

Web writing and style guide

Queensland Government

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Version	17
Version date	18/03/2022



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Web writing guide

1 How to use this guide

People visit websites to find information or complete a task. They want pages that are easy to navigate, and content that is easy to read and understand.

This guide will help Queensland Government web authors write clear and consistent web content that meets the content needs of our customers. This is important because it:

- will improve the accessibility and usability of our websites (required under the [Digital services policy](#))
- is a part of the government's obligations under the W3C [Web content accessibility guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#)
- improves [our customers' online experiences](#).

The writing techniques in this guide apply to all Queensland Government websites—corporate (departmental) websites, intranets, 'franchises' (www.qld.gov.au/) and campaign websites. No matter which website our customers visit, they should find the same writing style. A consistent 'voice' contributes to a consistent user experience.

As a web author, you should be writing content that is:

- customer-focused
- easy to understand (plain English)
- relevant and useful
- engaging and professional, but not bureaucratic
- impartial* (particularly for www.qld.gov.au websites).

*Don't obscure factual information with emotive political catchphrases. Trustworthy and customer-focused writing depends on providing information that is 'objective, independent, apolitical and impartial'. For more information see the [Public Sector Ethics Act 1994 \(Qld\)](#).

See the [Web style guide](#) for more information about web content style requirements.

2 Online reading behaviour

The first and most important step to becoming a good web writer is understanding online reading behaviour. As web writers, we need to understand how people read and navigate websites so we can prepare content accordingly.

2.1 Online vs print reading

Reading words on a page is different from reading words on a screen. As readers we approach these media differently because we don't expect to find the same type, quantity or layout of information in them. Consider the following:

- Screen reading is fast and superficial—it is based on **scanning**, more than reading. When we first encounter a web page, we won't read the text word by word. Instead, we take detours to evaluate information—scanning headings for keywords, glancing at images and tables, quickly checking links and bullet lists for relevancy (see F-shaped scanning below).
- We may scan as few as the first 2 words, or 11 characters, of a heading or link before deciding to read more or move on ([Nielsen 2009](#)).

- On the average web page, we only read 20–28% of the words ([Nielsen 2008](#)).
- Our ability to process information is less effective when we read online. We learn more, and retain this knowledge for longer, when we read printed text ([Wästlund 2007](#)).
- When we read online, different design and user interface elements compete with content for our attention (e.g. navigation components, images, buttons, pop-ups).
- Printed content has defined boundaries, providing readers with a clear mental map and easier orientation. Online text, with different links and informational journeys on offer, represents a ‘choose your own adventure’ ([Jabr 2013](#)).
- Reading online text can be more physically and mentally demanding than reading printed text ([Jabr 2013](#)).

2.2 F-shaped scanning

Web users tend to look at only some parts of a web page, and it’s helpful for us to know where they look.

Eye-tracking research (figure 1) shows that people scan web pages using an F-shaped pattern with 3 main characteristics:

- first horizontal eye movement
- second horizontal eye movement (but shorter than the first)
- vertical eye movement.

Within content areas, things that catch readers’ attention during this scanning process include:

- keywords in the first sentence of a paragraph
- keywords in the second sentence of a paragraph
- headings and subheadings
- bulleted and numbered lists
- link text
- bold text
- tables
- images.

F-shaped scanning shows that readers only view a minimum amount of information on a web page—just enough to work out if they will commit to more detailed reading, or not ([Nielsen 2006](#)).

By exploiting [structural elements](#) (such as those listed above), you can craft scannable web content that is easy for readers to use.



Figure 1. F-shaped scanning

'Heat map of Lady Gaga fan page' by K2 UX is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/).

3 Identify your audience

A key principle of [plain English](#) is to write for your readers. To develop customer-focused content, it is necessary to **identify your target audience, and their needs, before you start writing**.

Ideally, all Queensland Government web content should be informed by customer research and a content brief.

3.1 Customer research

Your agency may already have research you can use to learn more about your customers and their needs. Sources of customer research include:

- experts within your department
- client service staff (call centre, counter and online)
- web analytics and metrics (search terms, page views etc.)
- customer interviews, focus groups, surveys and feedback
- card sorting exercises
- usability studies.

3.1.1 Audience groups

A variety of different audience groups, making up a large cross-section of people, visit our websites. It is important to identify these groups and understand their needs. Different audience groups can be identified by demographics such as:

- age and gender
- social group (e.g. family with young children, seniors)
- occupation, interest or concern.

For each audience group also consider:

- education and/or reading level
- language abilities
- computer skills
- knowledge of the content
- known or likely attitudes about the topic.

3.1.2 Personas

With the information you've gathered about audience groups, you can now create personas—fictional, but realistic, descriptions of your target audience. Personas are used to identify the needs of 'real people'. Once you know your audience, it is easier to write to their abilities and expectations.

3.2 Content brief

You should prepare a [content brief \(DOCX, 826KB\)](#) before writing new web content or re-writing existing web content.

A content brief is a blueprint for writing. It includes an outline of your target audience and content goal. A content brief clearly explains **who** you are writing for and **why** you are writing.

For example, your content may have one or more of the following aims:

- explain how to complete a task (e.g. renew vehicle registration)
- educate and inform (e.g. comply with drink driving laws)
- motivate or raise awareness (e.g. promote a new grant)
- update or report (e.g. provide natural disaster alerts)
- request information (e.g. seek public consultation).

Knowing who you are writing for and why you are writing will help keep your message focused. Having a clear content brief will give you something to refer to whenever you are questioning an editorial decision, such as:

- what information to include and what to leave out
- how to arrange and structure your content
- when to link to other content

- which website will host the content, and where it will exist on that website.

Anytime you get stuck making an editorial decision, refer to your content brief.

Note: Basic HTML web content may not always be the best way to deliver your message. See Econsultancy's [periodic table of content marketing](#) (PNG, 322KB) for different ways to present information.

4 Structuring web content

Unlike many print publications, pages in a website and content within each web page can be read in any order. The ability of any web page, and the content within that web page, to stand alone is therefore important.

The following approach will ensure your content is well-structured and scannable.

4.1 Structuring a series of pages

- Limit each page to one main topic or concept. Within each page, you can break down this overall topic or concept into distinct sub-topics (a process called chunking).
- Use a descriptive title for each page.
- Keep pages short—ideally, each page should print on one or 2 A4 sheets. Refer to your content brief to keep your writing on message and remove any repeated or unnecessary information.
- Use hyperlinks to connect related material (refer to [Web style guide, section 8—Links—in-text, link lists and 'calls to action'](#)).
- Provide clear orientation where necessary—is there anything the reader should know in advance, or essential steps to follow up after?
- Ensure each page makes sense when read in isolation (i.e. the information on each page stands alone).

For example, see [Buying and owning a home](#), which provides information about home ownership. The overall topic is buying and owning a home, but this main topic is further broken down into individual web pages such as advice on buying a home, financial help and concessions, insurance etc.

4.2 Structuring within a page

- Use [descriptive headings and subheadings](#) to divide the page into paragraphs of related information ('chunks'). These break up the page visually and allow readers to quickly scan information.
- Put the [most important information first](#) or use some other organising principle that will make sense to your readers (e.g. steps in an application process).
- Use [short paragraphs and sentences](#) to expand on the ideas described by your headings and subheadings.
- Front-load your headings, introductory sentences and links (i.e. align keywords to the left to make your text scannable). There are only 4 places where you can guarantee front-loading of your keywords or links. That is, within the first few words of
 - a heading or subheading
 - the first sentence of a paragraph
 - a bullet in a bulleted list
 - content in the first column of a table.
- Use bulleted and numbered lists to highlight key points. Carefully select the content you use for lists. Using too many bullet points on a page will negate their visual and structural impact.

- Add hyperlinks to help users navigate to related content. Carefully select the links you use. Using too many links will negate their visual and structural impact (refer to [Web style guide, section 8—Links—in-text, link lists and 'calls to action'](#)).
- Use bold text (sparingly) to draw attention to important information.
- Use tables where appropriate—besides being an efficient use of space, a great deal of information can be placed in point form, and the layout is scannable.

For example, see [Common health issues](#), which provides information about common health issues associated with ageing. The overall topic is common health issues, but this main topic is broken down into distinct sub-topics such as 'heart attack' and 'cancer' (each of which supports the overall topic, but which also can stand alone).

4.3 The inverted pyramid

The inverted pyramid (figure 2) is a structural technique used in journalism for news articles, but it also applies to government web writing.

The idea is to place your most important information (who, what, where, when, why and how) at the top of the page. This way the conclusion or gist of the story is effectively presented in the opening paragraph. The supporting details, in diminishing importance, then follow.

In theory, you can remove these supporting details—starting from the bottom and all the way up to the opening paragraph if necessary—and still retain a basic story. This is a useful structure for both readers (who can skim, but still comprehend, news stories) and news editors (who are looking to cut the bottom sections off stories to fit within limited print space). So the inverted pyramid aligns with [F-shaped scanning](#) behaviour (i.e. because readers will focus on your first paragraph it makes sense to put important information there).

For example, see [Alcohol limits](#). The opening paragraphs provide a clear summary of the most essential information. If the page only had these 2 paragraphs it would still give readers enough information to understand the topic. It gets right to the point and uses good structural techniques (short sentences, useful link to more information, bullet points and bold text).

The information that follows these first 2 paragraphs is supporting information that provides more detail about the topic. It is important, but arguably not essential. It also uses good structural techniques (e.g. clear subheadings, bullet points and a table).

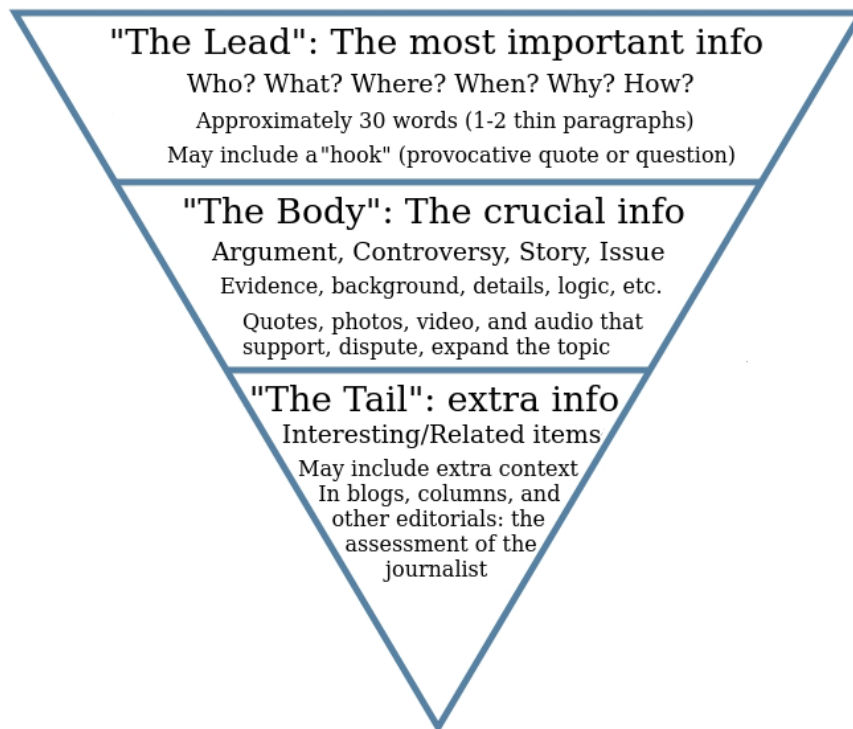


Figure 2. Inverted pyramid

'[Inverted pyramid in comprehensive form](#)' by Christopher Schwartz is licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

5 Plain English

Across the world, governments, corporations and academic institutions struggle with written language. Sentences are too long, words are too complex, and key messages are lost in confusing streams of bureaucratic jargon, technical language, buzzwords and acronyms.

The antidote for this style of writing is Plain English. **Plain English (or plain language) is language that is clear and to the point.** Plain English is not 'dumbed-down' English, but, rather, English where unnecessary complexity and wordiness are removed. It is concise, well-structured and allows readers to understand your message the first time they read it. This point is crucial. No one wants to labour over poor writing. It frustrates customers and reflects badly on our organisation.

Plain English makes the government sound less bureaucratic and more sympathetic to people's needs and concerns. It also saves time because it's quick and easy to understand and act on—not just for people with varying literacy levels, but for everyone.

By using language that is easy to read and understand, you will **help your audience focus on your message**. Consider the following example:



A strategic approach is necessary for facilitating operational improvements to service delivery outputs within regional communities.

Written in plain English it might say:



We must improve our service to regional communities.

The second statement is much clearer. It is simple, direct and uses a style that readers would have no problem understanding. Readers can easily grasp the message because the writer has made the reading process as simple as possible.

6 Simple words

One of the best ways to improve the readability of web content is to use simple words.

This doesn't necessarily mean choosing 'short' words instead of 'long' words. You could argue that using a short word rather than a long word may only slightly improve readability (e.g. 'ask' instead of 'enquire'). But using simple words is more about using common language—words that most people would use in everyday conversation (e.g. 'agree' instead of 'concur').

Avoid using archaic and overly formal words and expressions (e.g. notwithstanding, forthwith, heretofore, whomsoever). Use modern, simpler equivalents.

6.1 Why are simple words important?

The [2006 adult literacy and life skills survey](#) showed that almost half (46%) of Australians aged 15 to 74 lack the literacy skills needed to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work. The Queensland Government serves a large and diverse audience, so it's vital for us to use a simple vocabulary.

6.2 Related links

Check the Plain English Campaign's [A-Z list of alternative words](#).

7 Short sentences and paragraphs

[F-shaped scanning](#) shows that readers process web content in less detail than printed content. This behaviour aligns with the plain English principle of using short sentences and paragraphs to improve the readability of your content.

When it comes to web writing 'less is more'. Always think about ways to remove, rather than add, words. Strip your message down to its essentials!

Use the following guidelines for writing short, concise sentences that get to the point immediately:

- Write sentences that express one idea at a time. Long sentences that express multiple ideas, and which use complex grammatical structures and lots of punctuation, are more difficult for readers to process.
- Split long sentences into 2 or 3 short sentences.
- As a rule, aim for sentences of 15–20 words. But rather than counting each word, make each word count. Remove [redundancy](#).
- Be direct—use [active voice](#) and avoid using too many [nominalisations](#).
- Keep subjects and verbs close together.
- Do not duplicate information on other web pages. Use links.
- Aim for a maximum paragraph length of 5 lines.
- Use bullet points and tables to break up large blocks of text and highlight key points.
- Remove digressions and unimportant details. Refer to your content brief to keep your writing tight and 'on message'.

8 Personal pronouns

Using personal pronouns (e.g. 'you' and 'we') is a simple way to build rapport with your readers and make government language sound friendly and helpful.

8.1 'You' are the customer

We need to talk **to** our readers, not **about** them. Readers respond to 'you'. It shows that we understand their needs and makes it clear when they must take notice or complete an action.

Don't use impersonal words like 'the applicant' or 'the customer'.

8.2 'We' are the government

The terms 'we' and 'us' refer to the Queensland Government and any part of it. All agencies (and teams within them), collectively or singularly, are the Queensland Government.

Using 'we' and 'us' helps to personify the government (making us seem less like a bureaucracy) and creates the effect of a dialogue between us and our customers.

Using 'we' and 'us' also has the added benefit of efficiency. You won't have to spend time updating your website every time a department or agency name changes.

8.3 When to use agency or department names

Wherever possible, use 'we' when referring to a department or the government. **Only use an agency name when customers need the information.**

The only time you should use an agency name is when:

- the customer needs to know the name of an office to contact or visit
- in certain legal situations, such as disclaimers, the party claiming or disclaiming something must be named
- you're writing content for a corporate website or intranet (e.g. 'about us' or 'our policies' pages)
- trust of the information is demonstrably increased when an agency name is used (but research should support this)
- several agencies are mentioned. In this case refer to them all by name—providing there's a good reason why customer need to be told about the different agencies in the first place.

You can usually name the agency once, then use 'we' thereafter (within the same page).



The Queensland Government manages personal information in line with the *Information Privacy Act 2009*.

We will not give your personal information to third parties without your consent.

9 Active and passive voice

The rules of grammar tell us that 'voice' can be either active or passive. The rules of plain English tell us to use active voice as much as possible. But what do we mean by active and passive voice, and why should we choose one over the other?

9.1 Subjects and verbs

Basically, voice depends on the relationship between the **subject** and its **verb**.

To find the subject of any sentence, first look for the verb (or verb phrase). Then ask yourself: 'Who or what "verbs" or "is being verbed"?' The answer to that question is the subject. Basically, the subject of a sentence is what the sentence is about. The subject will almost always be a noun or pronoun (or a phrase that contains a noun or pronoun).

9.2 To verb, or to be verbed?

With active voice the subject of the sentence performs the action of the verb.



Judy [subject] wrote [verb] the report.

With passive voice the subject of the sentence receives the action of the verb.



The report [subject] was written [verb] by Judy.

So voice depends on whether the subject is the **doer** of the action (active) or the **receiver** of the action (passive). Both are grammatically correct sentences, so why should we prefer active voice over passive voice?

9.3 When to use active voice

Passive voice is the traditional style of government, legal and scientific writing. But active voice can be simpler. It often uses fewer words to say the same thing.

Importantly, active voice is also a more direct way of writing. Active sentences are always clear about the person or thing who is responsible for 'doing something' (i.e. the **agent**). Passive sentences do not always identify an agent.

For example, using the passive example from above you could remove the words 'by Judy' and still have a grammatically correct sentence.



The report was written.

The examples below show passive sentences where we have left out the agent who is responsible for 'doing something'.

Serious mistakes were made [by?]

Alternative solutions must be considered [by?]

An investigation must be conducted [by?] to find out who is responsible.

These laws will be reviewed [by?] by the end of the year.

While these sentences are grammatically correct, the words we are leaving out may be important. They complete a reader's understanding of 'who is doing what'.

In the examples above you can see how passive voice provides a way to conceal the agent responsible for an action. Be careful about using passive voice this way. Transparency is important. As government, we need to be accountable for our actions by clearly stating what we are doing and who is doing it.

It's easy to write in passive voice without even realising. Always check your writing and make conscious decisions about using passive voice.

9.4 When to use passive voice

While you should aim to make most of your writing active, passive voice may be appropriate in the following situations:

Situation	Example
When you don't know who the agent is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new high-speed rail will be built between Cairns and Brisbane. [A request for tender has not yet identified the contactor.] This new technology is still a few years away from being commercialised. [Again, we don't know who will do this.]
When you want to change the focus of a sentence by emphasising a process, rather than an agent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rate of hydrogen production was increased by 25%. (Passive voice is commonly used in scientific writing to describe processes rather than the people conducting them.) The 2015–16 budget has been released. (Arguably it is the release of the budget, rather than the department releasing it, that is more important.)
When you want to be tactful about designating blame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your application was misplaced. (John misplaced your application.)
When you want to place keywords on the left, to improve scannability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Photo ID must be shown. (Here we are using passive voice to front load the keywords 'photo ID'.)

10 Nominalisations

Nominalisations are nouns formed from verbs and other types of words. For example, 'application' is a nominalisation formed from the verb 'apply'.

You should avoid using nominalisations in your writing because they:

- are longer (have more letters) than verbs
- require extra words in their grammatical construction
- create a formal tone
- can involve abstract concepts
- often require a passive sentence structure, increasing your word count and engaging your reader less.

Apart from a longer piece of writing taking more time to read than a shorter piece, the nominalisations themselves (being longer words) will be more difficult to read than shorter words. This applies particularly to people with varying literacy levels, and those who speak English as a second language.

10.1 Use verbs, not nouns

When writing in plain English, verbs are a better alternative to nouns. Using verbs instead of nominalisations makes your writing simpler and more direct.

Compare the following:



We will be responsible for the implementation of the project.



We will implement the project.

10.2 Examples of nominalisations (by suffix)

Suffix	Examples	Root verbs
-ion	Application, completion, decision, education, explanation, implementation, introduction, investigation, nominalisation, provision	Apply, complete, decide, educate, explain, implement, introduce, investigate, nominalise, provide
-ment	Advancement, arrangement, lodgement, payment, replacement	Advance, arrange, lodge, pay, replace
-ing	Meeting, sighting [nouns]	Meet, see
-ness	Awareness, responsiveness	Be aware, respond
-ure	Failure, pressure	Fail, press
-age	Linkage, shrinkage, usage	Link, shrink, use
-ance	Maintenance, performance, sustenance	Maintain, perform, sustain
-al	Approval, removal, renewal	Approve, remove, renew
-ive	Alternative [noun]	Alternate
-ee	Trainee, mortgagee	Train, mortgage
-er	Runner, swimmer	Run, swim
-or	Lessor, mortgagor	Lease, mortgage

10.3 When to use nominalisations

At times, using nominalisations is necessary. Sometimes writing to avoid nominalisation can make the writing longer and more complicated. How else do you refer to a trainee—‘the person being trained’?

Use your own judgement to decide if nominalisation is appropriate. In general, though, use active verbs rather than nominalisations.

11 Redundancy

Good web editors understand the concept of ‘redundancy’ and know when to get rid of any words or phrases that are not essential to meaning. Redundancy can include:

- redundant words (using multiple words to express the same idea)
- redundant synonyms (using two or more words with the same meaning)




- weasel words (vague words, generalisations)
- false subjects ('there is' etc.).

Challenge every word you use. Effective web writing in government thrives on the 'less is more' principle, so look for any opportunity to shed excess words.

Note: As you can see from some of the examples in the table below, redundancy is closely related to the concept of [nominalisations](#). Using verbs instead of nouns will help to reduce your word count and make your writing more direct.

11.1 Redundant words

Instead of ...	Say ...
 at a later date	 later
 at this moment in time	 now
 collaborate together	 collaborate
 conducting an investigation	 investigate
 despite the fact that	 although
 follow after	 follow
 for a period of	 for
 in conjunction with	 with
 in connection with	 about
 in lieu of	 instead of
 in regard to	 about
 in the near future	 soon
 make an adjustment	 adjust
 on a daily basis	 daily
 on two separate occasions	 twice
 originally created	 created
 take action	 act

Instead of ...	Say ...
 take a look	 look
 take into consideration	 consider
 with regard to	 about

11.2 Redundant synonyms

Some of our most common phrases and expressions use redundant synonyms (i.e. words that mean the same thing). Never use 2 words when one will do. For example:

- [added] bonus
- aid [and abet]
- basic [fundamentals]
- [brief] summary
- close [proximity]
- each [and every]
- exact [same]
- fair [and equitable]
- first [and foremost].

11.3 Weasel words

‘Weasel’ words are words and phrases that writers use to make authoritative-sounding (but ultimately generalised) claims. They are deliberately vague and add no real value to your content. Remove them, or support your content with proper research.

Common weasel words include:

- actually
- basically
- probably
- quite
- really
- somewhat
- very.

Weasel phrases include ambiguous statements such as:







- the vast majority ...
- some studies show that ...
- in most cases ...
- in all likelihood ...

11.4 False subjects

False subjects are extra words at that can appear at the beginning of sentences, such as ‘there is’, ‘there are’, ‘it is’, ‘it was’ etc.

These words may appear harmless but they actually ‘displace’ the real subject of a sentence, wasting words in the process. False subjects can also contribute to [passive voice](#).

Removing false subjects from sentences is simple in some cases and will have no effect on your sentence apart from making it shorter. Other sentences may require more rewriting to make the true subject and verb appear first. Keep the clarity principle in mind. If rewriting your sentence doesn't make it clearer (or makes it less clear), then leave it alone.

 Conditions apply to this licence.	 There are conditions that apply to this licence.
 You need to provide ID at the counter.	 It is necessary to provide your ID at the counter.
 The committee decided to make another investigation.	 It was decided the committee would make another investigation.

12 Jargon

Jargon is language used and understood by a particular group of people. Many public and private organisations use their own jargon. Jargon might be highly technical, academic or scientific language. It might be 'legalese', 'corporatese' or 'govspeak'. Or it might have some other flavour.

Using jargon in your writing is not a problem if you are writing for a very specific audience who understands the lingo. But if you're writing for a general audience, you should avoid using jargon and look for more common and straightforward ways to express your ideas.

The words and expressions that make up government jargon are varied, but things to look out for include buzzwords, clichés, noun strings and technical language.

12.1 Buzzwords

Buzzwords are 'trendy' words and phrases that get repeated and reinforced in meetings, emails and other communications (both internal and external) to the point that they become corporate catchphrases.

Examples of buzzwords include words like 'holistic', 'granular' and 'seamless' and phrases like 'big data', 'future-proofing' and 'minimum viable product'.

By definition, buzzwords are fashionable for a period of time before new buzzwords replace them.

12.2 Clichés

Clichés are overused expressions—like buzzwords but longer-lasting. Clichés become clichés because they stand the test of time.

Examples of corporate clichés are 'put the cart before the horse', 'shift the goalposts', 'pick the low-hanging fruit' and 'think outside the box'.

Clichés and buzzwords are great tools for lazy writers. A well-worn word or saying exists for any occasion. The problem is that **clichés and buzzwords are vague substitutes for what you really mean.**

Many clichés are idioms, which have a **figurative** rather than a **literal** meaning (e.g. 'the devil is in the detail'). Using buzzwords and clichés hijacks the true meaning of words. This goes against plain

English principles of direct expression and simple language. It also excludes readers who speak English as a second language.

Take time to think about what you are writing. If you have a thorough understanding of your subject matter, you should be able to communicate your ideas without relying on trite, ambiguous expressions.

12.3 Noun strings

In government, jargon often comes in the form of ‘noun strings’, which are groups of nouns strung together.



The department’s **business capability initiative** included an overview of its **core service delivery framework** and its **disaster management communication matrix**.

Using nouns this way gives them the same function as adjectives and makes your text dense (or, in some cases, nonsensical). Readers may struggle to decipher such a rapid barrage of concepts, particularly when you string [nominalisations](#) together.

12.4 Technical language

Technical language includes technical, scientific, medical, legal and other language that requires some expertise in a particular field or profession to understand.

Using technical language is fine if you are writing content for experts who understand it. But you can still apply plain English principles (e.g. active voice, short sentences) to technical language, and these techniques should not restrict the meaning of your content.

When explaining technical concepts to general audiences, however, you will need to simplify your language so everyone can understand it. Plain English alternatives exist for many words, but in some cases the meaning of a simple word alternative may not be precise enough. In these cases you will need to think about the clearest way to define a technical term to your audience. Comprehension (i.e. having a complete understanding of your topic) is a key skill for editors who want to present complex ideas as simply and clearly as possible. Do your own research and be sure to challenge any assumptions.

13 Positive language

Readers are motivated by constructive, positive language and this is a writing technique you can use to improve **tone**.

Positive writing is persuasive writing. Using a negative style will make your audience resistant to what they are reading. Always try to turn negative sentences into positive ones.



We regret to inform you that we cannot process your application because you failed to submit 3 forms of identification. [Negative]



Please send us 3 forms of identification so we can process your application. [Positive]

13.1 Differences between positive and negative language

Positive language:

- tells customers what they **can** do
- has a conversational tone that is helpful and encouraging
- includes words like ‘please’, ‘thanks’, ‘yes’

- emphasises positive consequences
- offers alternative ways to resolve the issue.

Negative language:

- tells customers what they **can't** do
- has a formal tone that suggests failure or blame
- includes words like 'cannot', 'won't', 'didn't', 'unable', 'no'
- emphasises negative consequences
- doesn't offer alternative ways to resolve the issue.

















14 Inclusive language

You need to consider any sensitivities readers of your content might have. The main principle to observe is 'people first'. Portray people as part of the community and avoid stereotypical, stigmatising or divisive descriptions.

The *Style manual for authors, editors and printers* ([2002](#)) has an extensive section on inclusive and non-discriminatory language.

14.1 People with disability









Use terms that do not stigmatise or could be interpreted as offensive.

Terms to avoid	Acceptable alternatives
 Able-bodied, normal	 People without a disability
 Abnormal	 Specify the disability
 Affliction, afflicted with	 Person has/with (name of disability)
 Birth defect, congenital defect, deformity	 Person with a disability since birth, person with a congenital disability
 Blind, the blind, the visually impaired	 Vision-impaired, person who is blind, person with a vision impairment
 Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound	 Uses a wheelchair, wheelchair user
 Cripple, crippled, deformed, disabled person, handicapped, invalid, mentally retarded, retarded, spastic, special, victim	 Person with disability
 Deaf	 Hearing-impaired, person is deaf The deaf—this refers to people who identify themselves as part of the deaf community and who use sign language. Using 'deaf community' is only appropriate when referring to this particular community

Terms to avoid	Acceptable alternatives
 Deaf and dumb, deaf-mute	 Person who is deaf and non-verbal, person with multiple disabilities
 Disabled person	 Person with a disability
 Disabled toilets	 Universal access toilets
 Dumb	 Person who is non-verbal, speech-impaired
 Dwarf, midget	 Short-statured person
 Epileptic [noun]	 Person with epilepsy
 Fit, attack, spell	 Seizure
 Illiterate	 People with varying literacy levels
 Mentally handicapped, retarded	 People with learning difficulties, people with intellectual disabilities
 Physically challenged, intellectually challenged, differently abled, the disabled	 People with disability
 Special	 Describe the person, event or achievement as you would normally
 Sufferer (e.g. sufferer of Down syndrome)	 Person has/with (name of disability)
 Vegetative	 In a coma, comatose, unconscious

14.2 Gender and age

Always use gender-neutral words.

Terms to avoid	Acceptable alternatives
 Businessman	 Businessperson
 Chairman	 Chairperson
 Husband, wife	 Marital status should be irrelevant. If it must be stated, refer to 'partner' or 'spouse' rather than 'husband' or 'wife'
 Fireman	 Firefighter

Terms to avoid	Acceptable alternatives
 Gay couple	 De facto, same-sex couples
 Layman	 Layperson
 Man, mankind, spokesman, chairman, workmanship, man the desk/phones	 Humans, humankind, spokesperson, chairperson, quality of work/skill, attend the desk/phones
 Manmade	 Artificial, constructed, fabricated, handmade, manufactured
 Manpower	 Workforce, personnel, the staff, human resources, workers
 Mrs or Miss (unless known)	 'Ms' unless otherwise indicated
 Policeman	 Police officer
 The best man for the job	 The best person for the job, the best woman or man for the job, the best candidate for the job
 The man in the street	 The average person, ordinary people, people in general
 The old, the aged, geriatric	 Seniors, older adults, mature-aged
 The supervisor must give his approval	 Supervisors must give their approval (Or, better still, avoid the nominalisation: 'supervisors must approve...')

14.3 Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples

14.3.1 References to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The preferred and most inclusive collective term is 'Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples'. If a person or group has both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, you can write 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', which demonstrates dual heritage.

Do not use 'Aboriginal peoples and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples'. Do not use acronyms or abbreviations when referring to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

It's also important to ensure these two distinct cultural groups are represented individually by writing 'Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples' (or 'Torres Strait Islanders').

14.3.2 Use of the term 'Indigenous'

The term 'Indigenous' may be used sparingly if you are quoting or referring to another source where the term Indigenous has been used, or where the term 'Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples' has been used repeatedly throughout the document.

Capitalise the term 'Indigenous' when referring to the original inhabitants of Australia:

- Indigenous Australians
- Indigenous people or peoples
- Indigenous communities.

14.3.3 References to non-Indigenous people

When referring to ‘non-Indigenous people’, be sure to use this terminology. Do not refer to people as ‘Caucasian’ or by colour.

15 Accessibility

A key principle for designing websites is that they are flexible enough to meet different user needs. This concept is known as [accessibility](#).

Accessibility benefits people in certain situations, such as people with disability. When preparing Queensland Government web content, we need to consider the accessibility needs of all people—not just the majority. Accessible websites create a more socially inclusive environment in which all people can access information and services.

15.1 Mandate for accessibility

Producing accessible web content is not only the right thing to do, it is also mandated by the following:

- The Australian Government has endorsed the [Web content accessibility guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#), developed by the World Wide Web Consortium, which requires all government websites (federal, state and territory) to meet specific accessibility criteria.
- The Queensland Government’s [Digital service policy](#) ensures we allow for customers accessing online content using assistive technologies due to disability, impairment or preference.
- Under the [Disability Discrimination Act 1992 \(Cwlth\)](#), agencies must ensure people with disabilities have the same fundamental rights to access information as the rest of the community.
- In 2008, the Australian Government ratified the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), which specifically recognises access to information, communications and services, including the internet, as a human right.

15.2 Assistive technologies and adaptive strategies

As web writers, our focus is on structuring and writing web content. However, we cannot do this in isolation from the technical side of web development. What we write affects how assistive technologies and adaptive strategies perform and, in turn, how well we deliver online information.

15.2.1 Assistive technologies

Assistive technologies are products that people with disability use to help them do tasks that they cannot do, or do easily, otherwise. Examples include [screen readers](#)—devices that ‘speak’ web text—and refreshable braille displays/keyboards.

Some accessibility solutions are built into the operating system—such as the ability to change the system font size, or configure the operating system so that multiple-keystroke commands can be entered with a sequence of single keystrokes.

15.2.2 Adaptive strategies

Adaptive strategies are techniques that people with disability use to help them use computers or other devices. For example, someone who cannot see a web page may tab through the links on a page (while listening to the words being read) to help them scan the content.

15.3 Disabilities, challenges and solutions

Disability	Challenges	Solutions
Motor impairments	Users may not be able to use the mouse	Make sure all functions are available from the keyboard (try tabbing from link to link)
	Users may not be able to control the mouse or the keyboard well	Make sure your pages are error-tolerant (e.g. ask 'are you sure you want to delete this file?'). Do not create small links or moving links
	Users may be using voice-activated software	Voice-activated software can replicate mouse movement, but not as efficiently as it can replicate keyboard functionality, so make sure all functions are available from the keyboard
	Users may become fatigued when using 'puff and sip' or similar adaptive technologies	Provide a method for skipping over long lists of links or other lengthy content
Low vision	Text in graphics does not enlarge without special software, and looks pixelated when enlarged	Limit or eliminate text within graphics
	Users may set their own font and background colours	Allow users to do so by using as much real text as possible, rather than text within graphics
	Screen magnifiers reduce the usable window size	To reduce the amount of horizontal scrolling, use relative rather than absolute units (e.g. use percentages for table widths instead of pixels)
Colour blindness	Reds and greens are often indistinguishable (other colours may be indistinguishable)	This is not normally a problem except in cases where the colours convey important information. Under these circumstances, you will need to either change the graphic or provide an additional means of obtaining the same information. Usually, the most appropriate way to do this is to provide an explanation in the text itself. Shape can also be effective (e.g. octagon for stop, triangle for warning)
Blindness	Users generally do not use a mouse	Don't write scripts that require mouse usage. Supply keyboard alternatives

Disability	Challenges	Solutions
	Images are unusable	Provide text descriptions, in alt text and, if necessary, longer explanations (either on the same page or with a link to another page)
	Users often listen to the web pages using a screen reader	Allow for users to skip over navigational menus, long lists of items, ASCII art, and other things that might be difficult or tedious to listen to
	Users often jump from link to link using the Tab key	Make sure links make sense out of context ('click here' is problematic)
	Frames cannot be 'seen' all at once. They must be visited separately, which can lead to disorientation	Don't use frames unless you have to. If you use them, provide frame titles that communicate their purpose (e.g. 'navigational frame', 'main content')
	It may be difficult for users to tell where they are when listening to table cell contents	Provide column and row headers. Make sure tables—especially those with merged cells—make sense when read row by row from left to right
	Complex tables and graphs that are usually interpreted visually are unusable	Provide summaries and/or text descriptions
	Not all screen readers support image maps	Supply redundant text links for hot spots in image maps
	Colours are unusable	Do not rely on colour alone to convey meaning
	Users expect links to take them somewhere	Don't write scripts in links that don't have true destinations associated with them [e.g. href="javascript: function(this)"]
Auditory disabilities	Audio is unusable	Provide transcripts for audio clips
	Video with audio is unusable	Provide synchronous captioning and transcripts for video clips
Seizure disorders	Seizures caused by strobing, flickering, or flashing effects	Avoid any graphics, animations, movies, or other objects which have strobing, flickering, or flashing effects. Avoid graphics that may induce nausea or dizziness

Disability	Challenges	Solutions
Memory deficits	Users have difficulty remembering which website they are using	Clearly indicate context on every page (e.g. website logo)
	Users have difficulty completing lengthy interactive processes	Use multiple pages, number and label each step clearly and provide orientation using 'Step 1 of n'
Problem-solving deficits	Users may be unable to progress when confronted with errors	Provide clear instructions, effective error handling, clear error messages with suggestions of how to resolve
	Users are confused by unpredictable responses on website	Provide clear warnings for non-standard user interface actions (e.g. links that open documents rather than web pages)
Attention deficits	Users have difficulty focusing	Use visual cues to highlight important points or sections of the content. Remove distracting content (e.g. advertisements)
Comprehension deficits	Users have trouble reading or understanding text	Supplement text with images, illustrations and symbols. Use plain English
Maths comprehension	Users have difficulty with (or an aversion to) maths	Provide clear and simple explanations, and automatically calculate results where possible (e.g. shopping cart total cost)
Visual comprehension	Users have difficulty comprehending diagrams and illustrations	Provide text descriptions, in alt text and, if necessary, longer explanations (either on the same page or with a link to another page)

15.4 Related links

Read more about [inclusive language](#) for people with disability.

16 Search engine optimisation (SEO)

Before people can read your content, they must be able to find it. Search engine optimisation (SEO) is a process for influencing the ranking of a web page (or website) in a list of search engine results.

Search engines (e.g. Google) consider many factors to determine the relevance of your web page against a user's search terms. For web writers, the concept of keywords is an important one. Using keywords in your content and metadata will help improve your page's 'discoverability'.

17 Keywords

The term ‘keywords’ doesn’t just refer to single words—it includes phrases as well. The keywords you use, and where you use them, have an influence on your search engine rankings. You should use keywords in your page content and in your metadata.

17.1 Choosing keywords

Choose keywords and phrases that your customers would type into a search engine to find your content.

Choose at least 5 words and 5 phrases related to the topic of your page. Jot down your keywords before you start writing (include them in your content brief).

17.2 Placement of keywords

The positioning of keywords is vital, as more weight is given in certain places. Use your most relevant keywords for each page in:

- metadata, such as
 - [page titles](#)
 - [page descriptions](#)
 - [alt text](#)
- content, especially headings and links.

17.3 Keyword stuffing

When using keywords in your content, be careful to write for your readers, not just for search engines. Keyword stuffing will affect user experience (your text will sound unnatural) and result in penalties from search engines.

Focus on writing clear content, and let your keywords fall naturally into place.







18 Headings and subheadings

Well-written headings have a positive effect on your web page’s [scannability](#) and search engine rankings.





The key to writing effective headings and subheadings is using only a few words (including those all-important keywords) to summarise the main idea of the text that follows.

Headings and subheadings should:

- be descriptive

 Financial help for farmers	 Assistance
 Export opportunities to China	 Overview
 Applying for a liquor licence	 Applications

- contain keywords and meaningful phrases (not generic terms like ‘introduction’, ‘our team’ or ‘projects’)
- if possible, use keywords up front to make the headings easy to scan (i.e. front-loading)
- be short

 Natural disasters	 Flood, fire, drought, storms, and earthquakes
 Learn public speaking	 Learn to speak in front of small or large groups of people confidently

- not contain abbreviations that your audience won't know
- not all start with the same word(s), if possible, as this makes it hard to differentiate between sections when scanning down the page.

For more information about style for headings refer to the [Web style guide, section 6—Headings](#).

19 Metadata

Most search engines use metadata when adding pages to their search index. Metadata such as page title and page description are commonly used to describe your web page's content to users.

Good metadata is essential for all web pages. Badly written, irrelevant or missing metadata will lower the ranking of your page in a list of search results.

Your most important metadata are your page title and page description.

19.1 Page title

Don't confuse your 'page title' with your 'page headings'. Page headings are the <h1>, <h2>, <h3> etc. elements. The page title is the unique <title> element that is required for every HTML page, which:

- defines the title of a tab in your browser
- provides the title for a page you add to your favourites or favourites bar
- displays the title of a page that appears in a list of search engine results.

This last point is important. The most prominent text that appears in a search result is the page title. It gives you a quick indication of a page's content and it has a major influence on what search result you will click on.

If you are publishing content to www.qld.gov.au, use the following format for page titles:

- Heading 1 | Franchise name | Queensland Government
(e.g. Water charges and restrictions | Environment, land and water | Queensland Government).

For other web content you may have to set the page title manually. Page titles should:

- be unique—don't recycle from other pages
- accurately describe the page content
- be less than 60 characters (spaces are counted), or 512 pixels wide.

19.2 Page description

Whenever a web page appears in a list of search results a page description will also appear (below the main link to the page). The page description describes the content of your page to a user. A good page description will persuade a user to click through to your page.

Page descriptions should:

- summarise the page (don't just copy the first paragraph)
- be unique—don't recycle from other pages

- be around 150 characters (including spaces)
- get straight to the point. Briefly describe what the page is about, making sure the most important content areas are covered first—2 or 3 sentences are all you need.

19.3 Keywords

As well as using [keywords in your content](#), you can also include keywords (and key phrases) in your metadata. Be sure to use keywords that match the content on your page. Or use actual keywords and key phrases from your page. Choose words and phrases that people are likely to type into search engines to find your page. Keywords are more effective in headings when they are ‘front-loaded’ (i.e. the first few words).

19.4 Alt text

‘Alt text’ is text that describes an image (i.e. within the alt tag).

Alt text is most important for accessibility (i.e. for screen readers) and this should be your main consideration when writing alt text. But including a keyword can also help boost your page’s SEO (particularly for image-based searches). Just make sure your choice of words doesn’t compromise your main goal of improved accessibility.

Read more about [alt text for images](#).

20 Cross-linking

Using keywords in link text will help improve search engine rankings. Web pages also achieve better search engine rankings when other relevant and reputable pages link to them. Look at ways to create strategic cross-links between related pages.

For more information refer to [Web style guide, section 8—Links—in-text, link lists and ‘calls to action’](#).

20.1 Related links

Read the [Metadata management principles](#).

21 Images and non-text elements

Images and non-text elements can make your website more usable and support its message—but only if they complement and enhance the text rather than just illustrate or decorate it.

Non-text elements include photos, drawings, diagrams, graphs, tables, audio, video and multimedia. Such text elements should be:

- meaningful and relevant—not distracting or gratuitous
- optimised to limit file size and reduce download times
- approved for use under [copyright](#) requirements
- accompanied by metadata to meet web accessibility requirements.

Do not use images that are purely decorative (an exception is thumbnail images used on [www.qld.gov.au](#) pages), as they increase download times—creating problems for people with slow internet connections.

21.1 Images

Use images to:

- identify things (e.g. road signs and their meanings)
- humanise a story

- aid navigation (e.g. thumbnails on www.qld.gov.au pages).

Images are great for eliciting an emotional reaction from readers—though this can be a negative one if you don't use the right images.

The finer details in photos or images are lost on the web—especially in photos of objects or people in the distance, or smaller-sized images. To compensate, ensure subjects within photos are obvious.

Close-up shots with clean backgrounds are ideal, but ultimately the subject matter of the page should determine what type of image you use.

If the people in the image are working, make sure they are dressed and equipped properly, in line with health and safety rules.

Avoid showing number plates or other identifying marks of specific vehicles—there have been cases where vehicles shown in campaign photos are later involved in fatal accidents.

Where practical, avoid stock photos—use photos taken in Queensland. Make sure photos are not obviously from a different state, country or area. For example:

- Is the steering wheel on the correct side of the car?
- Are things like street signs, service uniforms, or clothing correct for Queensland?
- Are landmarks relevant to the content? (e.g. don't put a photo of a south-east Queensland river in a page about north Queensland.)

21.1.1 Size, resolution and file formats

- 'Standard' resolution is 72 DPI (dots—aka pixels—per inch). Resize images to fit the template size on your web page. With high-resolution displays becoming more common, we may need to start offering higher resolution versions for bitmap images (more than 300 DPI), and vector images for logos etc. in future.
- Preserve the image's aspect ratio—don't stretch or squeeze it. Also, don't mirror (flip) images for aesthetic reasons.
- Set quality to around 80% (for JPG compression) and save as JPG or PNG.

21.1.2 Alt text

Alt text is a 'text alternative' for an image (and other non-text elements on a web page). This text displays when you mouse over an image, or when an image doesn't load correctly.

To ensure accessibility, you must include text alternatives for all images (except decorative images, such as thumbnails used on www.qld.gov.au pages) and other non-text elements.

Alt text describes the content of your image for people who use [screen readers](#), such as those who are blind or are vision impaired. It also benefits people who use the web without images—for example, customers with text-only browsers and people who turn off images to increase download speed or reduce charges on mobile connections.

Alt text should be short and meaningful. A few words are usually sufficient, but sometimes more description is required. For example, if a picture is intended to show a particular feature, alt text such as 'mine' or 'coal mine' will probably not be enough. The alt text should briefly describe the feature that is being illustrated (e.g. 'Deep gravel pit at the South Blackwater coal mine').

Read more about [alt text](#) on the W3C website.

21.1.3 Copyright and releases

When adding copyright images to your content, you must make sure that you have the right to publish them (see [Information Sheet G103v04—Permission: Do I Need It?](#) from the Australian Copyright Council). If an image is not owned by the Queensland Government, you should get the approval of the owner (there are exceptions to this rule) and give the necessary credit.

It is also important to find out that there are no royalty or licence fees required to use the image.

Images that have a [Creative Commons licence](#) are free and legal to use, provided that the conditions of the licence are met.

When using images that clearly identify members of the public, all those shown must give their written permission. However, images of crowds are generally OK.

22 Legal obligations

22.1 Copyright

Putting material on the web is publishing it. It is therefore protected under the [Copyright Act 1968 \(Cwlth\)](#) and cannot be freely copied, downloaded or distributed. Whether in a book or on a website, material such as text, photographs, graphics, maps and tables is protected. Copyright also protects electronic material such as emails, databases, directories, computer programs and CD-ROMs/DVDs.

22.1.1 Key points

- In Australia, it is not necessary to register copyright. It is automatic and does not depend on the presence of a copyright symbol.
- The creator of a work owns the copyright unless they have assigned it elsewhere.
- The government owns the copyright in works created or first published by employees on behalf of the federal, state or territory governments.
- Before copying, printing, saving or emailing material found on a website, check the site's copyright statement for conditions of use.
- Any material copied from a website, must be accurately referenced (refer to [Web style guide, section 14—Referencing](#)).
- Penalties for infringement of copyright include fines and imprisonment.

Copyright can be very complex. If necessary, contact your agency's legal services unit for advice.

22.2 Moral rights

Under the [Copyright Amendment \(Moral Rights\) Act 2000 \(Cwlth\)](#) the creator of a work (as distinct from the copyright owner) has the right to:

- be attributed as creator of the work
- prevent another from falsely claiming authorship of their work
- prevent their work from being used in any way that may negatively affect their character and reputation.

22.3 Privacy laws

When publishing online, all Queensland Government agencies must comply with the [Information Privacy Act 2009 \(Qld\) \(PDF, 672KB\)](#). The Office of the Information Commissioner helps Queensland public sector agencies comply with this Act and publishes [supporting guidelines](#) on their website.

22.3.1 Photography

Members of the public have the legal right to refuse publication of their image. Therefore, a photograph that clearly identifies members of the public (including agency staff) cannot be published without the written permission of **all** those depicted.

Check to see if your agency has developed a specific form or procedure for this purpose.

22.4 Anti-discrimination laws

The Queensland Government is committed to anti-discrimination. This principle is explained in the following laws:

- [*Racial Discrimination Act 1975*](#)
- [*Sex Discrimination Act 1974*](#)
- [*Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986*](#)
- [*Disability Discrimination Act 1992*](#).

Under this legislation it is generally unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of race, colour, national or ethnic origin, gender, or physical or mental capabilities.

22.4.1 Inclusive language

Writers have a responsibility to consider any sensitivities readers of their website might have. The main principle to observe is 'people first'. Portray people as part of the community and avoid stereotypical, stigmatising or divisive descriptions.

Read more about [inclusive language](#).

22.5 Standards for government websites

All Queensland Government websites are required to adhere to the [Digital services policy](#) and the [Digital service standard](#). This outlines the minimum requirements for Queensland Government agencies in the creation, implementation, and management of agency internet sites for the delivery of information and services to the Queensland community.

The Digital service standard address consistency, accessibility and website management and recommend, at a minimum, adherence to the:

- [Consistent user experience \(CUE\) standard](#)
- [corporate identity guidelines](#)*
- [Web content accessibility guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#).

* Available online to Queensland Government employees only.

23 PDF guidelines

23.1 General guidelines

HTML content is considered best practice for publishing online. HTML is more accessible than other document formats (such as PDFs), is better optimised for online reading on a wider range of devices and creates a more seamless user experience (i.e. navigating to and from other HTML pages is easier and more intuitive).

PDF is a print format. Your preference for online content should be HTML. If you are going to publish a PDF on your website it must have either an:

- HTML equivalent (preferred)
- or
- [accessible non-HTML equivalent](#) with a [summary page](#).

If a PDF and an HTML equivalent are published, the PDF should be an 'also' version. All primary links should point to the HTML content.

23.2 Mandated accessibility requirements

- [Module 6: Non-HTML documents](#)
- [Digital services standard](#) (criteria 9)
- [Disability Discrimination Act 1992 \(Cwlth\)](#) (part 2, division 1, section 24). Note: Module 6 and the Digital service standard are written in accordance with the Act

23.3 Preparing accessible formats

Web (HTML) pages are the most accessible format. If you are publishing other formats (e.g. PDF), you will need to:

- publish an accessible HTML, rich text format (RTF), or Word alternative to PDF files
 - Note: Just publishing a Word document or RTF file doesn't mean it's accessible. The document must be set up in an accessible way. See [Module 6: Non-HTML documents \(minimum accessibility requirements\)](#)
- present the accessible version at the same time as the PDF document
- provide text alternatives for any images used, including graphs or charts
- provide text alternatives for all multimedia or audio files (e.g. captions, transcripts).

23.4 Exceptions to accessibility requirements

The following document types may be published without an accessible format—at your agency's own risk—but must include contact details (e.g. email, phone) in an accessible format so that a customer can ask for the information in an alternative format:

- 'right to information' (RTI) documents—documents included in an agency disclosure log under RTI legislation. Note: RTI documents belong on an agency website, not within www.qld.gov.au.
- image-based documents such as maps, where there is no appropriate other format for displaying the resource
- forms that are required by law to maintain their layout/presentation or to be completed in a specified way. Note: Many PDF forms can be legally replicated in HTML. See section 49 of the [Acts Interpretation Act 1954 \(Qld\)](#).

23.5 PDFs that might be suitable for qld.gov.au

- **Some** image-based content (e.g. high-resolution maps)
- Content that a customer may want to print or keep (e.g. transaction receipts, checklists to be used away from a computer, tickets with barcodes)—only if 'print this page' does not meet customer needs. Accessible equivalents should also be offered

23.6 PDFs that are unsuitable for qld.gov.au

- Agency-centric documents (e.g. annual reports)—these belong on the agency site
- Unusually shaped brochures (anything that requires special printer set-ups, special folding, etc.—unless educational project materials)
- Documents that duplicate existing HTML content (without a demonstrated need for that content to be downloadable as a package). Documents for government staff to download and print out as part of their work (e.g. counter staff downloading and printing out brochures for the public—this content should be on the intranet or on a network hard drive)

23.7 Related links

- Read more style rules for links in the [Web style guide, section 8—Links—in-text, link lists and ‘calls to action’](#).
- Read [Module 4: Online forms](#).
- Read more about [publishing standards for the Queensland Government publications portal](#).

24 Repurposing print documents for the web

Documents prepared for print publication are not suitable for online presentation and, where possible, should be repurposed for the web.

If it is not appropriate or cost-effective to repurpose a document for the web and it has to be published online (because you need to meet the criteria in the [Digital service standard](#)) there are alternatives.

24.1 Give your customers options

- Convert the document in its existing form to HTML, PDF or text only.
- Provide a full download of the document for printing.

See [Module 6: Non-HTML documents](#) and [PDF guidelines](#) for more information.

24.2 Increase the usability and accessibility of the document

- Split large documents into smaller sections.
- Provide a linked table of contents.

24.3 Add value

- Provide a short summary of the whole document or each section.
- Provide the executive summary in HTML and the rest in PDF.

24.4 Document types and suggested solutions

Document type	Best solution
Brochures	Convert to HTML, incorporate some images if necessary to tie in with the offline marketing
Fact sheets	Convert to HTML and provide print-friendly version
Guidelines or booklets	Convert to HTML and provide a print-friendly version. Incorporate some images if necessary to tie in with the offline marketing or Provide a summary or overview of the document and table of contents in HTML, incorporate some images if necessary to tie in with the offline marketing Convert the document to PDF and split into sections; link the sections from the table of contents Provide a full download of the document for printing and offline use

Document type	Best solution
	Note: See Module 6: Non-HTML documents and PDF guidelines for more information
Newsletters	Convert articles/stories to HTML and provide a print-friendly version Remove supplementary sections that are in the print version (such as contacts, current events and advertisement that are already published on the website). Provide links to these sections where appropriate
Legal, quasi-legal and statutory documents	Provide a summary or overview of the document and table of contents in HTML Convert the document to PDF and split into sections link the sections from the table of contents Provide a full download of the document for printing and offline use Note: See Module 6: Non-HTML documents and PDF guidelines for more information

25 How to edit web content—quick guide

25.1 Step 1: Use the style guides

Your main editorial references are:

- [Web writing guide](#)
- [Web style guide](#).

For spelling, use the *Macquarie dictionary*.

25.2 Step 2: Prepare a content brief

A [content brief](#) clearly explains **who** you are writing for and **why** you are writing.

You should always identify your target audience, and their needs, before you start any editing.

25.3 Step 3: Structural edit

This is editing at the document level. This is where you rearrange content into a suitable structure and gain a full understanding of the topic.

- Gather related information—sentences and paragraphs—into distinct topic groups ('chunking').
- Create keyword-rich headings and subheadings to describe these topic groups.
- Put these topic groups in logical order (e.g. most important to least important, or steps in a process).
- Highlight key points in each paragraph. You can then re-write these in plain English during your copyedit.
- Distinguish between valuable 'must need' information (which you should include on the page) and unnecessary 'might want' information (which you can remove or link to on other pages).
- Delete duplicated or irrelevant paragraphs or sentences.

- Research and understand your topic. Flag anything you don't understand and confirm meaning with SME.

Read more about [structuring web content](#).

25.4 Step 4: Copyedit

This is editing at the paragraph and word level. This is where you use your writing skills to develop a clear, simple style and apply plain English principles, such as:

- using active voice
- using simple words
- removing jargon
- removing nominalisations
- removing redundancy
- creating short paragraphs and sentences
- using positive and inclusive language.

For more information see [plain English](#).

25.5 Step 5: Proofread

This is editing at the sentence and word level. This where you apply a consistent editorial style by focusing on details such as:

- spelling
- capitalisation
- bullet points
- punctuation
- links.

For more information refer to the [Web style guide](#).

Web style guide

1 How to use this guide

This guide covers editorial style recommendations for Queensland Government web content. You can use this style guide to develop consistent editorial content for all Queensland Government websites—corporate (departmental) websites, intranets, ‘franchises’ (www.qld.gov.au) and campaign websites.

Many of the style recommendations in this guide are based on standards described in the 6th edition of the Australian Government’s *Style manual for authors, editors and printers* ([2002](#)).

Although comprehensive, this guide doesn’t cover every style issue for every situation. At some point you may need to make your own style decision. Use this style guide, as well as other resources (such as the Australian Government’s *Style manual for authors, editors and printers*) to help inform your decision. You may also find a good reason to depart from a particular style rule—this is especially justified when it improves a reader’s understanding of your content.

In either case always make sure to apply any style changes consistently, and always keep a record of them (e.g. in a style sheet) to keep everyone involved in content development informed of your decision.

For detailed information about web writing techniques see the [Web writing guide](#).

2 Acronyms, initialises and abbreviations

1.1 Definitions

- **initialism**—a group of letters used as an abbreviation for a longer term (e.g. NGO—non-government organisation)
- **acronym**—an initialism that can be said as a word (e.g. BOM—Bureau of Meteorology). However, throughout this style guide, ‘acronym’ can be taken to mean both an initialism and an acronym
- **abbreviation**—a shortened form of a word or phrase used in writing to represent the complete form

1.2 Guidelines for using acronyms

- Avoid using acronyms, especially uncommon acronyms.
- If possible, use a generic term instead of an acronym.
- Don’t create acronyms for terms you only use once or twice on a web page.
- Avoid using too many different acronyms on a single web page. Lots of acronyms can confuse readers and disrupt the reading process.
- When introducing acronyms, write the words in full on the first mention, with the acronym in brackets immediately afterwards. Use the acronym by itself after that.



We carry out quality assurance (QA)



We document QA processes in ...

1.2.1 Punctuation and capitalisation

Most acronyms are upper case and not punctuated.





ATO





A.T.O

 MOU	 mou
---	---

Some well-known acronyms have an initial capital only. You do not need to spell out these acronyms in full on the first mention.



 Anzac	 Qantas
---	--

When spelled out, the full term is not capitalised unless it is a proper noun.

 non-government organisation (NGO)	 Bureau of Meteorology (BOM)
---	---

1.2.2 Plural acronyms

When pluralising acronyms, **do not** add an apostrophe.

 2 MPs	 2 MP's
---	--

1.2.3 Words that shouldn't be acronyms

Avoid using acronyms that are inappropriate (e.g. the acronym is an offensive word). Always make sure to spell out the following:




- 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'. Do not use the acronym 'ATSI'
- 'whole of government'. Do not use the acronym 'WOG'.

Note: Screen readers will try to pronounce acronyms if they have enough vowels/consonants, otherwise they will say the letters one by one. Be mindful of this.




1.3 Guidelines for using abbreviations

1.3.1 Punctuation and capitalisation





Abbreviations made from the first few letters of a word have a full stop at the end.

 cont. (continued)	 Mon. (Monday)	 etc. (etcetera)
---	---	---

Abbreviations that consist of the first and last letters of the word do not have a full stop at the end.


 Qld (Queensland) [But QLD in addresses]	 Rd (road)	 dept (department)
---	---	---

Abbreviations derived from Latin terms are lower case and need full stops.

 i.e. (that is)	 e.g. (for example)	 etc. (and so on)	 et al. (and others)
--	--	--	---

We don't include commas after 'i.e.' or 'e.g.', but you should place a comma before 'etc.' if it is preceded by more than one list item.







Only use 'i.e.', 'e.g.' and 'etc.' in tables or brackets. In running text, spell out in full.

 Guests at your Brisbane registry wedding can include your family, that is , your mother, father, brother, sister, grandmother, and so on .
--

Abbreviated units of measurement do not have full stops or a plural 's'.

There should be **no space between the number and the unit**. This is to prevent the number being separated from its unit of measurement over a line break—which, with varying screen sizes, could happen anywhere.

See also [Common symbols of measurement](#).

 25cm	 25c.m.
 42kg	 42kgs
 19km	 19 km

1.3.2 Short (generic) names

When referring to organisations, projects and initiatives (and similar), the full name should be used the first time, then refer to 'the organisation' or 'the project'.

See also [Capitalisation: Specific and general names](#).

 Brisbane City Council	 the council
---	---

1.4 Symbols

Symbols are internationally recognised representations of units of measurement, words and concepts. Symbols that appear in content include:

Symbol	When to use the symbol
&	Use only in tables, if space is limited Do not use in general text as a substitute for the word 'and'
@	Use only in email addresses Do not use in general text for the word 'at'
%	Use only with numerals Do not use in general text for the words 'per cent' or 'percentage'
\$	Use only with numerals Do not use in general text for the word 'dollar' or 'dollars'

2 Addresses

2.1 Street and postal addresses

- Write street and postal addresses with as little punctuation as possible.
- Use 'all capitals' on the final line for the city or suburb and state.
- Use double-spacing between the city or suburb, and state and postcode.



Department of the Premier and Cabinet
1 William Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

2.2 Web addresses (URLs)

Write proper link text rather than using a URL as a link. The exceptions to this rule are:

- URLs that are recognised as a brand (e.g. Amazon.com)
- contact details.



See [parking permits](#) for more information.



See <https://www.qld.gov.au/parking/permits> for more information.



Email name@qld.gov.au for more information.

See also [Links—in-text, link lists and 'calls to action'](#).

3 Bold and italics

3.1 Bold for emphasis

Use bolding to emphasise certain text or to make a point clear.



Duty is calculated on the dutiable value, except for special vehicles.

For **new vehicles**, the dutiable value is...

For **used vehicles**, the dutiable value is...

Avoid excessive bolding. As with italicising, if you bold too many words it will disrupt the reading process and reduce its visual impact.

3.2 Bold for computer commands

Use bolding to highlight the keys or buttons that are used to perform a function as part of an online or system process.



Select **application form** from the drop-down menu.



Press **Ctrl+Alt+Del** to open the task manager.

3.3 Italics

Use italics only when:

- referring to a certain [published works](#) (e.g. for [textual contrast](#))
- referring to the full title of an Act (legislation)
- using the scientific names of plants or animals (e.g. *Felis catus*)
- referring to performances and musical compositions (operas, dances, ballets, etc.)

- referring to films, TV shows, radio programs, plays etc.
- referring to physical artworks (e.g. Salvador Dali's *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*)
- referring to names of ships, aircraft or other vehicles (e.g. the *Titanic*)
- defining a term (e.g. *settlement date* means 'the date ownership is transferred')
- using foreign words—ones that have not gained common use in English (*kimchi*—a dish made from fermented cabbage and chilli—is an acquired taste).

[Avoid using large blocks of italics](#) in online content.

4 Capitalisation

4.1 Minimal capitalisation

The Queensland Government's basic style policy is to use minimal capitalisation (sentence case). The basic pattern of sentences is structured around an initial capital followed by lowercase letters. Using too many capitals in your sentences can disrupt this pattern and the natural flow of reading.

Use capitals only:

- for the first letter of the first word of a sentence
- for proper nouns—the names of particular people, places and things
- where necessary to prevent confusion with a generic term (e.g. the Cabinet, Act, Bill)
- on the first word only of
 - headings
 - subheadings
 - page titles
 - navigation labels.

4.2 Specific and general names

Specific names are capitalised. Generic names are not capitalised.

Proper name	Generic/plural
the Brisbane River	the Brisbane and Bremer rivers
the Premier	the premiers of Queensland and Western Australia
the Sun Bay Landcare Committee met ...	Members of the committee voted to ...
Department of Justice and Attorney-General	the department

4.3 When to capitalise 'the'

Capitalise 'the' only when it is part of a formal title or the entity's name.

	Researchers working at The University of Queensland ...
	Researchers working for The Queensland Government ...

4.4 Publications

Full titles of all publications—**except legislation and periodicals**—take minimal capitalisation. You can use a short or generic title for some publications. Short titles are presented in lowercase.

The capitalisation rules for different publications most referenced in Queensland Government websites are described in the tables below.

Note: To ensure consistency in presentation we recommend using these style guidelines, regardless of the style used by external organisations.

4.4.1 Rules for minimal capitalisation (sentence case)

For sentence case, only the first word takes a capital. All other words take lowercase except proper nouns, and other [words that are subject to capitalisation rules](#) (names of programs etc.).

Note: Always capitalise the first word of a subheading. Use a colon to introduce a subheading.

The following publication types use minimal capitalisation for the full title:

Type of publication	Full title	Short or generic title
Books Includes both print titles and e-books	Min. caps and italics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Geology of Queensland</i> <i>Census of the colony of Queensland, 1861</i> 	N/A
Lectures, seminars, speeches, webinars	Min. caps and single quotes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'The last lecture: Really achieving your childhood dreams' 'Do schools kill creativity?' 	N/A
Other publications Includes any publications not covered above that are made publicly available, in either print or electronic format This covers most Queensland Government publications including standards, guidelines, policy documents, codes of practice, titles of web pages, forms, etc.	For linked text use min. caps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hendra virus in Queensland: A guide for veterinarians (PDF, 100KB) Code of practice for the building and construction industry (PDF, 300KB) For unlinked (plain) text use min. caps and italics to provide textual contrast: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Hendra virus in Queensland: A guide for veterinarians</i> <i>Code of practice for the building and construction industry</i> 	For linked text use lower case: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hendra guide (PDF, 100KB) building and construction code (PDF, 300KB) For unlinked (plain) text use lower case: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hendra guide building and construction code

Type of publication	Full title	Short or generic title
Section elements Includes articles, chapters, section headings, subheadings	For linked text use min. caps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carbon farming as a regulatory framework For unlinked (plain) text use min. caps and single quotes: ‘Carbon farming as a regulatory framework’	For linked text use lower case: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> carbon farming For unlinked (plain) text use lower case: carbon farming

4.4.2 Rules for maximum capitalisation (title case)

For maximum capitalisation, use capitals for all words except articles, conjunctions and prepositions (e.g. a, an, and, at, for, from, in, of, the, to). Always capitalise the first word, no matter what part of speech it is.

Note: Always capitalise the first word of a subheading. Use a colon to introduce a subheading.

The following publication types use maximum capitalisation for the full title:


Type of publication	Full title	Short or generic title
Legislation (Acts)	Max. caps and italics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Liquor Act 1992</i> <i>Acquisition of Land Act 1967</i> 	Max. caps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liquor Act Acquisition of Land Act the Act
Legislation (Regulations)	Max. caps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liquor Regulation 2002 	Max. caps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liquor Regulation the Regulation
Periodicals Includes newspapers, magazines, journals and other publications that are published at regular intervals	Max. caps and italics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Responsible Service</i> <i>Queensland Government Mining Journal</i> Note: Only capitalise ‘The’ before the periodical name if it shows on the masthead as part of the title: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Courier Mail</i> <i>The Age</i> 	N/A


4.4.3 Textual contrast

An important consideration for web editors is the idea of **textual contrast**. Readers should be able to easily distinguish between different types of information at the word and sentence level.


Maximum capitalisation provides textual contrast, whether the text is linked or not. Minimal capitalisation only provides textual contrast when the text is linked (i.e. the underline and colour of the hyperlink provides textual contrast from the surrounding text) or italicised.


For linked text, you do not need to use italics for additional contrast.

 We recommend following the [Code of practice for the building and construction industry \(PDF, 100KB\)](#) at all times.

 We recommend following the [Code of practice for the building and construction industry \(PDF, 100KB\)](#) at all times.

For unlinked (plain) text, we recommend using italics to distinguish the full title of a publication from the rest around it.

 We recommend following the *Code of practice for the building and construction industry* at all times.

 We recommend following the Code of practice for the building and construction industry at all times.

4.5 Examples of when to use capitals

Category	Examples
Adherent of a particular religion	Muslim, Hindu
Brands and models (includes Queensland Government products)	Esky, Blu-Tack, Mazda, Breedcow and Dynama, MyTransLink
Federal (when part of an official title)	the Federal Court of Australia, the Federal Court
Full names of organisations, institutions	The University of Queensland, Institute of Public Accountants
Groups of people	Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islander people
Holidays, religious days, public events	Australia Day, Queensland Multicultural Festival, Anzac Day
Legislation/legal bodies See also Legislation	<i>Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989</i> , Childrens Court (no apostrophe)
Nationalities	Australian, Sri Lankan, Polish, Queenslander
Official titles	Director-General of Queensland Health, The Young Achiever Awards (but 'the awards' when used on its own)

Category	Examples
Personal names	Nancy Bird, Henry Lawson
Place names	Darling Downs, the Gold Coast
Specific governments	the Queensland Government, the Australian Government (but 'the government' when used on its own)
Specific programs, plans, strategies, initiatives and policies	Advance Queensland, Safe Night Out Strategy, Queensland Procurement Policy, Closing the Gap, Koala Research Grant Program
Terms associated with government Always take a capital to avoid confusion with the generic meaning.	the Cabinet, the Treasury, the Crown, the Senate, Act, Regulation, Bill, Parliament House

4.6 Examples of when not to use capitals

Category	Examples
Government	the government, local government, machinery-of-government, the state government, the federal government, federal funding, the debate in parliament, parliamentary processes, the department, the agency, departmental staff, agency staff
Organisational	the board, the committee, the unit, the organisation
Place names	northern Australia, states and territories, statewide
Names of diseases and conditions (unless derived from a proper noun)	rabies, malaria, Down syndrome, Hendra virus, anthrax, tetanus
Information technology	internet, email, website
Indigenous Australian people	traditional owners, elders

4.6.1 Stylised lowercase

Some words are stylised with an initial lower case letter (e.g. iPhone, go card). These words maintain the initial lower case at all times, even when they start a sentence.

4.7 All caps





Do not use all capitals—this format is reserved for DANGER and WARNING signs.

If you want to emphasise something, bold it. See [Bold and italics](#).


5 Dates and time

5.1 Dates







When writing dates in full, format them as 'day month year'. Do not punctuate. You can also include the day of the week if it is helpful. Use this format in text.

 23 May 2015	 23rd May 2015
 Saturday 23 May 2015	 Saturday, 23 May 2015

When writing dates in numerals, format them as 'dd/mm/yyyy'. Use this format for tables and social media.





 23/05/2015	 23/05/15, 23/5/2015, 23-05-2015
--	---

Use the following formats for a span of dates.









 From 21 to 25 November there will be...	 From 21–25 November there will be...
 2014–15 (Use 4-digit–2-digit format to represent a financial year)	 2014–2015
 1995–1996 (Use 4-digit–4-digit format to represent an entire year)	 1995–96

5.2 Time of day

Write the time of day in the 12-hour system, using an un-spaced 'am' or 'pm'. Use a full-stop, not a colon, to separate hours and minutes.

 10am	 10 am, 10.00am, 10:00am, 1000
 10.30pm	 10:30pm, 10.30 pm, 2230

Use the following formats for a span of time.

 9–11am	 9am–11am
 9am–5pm	 9–5pm
 9.30am–5.30pm	 9.30–5.30pm
 Between 8am and 6pm	 Between 8am–6pm

✓ 7.00–11.30am (include minutes on both sides if one time has minutes)	✗ 7–11.30am
---	-------------

Note: If listing multiple time ranges on a page, keep the formatting consistent. If one time includes minutes, then so should all the others.

5.3 Decades and centuries

Use the following format to represent decades and centuries.

✓ the 1990s	✗ the 1990's
✓ 20th century	✗ twentieth century, 20C

5.4 Timestamps

Use the following format for timestamps (for invoices etc.)

✓ 1 June 2011, 4.27pm

6 Headings

Headings and subheadings organise and highlight content on a page. They are signposts to encourage a reader to read on and to make it easier to follow the document.

Large blocks of text are visually unappealing and can put readers off because:

- the content looks like 'hard work'
- the layout is not scannable.

Headings are therefore crucial to page structure, but they also play an important role in search engine optimisation (refer to [Web writing guide, section 18—Headings and subheadings](#)).

6.1 Capitalisation and punctuation

Capitalise only the first letter of the first word in a heading. Do not capitalise any other words unless they would normally have an initial capital (e.g. Queensland).

Do not use a full stop, a colon, dash or any other punctuation after a heading or subheading, unless it is a question—'Where can I pay?'

6.2 Length

Keep headings brief and descriptive—55 characters (including spaces) is the upper limit, though aim for less than 30, since headings are used in URLs and breadcrumb navigation. We aim for our headings to not wrap at 'standard' resolution. Headings should only be as long as needed to describe the content that follows.

See also Write descriptive headings (refer to [Web writing guide, section 18—Headings and subheadings](#)).

6.3 Levels

Don't use any more than 4 levels of headings, to ensure readers don't lose track of the hierarchy of information. Generally, 2 or 3 heading levels are all you need. If you find that you need more than 3 levels of headings, consider breaking the page into multiple pages.

Make sure your headings are nested in their correct hierarchy. Never skip a heading level for design or layout reasons.

Heading level	Example
Heading 1—page heading	Government benefits
Heading 2—major headings on the page	Grants
Heading 3—subheadings used where necessary	Great Start Grant
Heading 4—subheadings used where necessary	Am I eligible?

6.4 Parallel structure

Where possible, maintain a parallel grammatical structure. This is especially relevant when you are using headings to connect steps in a process.

6.5 Verbs and gerunds

A gerund is a noun made from a verb by adding the 'ing' suffix (e.g. 'removing' is the gerund formed from the verb 'remove'). As a general rule:




- use finite verbs in headings for the imperative mood; that is, when your content is telling readers how to complete a task (e.g. 'Apply for a driver licence' or 'Buy a *go* card')
- use gerunds in headings when your content is more advisory or informational (e.g. 'Moving to Queensland' or 'Keeping reptiles as pets').

7 Legislation

7.1 Acts



First references to an Act should always show the title in italics, including the year, followed by the bracketed abbreviation for the jurisdiction in roman type (i.e. not italicised), **if this is not obvious from the text**.

In subsequent references, this title can be shown in roman type with the date omitted.

 <i>Local Government Act</i> 1993 (Qld)	 the Local Government Act	 In Queensland, <i>the Local Government Act</i> 1993 is...
--	--	---



7.2 Regulations

Regulations and other delegated legislation (e.g. laws and by-laws) are treated the same as Acts, but are presented in roman type.

 Partnership Regulation 2004 (Qld)	 Parliamentary Service By-law 2002 (Qld)
---	---





7.3 Bills

Bills before parliament are presented in roman type.

 Building Queensland Bill 2015	 Appropriation Bill 2015 (Qld)
---	---




7.4 Division of Acts

The basic unit of division in an Act is the section. Cite divisions of Acts as follows:

 See section 4 of the Commonwealth's <i>Copyright Act 1968</i>
 In ss. 4–7 of the <i>Copyright Act 1968</i> (Cwlth)
 The <i>Copyright Act 1968</i> , s. 4
 The Copyright Act, ss. 4–7



7.5 Division of Regulations

The basic unit of division in a Regulation is the regulation (note lower case). In some cases, Regulations are divided into sections (use the same style for divisions in Acts). Check the legislation to see which is appropriate.

 The Commonwealth's Copyright Regulations, r. 18
 The Copyright Regulations, rr. 18–19
 See regulation 18 of the Copyright Regulations (Cwlth)

7.6 Subdivisions of Acts and Regulations

Format subdivisions of Acts and Regulations (subsections and subregulations, and paragraphs and subparagraphs) as follows (note spacing).

 The <i>Airlines Equipment Amendment Act 1981</i> (Cwlth), s.19(1)(a)(iii)
 The Public Service Regulations (Cwlth), r. 83(2)(a)(ii)

8 Links—in-text, link lists and ‘calls to action’

8.1 Types of links—primary and secondary

Links can be classed as either ‘primary’ or ‘secondary’:

- A **primary** link is a link that most customers will need to follow to resolve their journey—for example, the ‘apply’ link. There will generally only be one primary link on a page.
- A **secondary** link is a link to more detail that is relevant to, or an action desired by, a minority of customers. This may be, for example, a link to the definition of ‘Queensland resident’—most customers will have no doubt about this, so are unlikely to follow the link.

8.2 Types of links—informational and action

Primary and secondary links can be categorised further into ‘informational’ links and ‘action’ links:

- An **informational** link points to further reading.
- An **action** link is a ‘call to action’ that points to a service of some kind (e.g. ‘register for the seminar’, ‘subscribe to our newsletter’, or ‘apply for the grant’).

8.3 Link placement

All primary links should be ‘front loaded’; that is, be located as far left within the content area as possible. With varying screen sizes, the only way to guarantee this is to place the link within the first few words of the first sentence of a paragraph, or within a bulleted list.



Some [residence requirements](#) will apply once you move in.



After you move into the property, you must comply with the [residence requirements](#).

Note: It’s ok to use passive voice (refer to [Web writing guide, section 9.4—When to use passive voice](#)) in this situation.

For secondary links, front loading is preferred, but not critical.

8.4 Link text

[Well-written links](#) help our customers find the content they are looking for. They tell readers what your page is about and where to go for more information.

Using clear and [descriptive link text improves accessibility](#). Descriptive links are easily understood by people using assistive technologies such as screen readers. They also make your page more ‘scannable’ for sighted users.

Descriptive link text containing keywords also improves your page’s search engine rankings (refer to [Web writing guide, section 16—Search engine optimisation](#)).

8.4.1 Tips for writing better link text

- Write descriptive and meaningful link text that accurately describes the content you are linking to.
- Use your customers’ keywords (i.e. likely search terms).
- Do not use ‘click here’, ‘read more’ or other generic words in links.
- Never use a URL for link text.
- Avoid using agency brands in link text.

✓ [Funding for new IT businesses](#) is available through eConnect-2-Q.

✗ [eConnect-2-Q](#) funds new IT businesses.

- Link text should flow naturally with the text around it and have a clear relationship to the page that it is linking to.
- Link text should make sense when read out of context.
- Keep length less than 8 words.
- Put the most specific detail at the front. Customers will generally only scan the first 2 words (or 11 characters) before deciding whether to read on or skip to the next link.
- There is a fundamental difference between [action links](#) and [informational links](#).
 - For calls to action, the customer is thinking of that action while scanning the page (e.g. I want to **register**; I want to **apply**; I want to **unsubscribe**), so the verb should be included in the link text.

✓ [Sign the petition.](#)

✗ Sign the [petition.](#)

- For informational links, the customer is not thinking of the action 'read' or 'view'. They are thinking of the subject of their enquiry.

✓ Read more about [retirement villages.](#)

✗ [Read more about retirement villages.](#)

- Remember, your customers will have the term that they are scanning a page for in their head. If your customer is searching for the word 'funding', but your link text is 'forward-facing fiscal encouragement scheme' or 'eConnect-2-Q', they will not see it.

8.5 Links to third party sites for transactional services

If a third party is providing a transactional service on your agency's behalf, and their privacy policy differs from the Queensland Government's policy, you need to let customers know about the third party's privacy policy.

For example, you could link to a statement about the third party and, where possible, give the customer an alternative option.

✓ Information provided within the nomination form is being gathered by a third party provider and will be used for award purposes only and not for marketing purposes. Further information is available at [EAwards privacy statement](#).

[Nominate now](#) for Jack Pizzey Awards 2015.

If you would like to nominate on an alternative nomination form, please email RewardandRecognition@qld.gov.au.

8.6 Styling

8.6.1 General

Avoid overcrowding the text with links as this can be distracting (think a busy Wikipedia page). An alternative is to put a link list at the end of the content.

8.6.2 URLs as link text

- Never use a URL as a link within a sentence, unless
 - it is part of an address block on a contacts page
 - you are linking to a business where the URL is a recognised brand.



Website: www.premiers.qld.gov.au/ [Note: Leave off the 'http://']



The awards are proudly sponsored by wotif.com.

8.6.3 Non-HTML document links

- When linking to any non-HTML material, the file type and size, in brackets, should be included in the link.
 - If the file size is in kilobytes (KB), don't show decimal places.
 - If the file size is in megabytes (MB), show one decimal place.



Our [annual report \(PDF, 890KB\)](#) has more information.

Note: Template mark-up removes the underline of the file type and size, but this still functions as part of the link and will be visible to assistive technologies.

8.6.4 Link lists

Note: This style is for a list of links at the end of the main content. Linked list items in content should be treated as in-text links.

Link lists should have a heading with no colon, and no closing punctuation. Links in lists should be sentence case (i.e. the first letter of the first word is capitalised and all other words are lower case—other than proper nouns). You can use the target page's heading if appropriate.



Further information

- [Financial records worksheet for home-based businesses](#)
- [Operating a business in Queensland](#)

8.6.5 Calls to action

A call to action is, for the purpose of **qld.gov.au**, a link that entices the reader to take action. It should start with an active verb, and be succinct, 'punchy' and clear. It will stand apart from the rest of the content on the page and does not need closing punctuation.

Generally, this style is used when there is **only one link** at the end of a content page. Remember, the action you describe in the link should be doable online: you may be able to [book a steam train ride](#), but you can't [ride the steam train](#).



[Subscribe to our newsletter](#)



[Take the survey](#)





[Help save Town Hall](#)



[Register for a seminar](#)

8.6.6 Email links

Email addresses should be hyperlinked with the 'mailto' command. Don't use other link text to link an email address.

 Email thisfakeemail@qld.gov.au for more information.	 Email us for more information.
--	--

8.6.7 'More' links (for qld.gov.au pages)

If you are developing pages for www.qld.gov.au, you should only use 'More' links on index pages.

For accessibility reasons, you must include the title attribute in the link with the text 'Read more about: [section or article heading]'.



Figure 3. 'More' link example with title attribute

Note: See the [Github pattern library](#) for technical details. Refer to 'Content patterns: news slideshow'.

8.7 Preparing accessible formats

Web (HTML) pages are the most accessible format. If you are publishing other formats (e.g. PDF), you will need to:

- publish an accessible HTML, Rich Text Format (RTF), or Word alternative to PDF files
 - Note: Just publishing a Word document or RTF file doesn't mean it's accessible. The document must be set up to meet minimum accessibility requirements. See [Module 6: Non-HTML documents](#).
- present the accessible version on the same line as the PDF document. This has the advantage of saving space. Always list the main version first, followed by the accessible alternative.

 [Credit card payment form \(PDF, 41KB\)](#) or [\(RTF, 44KB\)](#)

- supply a text description of any images used, including graphs or charts—also known as 'alternative text' (refer to [Web writing guide, section 19.4—Alt text](#))
- provide text alternatives for all multimedia or audio files (e.g. captions, transcripts).

9 Lists—bulleted and numbered

9.1 General guidelines

- If bullets complete a lead-in, they will start with a lower-case letter and have closing punctuation on the last bullet.
- If bullets are stand-alone sentences, they will start with a capital letter and have closing punctuation.
- Don't use semicolons to separate bullets.
- Colons should not introduce next-level bullets.
- Only use 'including' to introduce a list when the list is not exhaustive.
- Don't use 'comprises of' to introduce a list. Within standard grammar, your choice is either 'comprises' or 'comprised of'. However, there are plainer words, like 'is' or 'are', you can use to introduce the list.
- Keep your list to about 7 items. If you exceed this and it is illogical to break the list into sub bullets, 8 or 9 list items would be OK; however, consider that the average person can hold only 7 items in their short-term memory ([Miller 1956](#)).

9.2 Bulleted lists

There are 3 main kinds of bulleted list:

- bulleted lists with lead-in text and list items that are sentence fragments
- bulleted lists with lead-in text and list items that are complete sentences
- stand-alone lists with no lead-in text.

9.2.1 Lead-in text and list items that are sentence fragments

Below is an example of the first—and most common—kind of bulleted list.



Bike paths make it safer and easier to cycle around. Using bike paths:

- gives you access to facilities like bike shelters
- allows you to choose routes for different purposes (such as exercise or sightseeing)
- reduces greenhouse gases and traffic congestion.

Notice that each list item is a sentence fragment (i.e. each item can't function as a 'stand-alone' sentence).

- Each list item begins with a lower case letter and can be added to the lead-in text to form a complete sentence.
- Only the last item has closing punctuation (i.e. a full stop).
- The structure is also parallel. In this example, the first word of each list item is a verb (and in the same tense).

If you want to add a second level of information, set out your list as follows:



Research shows kids respond better at school when their parents are involved. You can support your child by getting involved. You can:

- attend school functions. For example, parent-teacher information nights and social activities
- volunteer to help

- in the tuckshop
- in the classroom (e.g. reading)
- on excursions
- with fundraising efforts
- go to Parents and Citizens Association meetings.

Note that:

- in the first list item
 - sentences are added and punctuated normally
 - the last sentence does not have closing punctuation
- in the second list item—when introducing an extra level of bulleting—there is no extra colon
- the last list item has the closing punctuation.

Do not use semicolons at the end of each list item, or the word ‘and’ before the last list item—it should be clear from the lead-in text.

However, sometimes you may need to stipulate an ‘and’ or an ‘or’. This is done by setting the ‘and/or’ on a separate line, level with the bullet text indentation.



If you can't connect to the internet, your computer might:

- not be able to find a wireless network

or

- have a hardware fault.

However, usually, the lead-in sentence can be rewritten so the ‘and/or’ is not needed.



You must meet **all** of the below criteria:



At least **one** of the below must apply:

9.2.2 Lead-in text and list items that are complete sentences

If each list item is a complete sentence, punctuate it accordingly—starting with a capital letter and closing with appropriate punctuation (e.g. full stop, question mark).

All list items should be complete sentences—don't mix fragments and complete sentences.



Reduce your risk of becoming a victim. Follow these steps to secure your home:

- Make it as difficult as possible for a thief to gain entry.
 - Install and use key-operated locks on doors and windows.
 - Don't place keys under door mats or in obvious places.
- Make it as difficult as possible for a thief to take your belongings with them when they leave.
 - Don't leave keys in doors or windows when you're not at home.
 - Make sure alarms are functioning.
- Reduce temptation.
 - Engrave or microdot all items of value.
- Keep cash, keys and valuables out of sight and out of easy reach.

Each bullet stands alone—it can't be added to the lead-in to make a complete sentence. Each first-level bullet should be a complete sentence, start with a capital letter and have closing punctuation. In this example, the second-level bullets are also complete sentences; however, they could be written to complete a lead-in from a previous bullet.



Reduce your risk of becoming a victim. Follow these steps to secure your home:

- Make it as difficult as possible for a thief to gain entry by
 - installing and using key-operated locks on doors and windows
 - not placing keys under door mats or in obvious places.
- Make it as difficult...

In this case, the second level bullets complete the first-level bullet, so don't start with a capital letter and have the closing punctuation after the last second level bullet. Note that colons are never used within a list.

9.2.3 Heading with sentence fragment bullets



Tools and supplies

- Plastic sheeting and duct tape (or masking tape) to tape windows
- Whistle
- Utility knife
- Plastic garbage bags and ties
- Safety glasses and sun glasses
- Wide masking tape (or duct tape) for windows
- Wrench or pliers to turn off all utilities
- Tent and tarpaulin

There is no lead-in and no closing punctuation. Each item should start with a capital letter. All list items should be the same type of phrase—in this case, they're all noun phrases.

9.3 Heading with complete sentence bullets



Related links

- The Queensland Government's [Easy Plan CD](#) or [Think. Plan. Grow. CD](#) gives you all the information you need to write your business plan.
- Our [Business Resource Centre](#) offers a range of products and services to guide you through the process of assessing your business idea and planning your business.
- The [AquaProfit](#) series provides a tool to educate farmers, help decision making and support the growth of the aquaculture industry in Queensland and Australia.

There is no lead-in and each bullet stands alone as a complete sentence.

9.4 Stand-alone lists with no lead-in text

You see this type of list everywhere—reports, websites, menus. There is no lead-in text, just a descriptive heading. Each list item starts with a capital letter and has no closing punctuation.

**Music and performance**

- [Queensland Symphony Orchestra](#)
- [Opera Queensland](#)
- [Queensland Ballet](#)

9.5 Numbered lists

Numbered lists should only be used for lists where the order is important—such as for a sequence of steps or a rank order—or when you wish to refer back to points by number. Sometimes there will be lead-in text, other times the lists will stand alone.

**Instructions**

1. Fill in the application form using block letters.
2. Sign and date the form in the presence of a witness.
3. Attach certified copies of any documents.
4. Post the form and supporting documents to the address shown at the top.
5. If you have not received a response within 4 weeks, please contact us.

9.6 Lists in tables

The ‘no closing punctuation in tables’ rule overrides standard list punctuation. There should be no punctuation at the end of any list items (other than question marks).

10 Numbers and measurement

10.1 Numbers

10.1.1 When to use numerals

As a general guide write all numbers as numerals when they are quantified by units of measurement, periods of time etc.

Using numerals makes it easier for a reader to scan a web page. Numbers generally represent facts, and readers will look out for them (quantities, fees, phone numbers, etc.).

10.1.2 When to spell out numbers

In some cases a number may be mentioned within a general narrative, or as part of an idiomatic expression—which you should be careful about using anyway (refer to [Web writing guide, section 12.2—Clichés](#)).

Because numerals act as structural elements within content they are likely to catch a reader’s attention. If you do not intend for a number to be strictly quantifiable, then spell it out instead.



There are one or two things to consider



Back to square one



It takes two to tango



There’s only one way to do this

Always spell out a number when it starts a sentence. Alternatively, try rearranging the sentence.



Two-thousand cows are trapped by floodwater.



There are 2,000 cows trapped by floodwater.

10.1.3 Punctuation

Numbers over 999 use commas to mark thousands. (This does not apply to postcodes, street numbers or years.)



The current population is 1,300,567.

Do not use spaces within numbers (other than phone numbers). It can be confusing and cause problems online—screen readers may not recognise the number correctly, or numbers may break over a line.



700



7,300



56,430



103,260

10.1.4 Percentages

Use the percentage symbol (%) with numerals—don't write 'per cent'.

Note: Don't use the word 'over' with a number (e.g. 'over 10% of people'). Instead, write 'more than 10% of people'.

10.1.5 Money

When writing an amount of money, use decimal points for all figures when any include cents.



Annual registration fees cost between \$35.00 and \$69.90.



Annual registration fees cost between \$35 and \$69.90.

Write amounts that are less than a dollar as a decimal fraction and always with a zero before the decimal point.



The ticket is \$0.69



The ticket is \$.69

Amounts should include GST. In situations where GST needs to be excluded (e.g. when writing about calculating tax), note this.

10.1.6 Million and billion

- Write the words 'million' and 'billion' in full in general text. Leave a space between the numbers and text.





\$745 million





6 billion people

- Use the abbreviated form 'm' (for million) and 'bn' (for billion) in headings, tables or graphs.
- Use lower case, no full stop and no space between the abbreviation and the number.
- Move the unit of measurement to the column or row header to improve readability in tables.





 \$745m	 46m people
--	--

- Express large dollar values as multiples of a million (for amounts of \$1 million or more).



 \$4.75 million	 \$4,750,000
--	---

10.1.7 Ages

When an age is used as a noun (when you can place 'a', 'an' or 'the' in front, or add a plural 's'), you should hyphenate. When used adverbially, hyphens are not needed.

 Five-year-olds say the funniest things.	 Five year olds say the funniest things.
 He's 5 years old.	 He's 5-years-old.

Generally, unless it's necessary to prevent confusion, you do not need to add 'years old' when writing an age. Avoid 'years of age' or 'aged [number]' entirely.


 You must be at least 18.	 You must be at least 18 years of age.
--	---

10.1.8 Fractions


There are two types of fractions: decimal and non-decimal. Where possible, use decimal fractions rather than non-decimal fractions.

10.1.8.1 Decimal fractions

- Use a full stop in decimal fractions.
- Use decimals only when you need to accurately display numerical information.
- Place a zero (0) before the decimal point, when the decimal number is less than one (1).




 0.25	 .25
--	---

Always use the same number of decimal places for all decimal quantities being compared, either in the text or in a table.

 The levels varied between 5.647 and 9.540 for the 2-year period.
--

10.1.8.2 Non-decimal fractions

Use hyphens when writing non-decimal fractions in words, unless the fraction is preceded by 'a' or 'an'.

 Reduce by one-third.
 Choose from the many half-day or full-day walks.
 The rate of pay for overtime work is time and a half.

✓ More than 200 vertebrate animal species live here and about a quarter are found nowhere else in Australia.

Write non-decimal fractions as numerals in recipes or in situations where fractions are commonly used and decimals would cause confusion.

Use the fraction bar rather than the forward slash to separate the numerator and denominator as the slash has other functions.

✓ $1\frac{3}{4}$ ✗ 1 3/4

10.1.9 Phone numbers

Phone numbers should use non-breaking spaces (to stop numbers breaking over a line). If you're listing a number as a word, you should include the actual number in brackets after it. Numbers can be shown in the following ways. Note the spaces.

✓ 13 74 68	✓ 1800 177 120	✓ 1300 880 882
✓ (07) 3868 4035	✓ +61 7 3868 4035	✓ 13 QGOV (13 74 68)

10.2 Measurement

Write unit names in full when they are used on their own.

✓ The distance was measured in metres.

Do not put a space between a numeral and the abbreviated unit symbol.

✓ 6km	✓ 165km/h	✓ 100g
✓ 25KB	✓ (PDF, 532KB)	

Distinguish between dollar currencies if multiple currencies are used on a page.

Place the currency in front of the dollar symbol.

✓ A\$10,000 ✓ US\$350 ✓ NZ\$5,000

For other currencies, place the symbol before the numeral.

✓ £26 ✓ ¥14,500

10.2.1 Common symbols of measurement

Term/prefix	Symbol	Term/prefix	Symbol
Bit	b	Kilogram	kg
Byte	B	Kilometre	km

Term/prefix	Symbol	Term/prefix	Symbol
Centimetre	cm	Litre	L
Cubic metre	m ³	Mebibyte	MiB
Gigabit	Gb	Megabyte	MB
Gigabyte	GB	Millilitre	mL
Gibibyte	GiB	Millimetre	mm
Gram	g	Minute	min
Hertz	Hz	Second	s
Kibibyte	KiB	Square metre	m ²
Kilobyte	KB	Tonne	t

10.2.2 Building measurements

Express building measurements in millimetres (the Australian building standard) unless the description is of a general nature. Use millimetres to detail requirements for subjects including workplace health and safety, and disability needs.



Wheelchairs require a space of 1,300mm by 800mm with a door height of 1,400mm.

11 Punctuation

Punctuation is used to ensure the meaning of text is as clear as possible. Good punctuation is almost unnoticeable—sentences flow and meaning is clear. Insufficient or incorrect punctuation can make your writing ambiguous. Unnecessary punctuation is distracting and slows readers' progress through the text.

The Queensland Government's policy is to use minimal punctuation.

11.1 Apostrophes

Use apostrophes to show:

- possession
- missing letters within a word or words.





11.1.1 Possession

The table below summarises apostrophe placement.



Placement	Meaning	Example
Cats	More than one; no possession	The cats are prowling at night.
Cat's	Belongs to one	The cat's bell has fallen off.

Placement	Meaning	Example
Cats'	Belongs to more than one (plural ending in s)	The cats' beds were in the laundry.
Children's beds	Belongs to more than one (plural not ending in s)	The children's beds were still unmade.



For singular words ending with 's', add an apostrophe and an 's'.

 The business's strategy will not work.	 The business' strategy will not work.
 James's contract ends on 30 June.	 James' contract ends on 30 June.


Similarly, for plurals that don't end with 's', add an apostrophe and an 's'.

 the people's choice	 the children's school
--	--



The only situation where you do not add an apostrophe to indicate possession is when using pronouns (words that stand in place of nouns—he, she, it).

 The dog hurt its paw.	 The dog is hers .
---	---



There is no need to use an apostrophe if the word is descriptive rather than possessive.

 Mates rates (rates for mates, not owned by mates)


Do not use an apostrophe in expressions of time involving a plural reference.

 He has 12 years experience.	 She was paid 3 weeks wages.
--	--


However, there is an apostrophe in singular references.

 1 year's notice ...	 A day's walk ...
--	---


Place names do not contain apostrophes.

 Stones Corner	 Shaws Bay
---	---

When 2 or more nouns indicate joint ownership, only the last noun takes an apostrophe.

 Ms Martin and Mr Blake's strategy

When the ownership is not joint, add an apostrophe to each noun.

 Ms Martin's and Mr Blake's strategies

Possessive compound nouns take an apostrophe on the last word of the phrase.

✓ someone else's idea	✓ chief of staff's opinion
-----------------------	----------------------------

Some organisations include an apostrophe in their names. Always check the official names of organisations to ensure their accuracy.

✓ Corporate Services Division	✓ Department of Veterans' Affairs
-------------------------------	-----------------------------------

11.1.2 Contractions

You can use apostrophes to indicate when letters have been omitted (a contraction).

Example	Contraction
It's cold today.	It is —do not confuse with the possessive pronoun 'its'
You're right about that!	You are —a common mistake is to write this as 'your'. 'Your' is a pronoun— Your dog was sick on the couch.
Who's responsible for this?	Who is —don't mistake this for 'whose'. 'Whose' is a pronoun— Whose dog was sick?
He's been to New York.	He has
We've had enough and we're going home.	We have, we are

While it is fine to use contractions, there are times when you may want to spell out the full expression so that you can emphasise (bold) the 'not'.

✓ You must not ...	✓ If you do not have ...
--------------------	--------------------------

11.1.3 Plurals

In almost all cases, it is **incorrect** to use an apostrophe to show a plural.

✓ Tomatoes \$1.99	✗ Tomato's \$1.99
-------------------	-------------------

You will often see apostrophes used to pluralise numbers and acronyms. This is incorrect. You should simply add a lower case 's' with no apostrophe.

✓ CDs and DVDs	✗ CD's and DVD's
✓ 1,000s of bargains	✗ 1,000's of bargains

11.2 Brackets (parentheses)

There are various types of brackets with different uses.

Bracket type	Symbol
Parentheses (round brackets)	(example)

Bracket type	Symbol
Square brackets	[example]
Angle brackets	<example>

Round brackets are the most common type. Their main function is to enclose definitions, comments, clarifications, additional information or asides. Em dashes or commas can be used to similar effect in some cases.

- ✓ The koala gets its name from an ancient Aboriginal word meaning 'no drink' because it receives more than 90% of its hydration from the eucalyptus leaves (also known as gum leaves) it eats.

Round brackets are also used to show plural noun alternatives.

- ✓ Employee(s)
- ✓ Applicant(s)

Use square brackets in quoted material to signify editorial interpolations or insertions made by someone other than the author.

- ✓ 'Although I grew up in New South Wales, I was born in Glastonbury [Queensland], where my family had a property.'

Do not use one set of brackets inside another set. Use a combination of brackets and em dashes.

- ✓ Mr Freeman visited yesterday—he was here representing the Australian Taxation Office (ATO)—and outlined the benefits of the new system.

11.3 Colons

Use a colon to introduce more information, such as a list, word, phrase, clause or quotation.

- ✓ There are 7 official regions in the department: Brisbane, Far North Queensland, North Queensland, Central Queensland, North Coast, South West, and South East.
- ✓ The question is: Who will take responsibility?
- ✓ The minister began: 'Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen...'

11.3.1 Subtitles

Use a colon to link a title with its subtitle. Use an initial capital after the colon.

- ✓ Mental illness: Know the signs

11.3.2 Ratios

Another way you can use colons is to express ratios.

- ✓ 1:1,000
- ✓ 3:1

11.3.3 Notes

Use a colon to introduce a note. Use an initial capital after the colon.



Note: Use an initial capital after the colon.

11.4 Commas

Use a comma to:

- indicate a short pause
- clarify a string of adjectives
- separate list items in a sentence
- prevent ambiguity.

11.4.1 Indicating a pause or setting apart an introductory statement



However, many new services have since been launched.



With public support, the council began its urban renewal project.

11.4.2 Clarifying a string of adjectives

For more information refer to the 6th edition of the Australian Government's *Style manual for authors, editors and printers*, ([2002](#)).

11.4.3 Separating list items

When listed items in a sentence are wordy or complex, use a comma before the final 'and' to avoid ambiguity or confusion.



Landholders within the targeted region, representatives of various government agencies, and community and industry group representatives attended the seminar.

11.4.4 Preventing ambiguity

Bert said Ernie is a muppet.
[Bert, said Ernie, is a muppet.]

Let's eat grandma!
[Let's eat, grandma!]

11.4.5 Common mistakes

11.4.5.1 Separating subject from verb

A common error people make when using commas is separating the subject from the verb, especially in long sentences. In the example below, the subject and the verb (lexical verb, not the auxiliary 'should') are bolded.




Passengers who have just disembarked from Flight 123 and need to make the connecting flight to Sydney, should **make** their way to Gate 16 immediately.




Passengers who have just disembarked from Flight 123 and need to make the connecting flight to Sydney should **make** their way to Gate 16 immediately.


Never put a comma between a subject and its verb unless you are using a pair of parenthetical commas to set apart something non-essential.


 Jason, **the IT manager**, sent out a memo about the new software.


The bold text is the non-essential part; the commas are being used like parentheses (brackets). If you were to remove the part contained within commas, it would still read normally.

Another common way that people accidentally separate subjects from verbs is they forget to put in the closing comma.


 Hobart, Tasmania, is too cold.


 Hobart, Tasmania is too cold.

 Michael, considered to be the department's best presenter was sick and couldn't come to work.


 Michael, considered to be the department's best presenter, was sick and couldn't come to work.


Be careful where you place your parenthetical commas—remember that the sentence should still work when the part within the commas is omitted.

 We wanted to stay and meet him, **but because we had a connecting flight**, we had to leave early.

 We wanted to stay and meet him, but, **because we had a connecting flight**, we had to leave early.


If we remove the non-essential parts of the sentences (bold), we are left with:


 We wanted to stay and meet him we had to leave early. [missing a joining word]


 We wanted to stay and meet him, but we had to leave early.


11.4.5.2 The comma splice

Don't use a comma to separate clauses that should function as separate sentences. Write them as separate sentences, separate them with a semicolon, or use a conjunction to join the clauses.

 I'll be back by lunchtime, we can meet then.

 I'll be back by lunchtime. We can meet then.

 I'll be back by lunchtime; we can meet then.

 I'll be back by lunchtime, so we can meet then.

11.4.5.3 Commas after a salutation

Do not use a comma after the salutation (name or title) in a letter or email.

 Dear Janice

 Dear Sir

11.5 Dashes and hyphens

11.5.1 What's the difference?

-	This is a hyphen
–	This is an en dash (also called an n dash or en rule) [Word shortcut: Hold Ctrl and press - (minus sign) on the numerical keypad] [Windows shortcut (all programs): Hold Alt and type 0150]
—	This is an em dash (also called an m dash or em rule) [Word shortcut: Hold Ctrl and Alt and press - (minus sign) on the numerical keypad] [Windows shortcut (all programs): Hold Alt and type 0151]

11.5.2 Hyphens

The hyphen is the most common device for linking words and word fragments. If in doubt about whether to use one, consult the latest edition of the *Macquarie dictionary* or the *Style manual for authors, editors and printers*. Appropriate use often depends on context.

11.5.2.1 When to use hyphens

Situation	Example
Compound adjectives before the noun	Full-time job, long-term contract, high-quality service, department-owned office, dark-haired man
Compound words with a number	2-hour flight, 4-part series, 10-year-old
Fractions	Two-thirds, five-and-a-half hours, one and three-quarters
Prefixes, but not always (check Macquarie dictionary for style)	Ex-president, co-author (but coordinate and cooperate)
Prefix followed by a capital letter	Pre-Christian era, un-Australian behaviour
Two-syllable prefixes ending in a vowel other than 'o', followed by a vowel	Anti-aircraft, semi-official
Compound nouns with a preposition	The car was a write-off. The thieves' hang-out was deserted But phrasal—'two word'—verbs don't need the hyphen (e.g. Let's hang out; we'll write off the car)
Last letter of a single-syllable prefix and the first letter of the word are the same vowel	Re-educate (not reeducate), de-emphasise (not deemphasise) But 'cooperate', 'coordinate' and their derivatives are no longer hyphenated

Situation	Example
Avoiding confusion	Re-covered (put a new cover on) vs. recovered (retrieved, got better), re-signed (signed again) vs. resigned (acquiescent, or left a position)

11.5.2.2 When not to use hyphens





Situation	Example
Two-syllable prefixes ending in 'o'	Macrobiotic, radioactive, retrograde
Two-syllable prefixes ending in a vowel other than 'o', followed by a consonant	Antisocial, semilunar
Two-syllable prefixes ending in a consonant	Hyperlink, interactive
Adverb–adjective combinations (mostly -ly suffix)	Wholly owned subsidiary, newly appointed officer
Well-known words unlikely to be mispronounced and those now in common use	Coordination, cooperation, ongoing, repositioned, reallocate, prearrange, wellbeing, reprint, frontline, statewide, subheading, lifelong, biennial
When describing a range [use an en dash]	Read chapters 21–25. [Not: Read chapters 21–25.]

11.5.3 En dashes


The en dash is approximately the width of a capital 'N' and acts as a linking device. It is used to:

- show a range between numbers or words
- show a relationship between words that keep their separate identities
- attach a prefix to a group of words.



11.5.3.1 Showing a range

 Your application will take 3–5 days to process.	 See pages 213–224.
 The results are in for the March–July period.	 It's a 9–5 job.

In most cases, you will not need a space on either side of the dash; however, if the information on at least one side of the dash includes a space, you should put a space on both sides of the dash.

 Brisbane – Gold Coast rail line




Note: Do **not** use an en dash with the words 'from' and 'between'.

 The show runs from 1 April – 6 May.	 The show runs from 1 April to 6 May.
---	--

 I lived in Asia between 2000–2005.	 I lived in Asia between 2000 and 2005.
--	--



11.5.3.2 Showing a relationship

If joining words that keep their separate identities, use an en dash in place of a hyphen.

 Mother–daughter relationship	 Hand–eye coordination	 Asia–Pacific region
--	---	---

11.5.3.3 Attaching a prefix

Sometimes you may wish to attach a prefix to a group of words. In this situation you can't just use a hyphen—people may make the mistake that the prefix applies to only the first word of the group.

 Pre-school age [this means 'the age of a child attending preschool']
 Pre–school age [as in 'to be younger than the age that children start to attend school']

11.5.4 Em dashes


The em dash is approximately the width of a capital 'M' and acts as a separation device. It can be used to:

- amplify or explain
- show an abrupt change
- set a phrase apart (like brackets).


Government style is to have **no space** either side.

11.5.4.1 Amplifying and explaining

An em dash can replace a colon or semicolon when expanding on or explaining a statement.


 Jenny rang to say that she wouldn't be coming in because she was sick—she said she couldn't even get out of bed.
--

11.5.4.2 Showing an abrupt change


 I have a meeting at 1pm—the details are unimportant.
--

11.5.4.3 Setting a phrase apart

A pair of em dashes can be used instead of brackets.

 Transfer duty—formerly known as stamp duty—is payable online.

It's OK to use a question mark or an exclamation mark within the parenthetical remark.

 Billy-Bob won the lottery—for the second time!—on Friday.

11.5.4.4 What not to do

Don't:

- use more than one pair of parenthetical dashes in a sentence
- place a comma after the closing dash—even if one would have gone there without the parenthetical comment.



In Australia, the winter months—June, July and August—are not as cold as those of England—December, January, and February—and snow is uncommon in some states.



Following recent tax reforms—enacted with bipartisan approval—,many people have experienced increased costs of living.

11.6 Semicolons

Semicolons are used in two ways:

- to connect related clauses that could otherwise function as separate sentences
- to punctuate run-on lists (lists in sentence form—as opposed to a bulleted or numbered list) where the list items have their own internal punctuation.

11.6.1 Related clauses

Below are some examples of the first use.



The ride lurched up and down; I felt sick.



Many people avoid using semicolons because they're not sure how to correctly use them; however, the rules are quite simple.

In both examples, the clauses on either side of the semicolon could be written as separate sentences.



The ride lurched up and down. I felt sick.



Many people avoid using semicolons because they're not sure how to correctly use them. However, the rules are quite simple.

Sometimes this is what you want. The difference is that the semicolon shows that the two clauses are connected, and when spoken aloud the pause between them would be shorter than it would be with a full stop.

If you are unsure as to whether you can use a semicolon, consider:

- Can you write the parts on either side of the semicolon as separate sentences?
- Are these parts directly related to each other?

11.6.2 Run-on lists

Consider these list items:

- Agriculture and Fisheries
- Science, Information Technology and Innovation
- Treasury.

If you were to write this list as a sentence, you couldn't use commas to separate the list items because some of the items already have commas in them.



Agriculture and Fisheries, Science, Information Technology and Innovation, and Treasury are government departments.

In this case, use semicolons to differentiate the list items.



Agriculture and Fisheries; Science, Information Technology and Innovation; and Treasury are government departments.

As you can see, the semicolons clearly delineate the separate items. Remember, semicolons are used **only when one or more list items contain commas**. If only one item has commas within it, you should still use semicolons to separate all items. Do not use semicolons when commas will suffice.

11.6.3 When not to use semicolons

Don't use semicolons:

- at the end of items in a bulleted list
- before an expansion, definition or announcement.



Correct punctuation is important; it makes reading easier.



Correct punctuation is important—it makes reading easier.

11.7 Ellipses

An ellipsis is a punctuation mark consisting of 3 dots. Use it to show an intentional omission of a word or a phrase from the original text. Use square brackets around the ellipsis to make it clear that there was no pause in the original quote.



The Treasurer said, 'the plan [...] will benefit all Queenslanders.'

11.8 Full stops

Use a full stop to mark the end of a sentence that is not an exclamation or a question.

Do **not** use full stops after:

- the end of a title of a book or other publication
- headings or subheadings
- captions or figure names
- dates or signatures
- symbols for units of measurement.

11.9 Quotation marks

Quotation marks are used mainly to show direct speech and the quoted work of other writers.




Use single quotation marks in the first instance. For quotes within quotes, use double quotation marks.



'The envelope was marked "confidential", but it was opened anyway,' the manager said.

11.10 Slashes

The slash (forward-slash or oblique) is used to indicate alternatives.




 Yes/no	 Audio/video	 Fewer than / less than
--	---	--

A space is inserted on both sides of the slash when some or all of the alternatives consist of more than one word (e.g. the ‘fewer than’ example above).

A slash is also used to form certain standard abbreviations.

 a/c (air conditioning)	 c/- (care of)
--	---

It is also used to express the words ‘per’, ‘a’, or ‘an’.

 60km/h	 12mg/d	 10L/100km
--	--	---

Note: The backslash (\) is generally not used, except in file paths.

12 Spelling

12.1 Macquarie dictionary

If you’re unsure how to spell a word, check the *Macquarie dictionary*—the standard dictionary for Australian governments. Where alternative spellings are provided, use the one listed first.

Most agencies will have access to the [Macquarie dictionary online](#). Contact your librarian or communications area if you need access.

Don’t rely on outdated, printed dictionaries because word usage changes over time.

12.2 Names

Always check the official spelling of the names of people, departments, organisations etc. We recommend using the following resources to ensure accuracy and consistency.

12.3 Department names

Check the [Queensland Government departmental websites](#) for the official names of departments and agencies.

12.3.1 Minister’s names

Check the [Queensland Cabinet and Ministerial Directory](#) for the full titles of Ministers’ names.

12.3.2 Australian place names

Check the [Geoscience Australia place names search](#) for the official spelling of Australian place names.

12.4 ‘-ise’ vs ‘-ize’

Use the ‘ise’ form for word endings, not the ‘ize’ form.

✓ Authorise	✗ Authorize
✓ Organisation	✗ Organization

12.5 Spell checkers

Spell checkers are handy in some situations but use them with caution. Spell checkers:

- may not be based on an Australian dictionary
- will not pick up words that, although spelled correctly, are incorrect in the context in which they occur in the document.

13 Tables

13.1 General guidelines

- Don't use closing punctuation in table text (unless it is a question mark). Punctuation can be used to separate sentences within a cell, but the last sentence should not have closing punctuation.
- Capitalise the first letter of the first word in a cell (unless the purpose of the table is to illustrate capitalisation rules, or you are listing scientific names—where capitals are used for the first letter of names derived from proper nouns).
- Keep a parallel structure between similar cells.
- For columns listing numbers, always right-align the text (so thousand markers and decimal places align) and use a consistent number of decimal places for each cell.
- Move units of measurement to the relevant column or row heading, so you don't have to repeat them in each cell.

Species	Min. size (cm)	Max. size (cm)	Take and possession limit
All emperors	25	-	Limit of 5 per species
Blue spotted coral trout	50	80	
Chinaman fish	-	-	'No take' species
Greasy rockcod	38	100	
Jobfish (rosy snapper and lavender snapper)	38	-	Combined limit of 8 in total for both species

13.2 Accessibility

Tables will work with assistive technologies, providing you build them with the proper HTML mark-up.

To create accessible tables you should:

- avoid complex tables (i.e. nested tables, or tables with cells that span more than one row or column)
- use tables only for tabular data (not for layout reasons)
- create a clear relationship between the data, either horizontally or vertically
- include column or row headings (or both).

If you are developing pages for www.qld.gov.au, check the [Github pattern library](#) for technical details about tables. Refer to 'Content patterns: data tables'.

13.3 Related links

- Read more about [creating accessible tables](#) on the W3C website.
- Read more about [creating accessible tables](#) on the WebAIM website.

14 Referencing

Sources of information should be acknowledged to secure your content's credibility, to inform customers, and for copyright reasons.

14.1 Author–date system

The government referencing style is the author–date system. For more detail see chapter 12 of the Australian Government's *Style manual for authors, editors and printers*.

14.1.1 In-text citations

Place the following details, in brackets, at the end of the sentence before the full stop:

- the author's name
- year of publication
- if useful to readers, the page number where the original material appeared.



One of the earliest definitions of condition was developed in relation to grazing land management of rangelands (Society of American Foresters 1944).

When the name of the author is part of the sentence, put only the date in brackets and place the citation immediately after the author's name.



Regional ecosystems were originally defined by Sattler and Williams (1999) as vegetation communities in a bioregion that are consistently associated with a particular combination of geology, landform and soil.

No full stops follow the author's or editor's initials.

Page numbers, when included, come after the date and are separated from the date using a comma. Use an en dash to show a span of pages.

When quoting page numbers, use a minimum number of numerals: 256–8; 256–64; 256–301. The exception to this rule is for numbers 10–19 (e.g. use 510–19 not 510–9).

For an in-text reference to a work with more than 3 authors, include only the name of the first-listed author, followed by the abbreviation et al.



Male palm cockatoos are highly territorial and will defend nest sites year round (Murphy et al. 2003).

14.1.2 Reference lists

Titles of all published works except periodicals take minimal (first word only) capitalisation and italics. This includes books, reports, media releases, policies, protocols, standards and guidelines.

Titles of articles and chapters of books take minimal capitalisation, and are set in roman in single quotes.

✓ Wellington, P 1995, *Kaizen strategies for customer care: How to create a powerful customer care program and make it work*, Pitman Publishing, London.

✓ Barker, J, Grigg, GC and Tyler, MJ 1995, *A field guide to Australian frogs*, Surrey Beatty and Sons, Chipping Norton.

Titles of periodicals (journals, magazines and newspapers) take maximum capitalisation (capitals for all major words) and italics.

✓ Hall, WTK 1964, 'Plant toxicoses of tropical Australia', *Australian Veterinary Journal*, vol. 40, pp. 176–82.

Titles of unpublished papers, theses, and so on, are set in roman.

When citing multiple author works in a bibliography or list of references, include the name and initials of each author.

✓ Murphy, S, Legge, S and Heinsohn, R 2003, 'The breeding biology of palm cockatoos (*Probosciger aterrimus*): a case of a slow life history', *Journal of Zoology*, vol. 261, pp. 327–39.

14.2 Electronic citations

When material is published in more than one medium, the print version is the citation preferred because it won't change, unlike an electronic one, which may become unavailable.

14.2.1 In-text citations

The in-text citation of a website using the author–date system includes:

- the name of the author (the person or organisation responsible for the site)
- the site date (the date the site was created or most recently updated).

✓ Research tells us parent and community engagement that is effectively focused on student learning can deliver powerful outcomes (OECD, 2011).

14.2.2 Footnotes

Superscript links can be used with in-text references to refer customers to the full reference at the end of the page.

✓ The Salinity Risk Assessment Framework (Grundy et al. 2007¹)

✓ ¹ Grundy MJ, Silburn DM, Chamberlain T 2007, 'A risk framework for preventing salinity', *Environmental Hazards*, vol. 7, pp.97–105.

14.2.3 Reference lists

Details required for a full bibliographic reference are:

- the name of the author (the person or organisation responsible for the site)
- the site date (the date the site was created or most recently updated)
- name of the resource
- URL of the site
- date of viewing the resource.

When citing URLs, copy the location exactly, taking care with punctuation and case. If you need to break a URL across lines, do so only at a punctuation separator.

In running text, enclose the URL in pointed brackets (<>) to avoid confusion with the sentence punctuation.

Reference source	Reference style
Website document—institutional author	OECD, 2011, 'What can parents do to help their children succeed in school?' PISA In Focus, 2011/10, http://www.oecd.org/pisa/49012097.pdf , accessed July 2015.
Website document—individual author	Nielsen, J 2009, <i>First 2 words: A signal for the scanning eye</i> , < https://www.nngroup.com/articles/first-2-words-a-signal-for-scanning/ > accessed May 2013.
Electronic journal articles	Murray, CJL, King, G, Lopez, AD, Tomijima, N & Krug, EG 2002, 'Armed conflict as a public health problem', <i>British Medical Journal</i> , Feb. 2002, viewed 8 February, 2002
CD-ROM	Prime Notes 2005, CD-ROM, Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Queensland.
Film, video or other recording	<i>The Caretakers—pastoral property planning</i> 1989, video recording, Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Toowoomba.
Databases	As a minimum, provide details of the title, producer, the term database (if this is not clear from the title) and the frequency of updating. Useful additional information includes version number, timespan covered, hardware and software requirements, etc.
Emails and other personal correspondence While they must be cited in text, it is not necessary to cite the details of personal communications in a bibliography Do not cite an email address without prior permission from the owner	In text: White, B 2000, email, 28 March If citing in full in a bibliography, use the formula: White, B 2000, email, 28 March, bwhite@bigpond.net.au.

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