**Office of the Australian
Information Commissioner**

OAIC Brand Guidelines

January 2021



OAIC

Contents

This document outlines the principles and elements that form the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) brand

Contents	2	Our typeface: Secondary	14
Introduction	3	Our image library: Best practice	15
Our Logomark	4	Our image library: Conceptual Imagery	16
Our Logomark: Things to avoid	5	Visual language: Photo treatment	17
Our crest: Strip	6	Our image library: Icons	18
Our crest: Stacked	7	Our video: Visual language and branding	19
Our crest: Inline	8	Our video: Other on screen elements	20
Our crest: Breathing space	9	Our video: Other onscreen elements	21
Our crest: Things to avoid	10	Our video: Best practice	22
Our colours	11	Our collateral: Examples of how our brand should look	23
Our colours: Visual language	12	Our collateral: Examples of how our brand should look	24
Our typeface: Primary	13		

Introduction

Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

This document outlines the guidelines, principles and elements for the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) corporate identity. It includes information about using our logos, colours, brand and graphic elements, typefaces and photography as well as showcasing how they apply to a suite of products.

Correctly and consistently applying these elements will bring visual unity to our communication products.

Compliance

Use of the brand guidelines is mandatory for all OAIC communication materials. This includes all products that are used to deliver the agency's messages— including publications, banners, website material, social media posts, stationery and more.

Support

All public-facing material must be discussed with Strategic Communications in the first instance. For more information and support in applying these guidelines, please contact corporate@oaic.gov.au.

Our Logomark

Our logomark is the visual cornerstone of our brand. It expresses our identity and ensures instant brand recognition. To function correctly as a brand identifier the logomark relies on consistent and correct application. Only official versions of the logomark should be used. Please ensure it is used consistently across all materials.

Details of the approved logomark and its use can be obtained by contacting OAIC's Strategic Communications team via corporate@oaic.gov.au

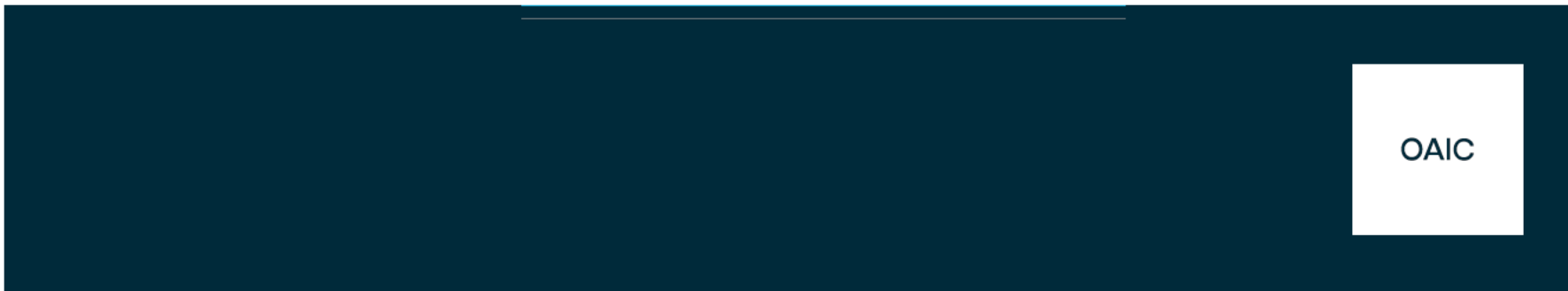
EPS, PNG and JPG formats of the OAIC logomark are contained within the logoset.

Dark



20mm Min

Reversed



Our Logomark: Things to avoid

Never rotate or skew it.

Never rotate, skew, squash or alter our logomark in any way. Only use logos supplied in the official logoset.



Never embellish it.

Do not add virtual embellishments like embossment, drop-shadows etc. to our logomark. Only use logos supplied in the official logoset.



Never change any part or proportion of the logomark.

Do not change colours from the original. Only use logos supplied in the official logoset. If any elements of the signature should increase or decrease, all other elements should change proportionately.



Our crest: Strip



EPS, PNG and JPG formats of the OAIC crest are contained within the logoset.

Dark



Australian Government

Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

Reversed



Australian Government

Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

Our crest: Stacked



EPS, PNG and JPG formats of the OAIC crest are contained within the logoset.

Dark



Reversed



Our crest: Inline

EPS, PNG and JPG formats of the OAIC crest are contained within the logaset.

Dark



Australian Government
**Office of the Australian
Information Commissioner**

Reversed



Australian Government
**Office of the Australian
Information Commissioner**

Our crest: Breathing space



It is important not to crowd the crest. Allowing ample space around it ensures that other graphic elements don't interfere. As a basic rule, a square space the height of the crest should be given on all sides of the OAIC crest. Avoid using the crest at less than 20mm wide.

Our crest: Things to avoid

Avoid any instances which causes the OAIC crest to become altered or modified in anyway. The following are some examples of situations to avoid.

Avoid using the crest on an image or busy background

The crest should only be used on approved background colour in either its light or dark version.



Never rotate or skew it.

Never rotate, skew, squash or alter our crest in any way. Only use logos supplied in the official logonet.



Never embellish it.

Do not add virtual embellishments like embossment, drop-shadows etc. to our crest. Only use logos supplied in the official logonet.

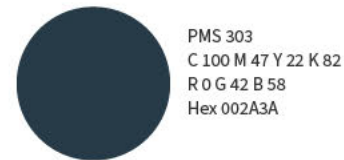


Our colours

An engaging colour palette that strikes a balance between credibility and innovation has been selected. Consistent use and reproduction of our colours will ensure brand recognition.

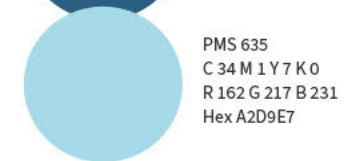
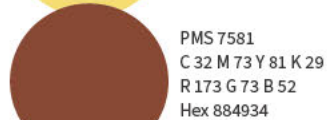
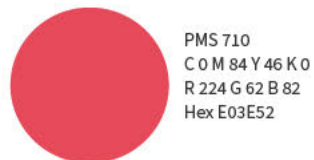
Primary colour

Dark Blue forms the base of all OAIC material. Used in conjunction with the supporting colours it provides a flexible and unique system. Discretion is to be used to ensure that a colour system is legible and compliant across all media.



Secondary colours

The secondary colours have been carefully selected to complement and support our primary dark blue. To adhere to accessibility requirements, some colours are to be used for a specific purpose.

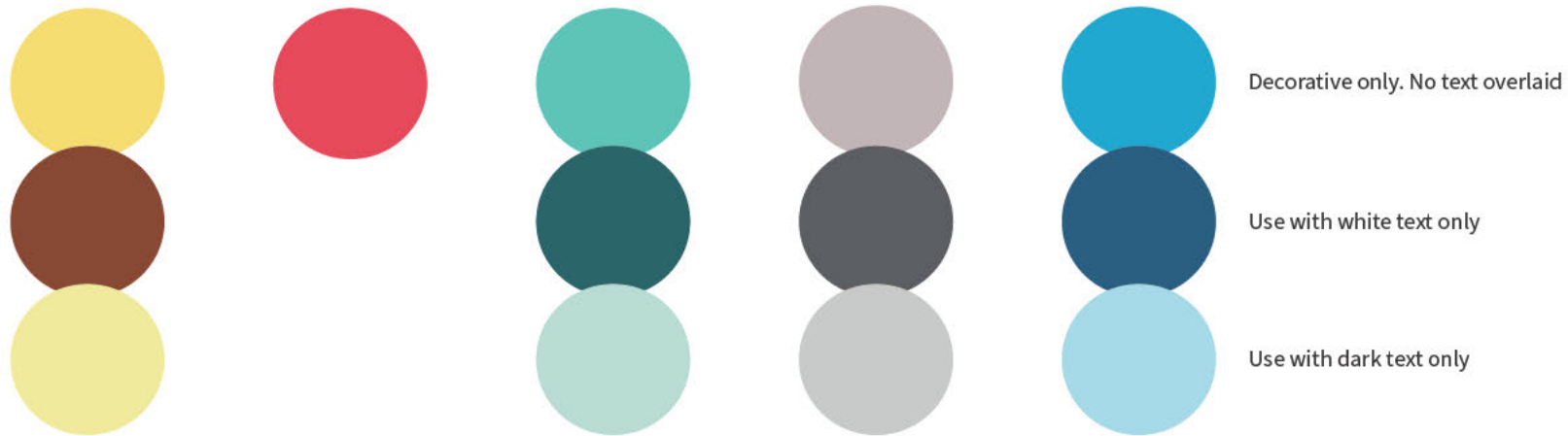


Our colours: Visual language

The readability of the text is influenced by its colour against the background. To ensure clarity, a few combinations have been established for use in the brand identity.

Secondary colours, their use and accessibility compliance (WCAG AAA)

Decorative colours are to be used without text overlay - The other secondary colours in the palette are divided into use of dark or white text. Dark text can be the primary brand colour (dark blue) or black.



Our typeface: Primary

Source Sans Pro is our primary font, but use Arial where Source Sans Pro is not available. Source Sans Pro is to be applied to every professionally designed, outgoing communication document. Please contact the communications team to request access to the font family.

Source Sans Pro Light

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
 abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
 abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
 1234567890!@#\$%&*!?

Source Sans Pro SemiBold

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890!@#\$%&*!?

Source Sans Pro Regular

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
 abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
 abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
 1234567890!@#\$%&*!?

Source Sans Pro Bold

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890!@#\$%&*!?

Our typeface: Secondary

Arial is to be used when access to Source Sans Pro is not available (e.g. when producing documents where the typeface integrity can not be guaranteed).

Arial Regular

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

1234567890!@#%&*!?

Arial Bold

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

1234567890!@#%&*!?

Our image library: Best practice

Our imagery aims to represent the professional, yet friendly brand image. The photographs should reflect the authentic, down-to-earth human aspect of our target audience.

For access to the OAIC image library, or advice on image selection contact corporate@oaic.gov.au



Our image library: Conceptual Imagery

Often, a more conceptual image is required to reflect the abstract symbolism of data, technology or business. In these situations we have appropriate approved images in our library.

For access to the OAIC image library, or advice on image selection contact corporate@oaic.gov.au

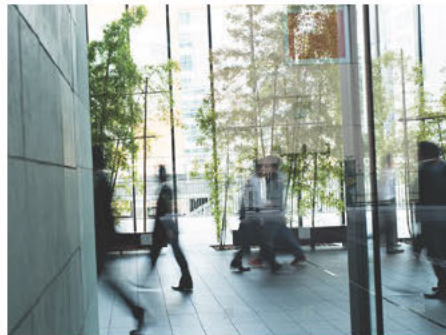


Visual language: Photo treatment

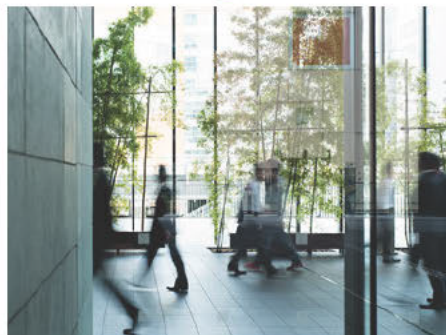
The composition and visual effect of an image can strengthen or dilute the message. Here are some examples and hints of how an image can be adjusted and enhanced.



Make adjustments to brightness and contrast where necessary



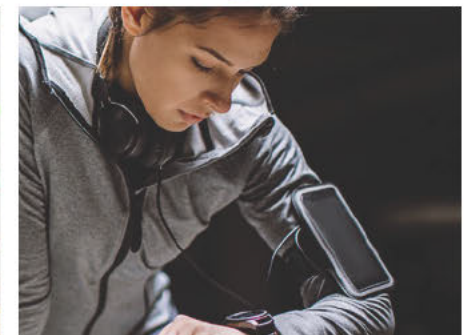
Make adjustments to perspectives and horizon levels where necessary



Try using rule of thirds to create a more interesting and open composition



Try cropping in close on an image to add some impact to the subject



Our image library: Icons

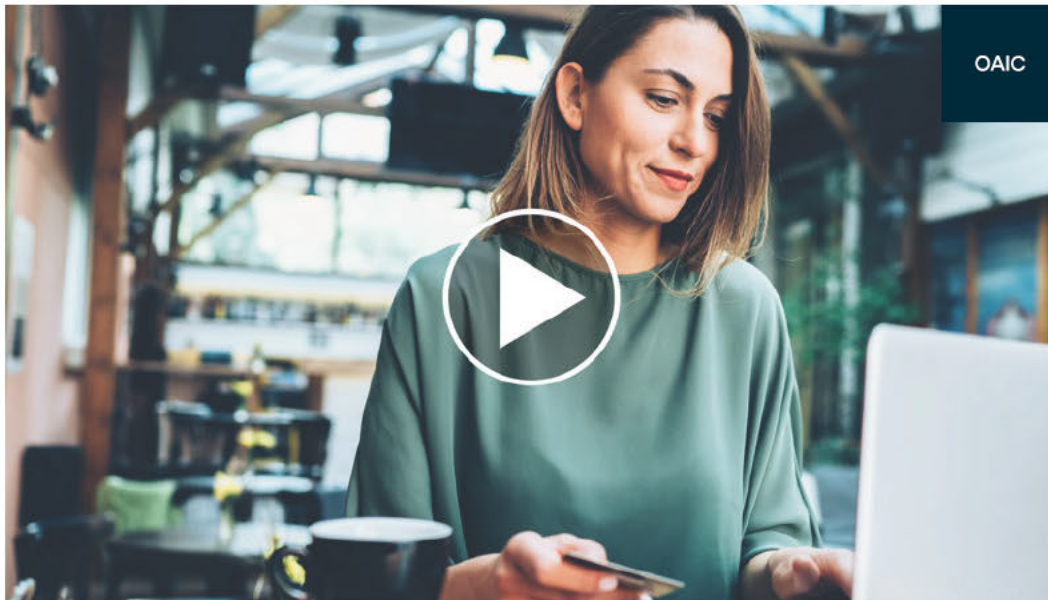
Icons are a visual representations of specific objects. They are simplified drawings of actual things that can be used as a shorthand for a longer description. We have developed a suite of icons for use within the OAIC's communications.

The examples below are a small section of the suite we have available.



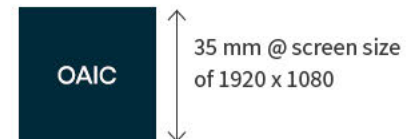
Our video: Visual language and branding

The aspect ratio of our video content is 16:9. The width should always be the full width of the page or column that the video sits in. Colour grading should be bright and natural.



Branding bug

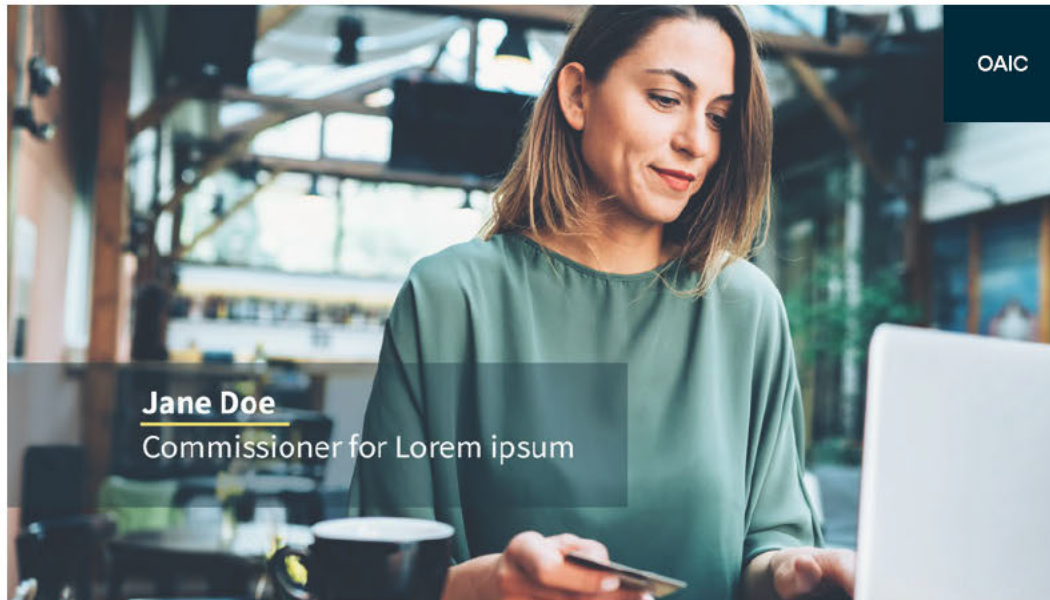
A bug is a graphical element that usually displays in or around a given corner of the viewable area of the video for the entirety of the program. Its position puts the bug away from the main focus of the video and it's usually styled so that it doesn't draw too much attention to itself. The bug should sit in the top right corner of all video content and contain the standard OAIC square logo.



Our video: Other on-screen elements

Other on-screen elements that may be necessary include titles, supers, lower thirds, closed captions, end-frames and calls to action.

Adequate space is always left at the bottom of screen for closed captioning. All videos produced by the OAIC must be captioned for the hearing impaired. Our preferred approach to captioning for social media and other videos is to apply the caption within the video at the time of editing.



Lower thirds and overlays

The lower third title graphic, better known as just the lower third, is an area of the screen that is commonly used to display contextual information, such as a person's name, a location or some other pertinent information.

Overlay: R 0 G 42 B 58 @ 70% opacity

Text: white Source sans pro Bold (name) and regular (description) Divider: R 243 G 221 B 109

Our video: Other onscreen elements

Titles and introduction cards on OAIC videos should only be used when absolutely necessary. It is at the discretion of the editor and/or designer, as a rule of thumb the video must be longer than 60 seconds to require a title. The typeface for titles should be Source Sans Pro Bold and Regular and animation limited to simple dissolve.

End-frames are essential on all video content developed by the OAIC and should contain the OAIC crest and a strong call to action.



A typical endframe example

Background colour: R 0 G 42 B 58
Message: Brought to you by the OAIC
Crest: stacked version - centered on frame
Call to Action: website URL

Our video: Best practice

There are a number of other important factors to consider when developing video content for the OAIC. Along with guidelines previously discussed, the items below will help improve the quality of your videos.

Should you have additional questions, please contact the Strategic Communications team for guidance.

Talent and attire

- On-camera talent acts as a direct representation of your organisation. Keeping consistency with your talent can make your videos feel branded and cohesive
- Discuss ahead of time whether your spokesperson should be wearing a business logo shirt or if a suit and tie is more appropriate. Each gives off a very different tone, making that a very important consideration.

Backgrounds

- Consider the location of where the footage will be shot and what's in the background
- Considerations should be made around the lighting, colour and tone of where you are filming
- Consider the overall tone and feel of your video to ensure what you're seeing is matching what you're hearing.

Due diligence

- Prior to shooting your videos, ensure you have permission from each person you'll be capturing on camera, this includes people who may appear in b-roll footage
- If you are unsure about best practice, consult with the Strategic Communications team to discuss requirements for before, during and after filming.

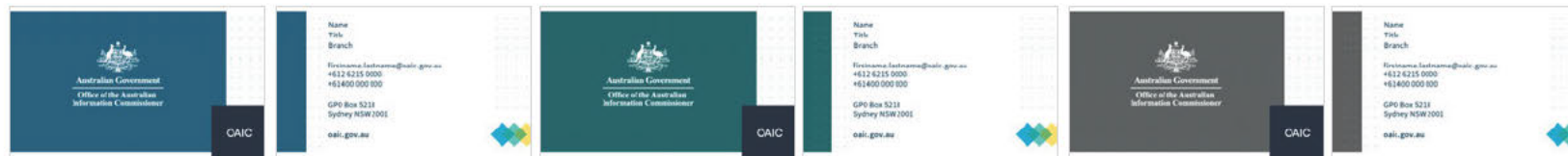
Our collateral: Examples of how our brand should look

The following collateral showcases how our brand guidelines work together in forming a cohesive identity.

Word templates



Business cards



Our collateral: Examples of how our brand should look

The following collateral showcases how our brand guidelines work together in forming a cohesive identity.

PowerPoint slides

Australian Government
Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

OAIC master slide deck

Compiled by
Strategic Communications

@OAICgov OAIC

What we do – Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

- An independent statutory body established in 2010
- We promote and uphold privacy and information access rights and have regulatory oversight across the Australian Government and every sector of the economy
- Our vision is to increase public trust and confidence in the protection of personal information and access to government-held information

@OAICgov OAIC

Proactive disclosure

Pro disclosure by “default”
What additional information can be provided proactively?
Can personal information be made available through an administrative access scheme?

@OAICgov OAIC

History of the Privacy Act

- 1988: The Privacy Act 1988 commences 1 January 1989
- 1990: Credit reporting incorporated into the Privacy Act
- 2000: Amendments to the Privacy Act establish the National Privacy Principles
- 2008: ALIC releases the 'Fox Four Information' report which reviews the Privacy Act
- 2012: Reforms to the Privacy Act introduce the Australian Privacy Principles
- 2014: Australian Privacy Principles commence
- 2018: Notifiable Data Breaches (NDB) Scheme begins
- 2019: ACCC's Digital Platforms Inquiry report recommends privacy reforms to strengthen online privacy protections

The Privacy Act has been amended almost 90 times since it commenced in January 1989

@OAICgov OAIC

Pull-up banner

Australian Government
Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

Promoting and upholding
privacy and information
access rights

oaic.gov.au
@OAICgov

OAIC



Australian Government
**Office of the Australian
Information Commissioner**

Thank you

OAIC

For all brand requests, contact
corporate@oaic.gov.au

OAIC