

Quick reference guide to the Australian Public Service Style Manual



The updated Australian Public Service Style Manual focuses on making government communication simple, clear and consistent. It is the first online manual and includes new guidance specifically for digital communication. To help you apply the new manual at AFSA, [the Communications and Stakeholder Engagement team](#) have prepared this quick reference guide.

Capitalisation

Use minimal capitalisation to make content easier to read.

For example:

In 'The Bankruptcy Report', capitalise the full name and then refer to the lower case noun 'report' thereafter.

- Use an initial capital for the word 'government' if it is part of a formal name. Use lower case everywhere else.
- Follow [the rules of capitalisation for government terms](#).
- Do not use all capitals for headings. Minimise capitals for common nouns and adjectives.
- Check the manual for [guidance on when to use proper and common names by topic](#). If still in doubt, check the the Australian concise Oxford dictionary or the Macquarie dictionary.

Follow the conventions in the manual for using capitals for titles, honours and forms of address

- Use capitals when an official title precedes the name of the office holder.
- Use capitals when using the terms 'traditional owner', 'elder' and 'custodian'. Titles should come directly from [the relevant First Nations community](#).

Legal material has its own conventions for capitalisation.

Content that has a legislative focus might use complementary sources to [the guidance on citing legal material in the manual](#).

Ampersands

Avoid using ampersands unless they are part of a company name, trademark, or financial market.

Australian Public Service Style Manual, www.stylemanual.gov.au

Punctuation

Use minimal punctuation to make meaning clear.

Too much punctuation makes text crowded and difficult to read. **Check the Manual for [advice on how to treat each punctuation mark](#).**

Commas

Commas separate parts of a sentence so meaning is clear to users. [Use commas when the sentence structure and plain English supports their use](#).

Use commas to separate in-sentence list items.

Semi colons

[Semicolons can complicate sentences for users if overused](#). Use a bullet or numbered list instead of semicolons in a complex sentence.

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

Choosing numerals or words

Use numerals for '2' and above, and write the numbers 'zero' and 'one' in words.

Exceptions

Use words for numbers when:

- starting a sentence
- writing a publication title that includes a number written as a word
- writing a proper noun that includes a number written as a word – for example, the film 'The Three Stooges' does not become 'The 3 Stooges.'

In addition, **use words for numbers below 10 for government content that follows journalistic conventions** (for example, media releases).

Dashes

En dashes

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

Use them rarely to use them effectively – for example, to draw attention to a new and important detail for your main idea.

It is recommended to use words instead of an en dash to link spans of numbers.

For example:

- Monday to Friday (not Monday-Friday)
- 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. (not 9-5)

Em dashes

Em dashes (—) are not Australian Government style.

Hyphens

Hyphens

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

There are few firm rules about using hyphens, and dictionaries do not always agree. Refer to [the Manual](#) for detailed guidance on the points below:

- [Hyphens are useful in some sets of words formed with prefixes](#), such as: 'anti-' and 'auto-'
- [Write most suffixes without hyphens](#). For example, 'readable' and 'colourful'
- [Hyphenate some but not all compound words](#). For example, 'the accounts are up to date' not 'the up-to-date accounts'
- [Don't hyphenate '-ing' and '-ed' verbs or most '-ly' adverbs](#). For example, 'a fully loaded truck' not 'a fully-loaded truck'.

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Quotations

Use single quotation marks. Double quotation marks aren't Australian Government style. Use them only for quotations within quotations.

Quotes

Write most direct speech in single quote marks, and use single quote marks to:

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

Double quotation marks aren't Australian Government style. [Use them only for quotations within quotations.](#)

[Use block quotes with no quotation marks for long quotes.](#)

Acronyms and initialisms

Use shortened forms only when this choice supports plain English.

If the shortened form represents a proper noun, start each word with a capital letter.

For example:

'NSW' is written out as 'New South Wales'.

If the shortened form represents a common noun, do not begin each word of the full form with a capital letter.

For example:

'EIS' is written out as 'environmental impact statement'.

Australian Public Service Style Manual, www.stylemanual.gov.au

Lists

Lists should make it easy to scan and understand a series of items. **Structure and style lists with the reader in mind and use minimal capitalisation and punctuation.**

There are 3 different ways to structure lists:

Fragment lists

Use these when the lead-in states the grammatical subject.

If you add each fragment to the lead-in, it will make a complete sentence.

For example:

Queensland is famous for its:

- islands and coral reefs
- abundant wildlife
- tropical rainforest.

Sentence lists

Each sentence is marked by bullets or numbers.

Sentence lists can have a:

- heading without a colon
- fragment lead-in with a colon
- sentence lead-in that ends in a full stop, meaning that if you add each fragment to the lead-in, it will make a complete sentence.

For example:

The committee members decided the following actions:

- The committee secretary will respond to each recommendation.
- The secretary will allocate responses that need more work to members.
- Members will discuss the recommendations at the next committee meeting on 9 March.

Lists

Stand-alone lists

List sentence fragments (not full sentences) and have a heading without a colon.

Rules for stand-alone lists:

- use a heading, not a lead-in
- start each fragment with a capital letter
- don't add full stops to the end of any of the fragments (even the last item)
- indent each list item if it helps people scan the content.

For example:

My weekly tasks

- Answering phone enquiries
- Booking conference venues

Dates and times

Write, abbreviate and punctuate dates and times consistently.

Following these rules for times and dates, and also [refer to the detailed instructions in the manual:](#)

- use numbers for the time of day
- in general, use numbers for the day and the year but spell out the month in words
- don't include a comma or any other punctuation in dates, for example 'Friday 31 October 2020'
- don't shorten dates in text
- don't use ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc)
- use 'from' and 'to' in spans of years.