

Guide for Writing in Plain English

Writing in plain English means using simple and direct language.

The benefits are:

- It helps your audience understand content the first time they read it.
- It helps people make decisions.
- It removes ambiguity.
- It builds trust and confidence.

Writing in plain English is not just for audiences with limited literacy. Plain English principles are relevant for all writing, whether your audience is a minister who needs to make a quick, informed decision or a job seeker who wants to access services.

Always consider your audience and ask yourself:

- Do I think I would understand if I was that person?
- Am I assuming that my audience knows something?
- What do they actually need to know?

For guidance on the department's style see the [writing style guide](#).

Note that the examples in this guide are made up; they are not intended to be factual.

Basic rules for writing in plain English

- Avoid jargon and technical terms.
- Use short sentences and everyday words. It's better to use several short sentences than a long sentence broken up with punctuation.
- Try to stick to one idea per sentence.
- Avoid acronyms that aren't well known.
- If there is a simpler or shorter way of saying something, use it.
- If you need to use a complicated term that your audience might not know, explain what it means.

How to write effective sentences

1. Use active voice.

Active voice means using the 'subject-verb-object' structure. Your sentence should ideally have a subject, and it should come before the verb.

Instead of this	Write this
The man was bitten by the dog.	The dog bit the man.
The job seekers were congratulated by the Minister.	The Minister congratulated the job seekers.
There are three objectives proposed to guide the work of the committee.	The committee members proposed three objectives to guide their work.
Data analysis was performed to determine the extent of the problem.	The team analysed the data to determine the extent of the problem.

Other terms to watch out for: '[insert subject here] launched the program' instead of 'the program was launched'; '[insert subject here] reviewed the report' instead of 'the report was reviewed'; '[insert subject here] helped the job seekers' instead of 'the job seekers were assisted'; '[insert subject here] will give you (something)' instead of 'you will be given (something)'.

You might need to use passive voice if you don't know who was responsible for an action, for example 'Three reams of paper have been taken from the cupboard'.

2. Avoid words that end in 'ion' or 'ing' if you could use a verb instead.

In other words, avoid turning verbs into nouns.

Instead of this	Write this
The Government carried out an evaluation of the program in 2017.	The Government evaluated the program in 2017.
Publication of the tender outcomes will occur in March.	The department will publish the results of the tender in March.

Instead of this	Write this
In the planning of the event menu, we will give consideration to dietary requirements of our guests.	We will consider our guests' dietary requirements when we plan the menu.

Other terms to watch out for: 'the introduction of' (use 'introduce'), 'the running of' (use 'run'), 'the management of' (use 'manage'), 'a description of' (use 'describe'), 'the provision of' (use 'provide' or 'give').

3. Delete words you don't need.

Most of the time you don't need more words to get a message across. Many of the words we use are redundant.

Instead of this	Write this
I briefly summarised the content of the email for my manager.	I summarised the email for my manager. ('Briefly' is already implied by the word 'summarised'.)
The information contained in this email is confidential.	This email is confidential.
Assistance is available through the program to facilitate payment of costs associated with moving.	The program can help you with moving costs.

Other terms to look out for: 'a period of time' (use 'time'), 'critically important' (use 'important' or 'critical'), 'currently underway' (use 'underway'), 'relevant stakeholders' (use 'stakeholders').

4. Avoid vague words and references.

- Be careful with 'this', 'these', 'they', 'which', 'their', 'his', 'her' or 'its'. Make sure it's clear who or what you are referring to.
- Avoid using 'this' or 'these' alone at the start of a sentence. Instead write 'this problem', 'these proposals' etc.
- Avoid vague terms such as 'a number of factors', 'several aspects', 'in the area of', 'in certain situations' and 'in a range of cases'.

Instead of this	Write this
<p>A number of CEOs from well-known businesses in the hospitality industry will be in attendance at the meeting as well as chief financial officers and business managers from their organisations. They will present on a number of topics relevant to the meeting theme.</p>	<p>'They' is ambiguous. Instead write:</p> <p>CEOs from several well-known businesses will present at the meeting. Chief financial officers and business managers will also attend.</p>
<p>A variety of factors are currently making a contribution to unemployment levels in young people in Australia, and these are in addition to the future challenges posed by the changing nature of work.</p>	<p>Be specific about the 'factors' or leave the reference out completely:</p> <p>The changing nature of work will create new challenges for youth unemployment in Australia.</p>

5. Avoid convoluted or complicated sentences.

- Don't try to fit too many concepts into one sentence.
- If a sentence has a lot of commas it's a sign it might be too long.
- Try not to start a sentence with words like 'through', 'where', 'when', 'in', 'by', 'there are' or 'it is' if you could get to the point more directly.
- Don't place a comma between a subject and its verb.
- Avoid noun strings: for example 'the business has an employee engagement improvement program' could be 'the business has a program to improve employee engagement'.

Instead of this	Write this
<p>Implementing the recently-announced initiative that will decrease the number of people not meeting their participation requirements or attending appointments without a reasonable explanation, is a priority for the branch in the coming year.</p> <p>(Note that in this sentence the comma comes between the subject and the verb: 'implementing the initiative' and 'is'.)</p>	<p>One of the branch's priorities this year is to implement the XXXX initiative [give a specific name or say 'a new compliance initiative']. This initiative will....</p>
<p>Through analysing the available research and data and speaking with relevant stakeholders, the department has devised and proposed a number of recommendations, to improve the outcomes of the program.</p>	<p>The department has analysed data, research and advice from stakeholders and has put forward recommendations to improve the program.</p>

Plain English words and terms

Use the following list to help you write simple sentences. This list is a guide only; consider your audience and the tone you want to achieve. For example the word 'assist' might be fine for an internal minute, but 'help' would be better for web content aimed a job seeker.

Instead of this	Write this
a number of	some, many, few
adequate number of	enough
aggregate	total
as a consequence of	because
ascertain	find out
assist/assistance	help
arrange	set up
cognisant of	aware of, know
commence	begin, start
complete	do or finish
concerning	about
consequently	so
due to the fact that	because
enhance	improve or make better
ensure	make sure
establish	create, set up
examine	look at, check
facilitate	help
give consideration to	think about, consider
identify	set, create, decide on, know, recognise

Instead of this	Write this
I have capacity to	I can
impact upon	affect
implement	apply, do
in accordance with	in line with
in excess of	more than
inform or advise you	let you know (unless formal)
in order to	to
in receipt of	get, have, receive, receiving
in regard to	on or about
in relation to	about
in the event of, in the event that	when, if
it should be noted that	note that, remember
leverage	use, build on
make an application	apply
make a complaint	complain
maintain	keep or stay
obtain	get, have
on a daily basis	daily
outcome	result, or describe what the outcome is, e.g. a job
participant	person, job seeker
participate	take part
persons	people
prior to	before
primary	main
provide a response to	respond to
provide assistance	help

Instead of this	Write this
pursuant to	under
reach a decision	decide
subsequently	after
the way in which	how
throughout	in
through the provision of	by providing
undertake	do
upon	on
utilise	use
within	in
with reference to, with regard to, with respect to	about, regarding
you are required to/it is a requirement that	you need to, you must, we will ask you to

Writing Style Guide

Published 25/07/2024

The department uses the [Australian Government Style Manual](#) as the main guide for writing for the department. This is the standard for all Australian Government writing and editing. If you write, edit or approve Australian Government content, use this guide to create clear and consistent content that meets the needs of all users.

Additionally, we encourage the use of plain English to help communicate more effectively. Please consult the [Guide for Writing in Plain English](#) for more information.

Having a consistent style makes our writing easier to understand and more credible. Use common sense; always consider your audience and the medium you are writing for when applying the advice in the guide.

Other writing guides

Some types of writing have specific rules that take precedence over this writing guide:

If you are writing a ministerial or brief, contact Parliamentary@dewr.gov.au for assistance.

Ministers' offices may have their own style preferences on ministerial products such as media releases.

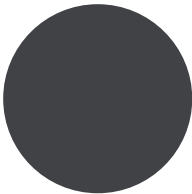


Australian Government
Department of Employment
and Workplace Relations

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

Colour palettes and fonts

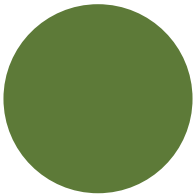
Primary colour palette



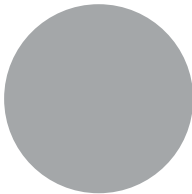
Graphite
C70, M62, Y56, K43
R64, G66, B70
Hex #404246



Eucalyptus
C58, M20, Y91, K3
R122, G159, B76
Hex #7A9F4C



Dark Eucalyptus
C66, M33, Y98, K17
R93, G122, B56
Hex #5D7A38



Grey
C38, M29, Y29, K0
R164, G167, B169
Hex #A4A7A9



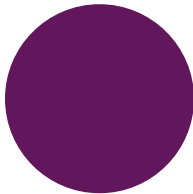
Mid grey
C15, M11, Y11, K0
R215, G216, B216
Hex #D7D8D8

Tints 10–90%



The primary colours should be the dominant palette for all print and digital assets. This will ensure DEWR maintains a consistent visual identity. These colours have been specifically chosen for practical reasons including legibility, contrast ratios and accessibility requirements. The tints can be used for graphic elements, infographics, illustrations, charts, diagrams and headers on dark backgrounds.

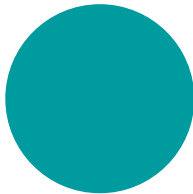
Secondary colour palette



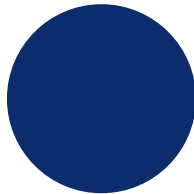
Plum
C66, M100, Y32, K23
R98, G22, B92
Hex #62165C



Lime
C26, M1, Y100, K10
R181, G196, B39
Hex #B5C427



Teal
C81, M19, Y39, K1
R0, G155, B159
Hex #009B9F



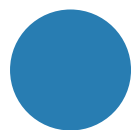
Navy
C100, M85, Y5, K36
R13, G44, B108
Hex #0D2C6C

Tints 10–90%



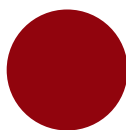
These colours support the primary palette and can be used in a 50:50 ratio with one or more of the primary colours. The secondary palette and tints can be used for graphic elements, infographics, illustrations, charts, diagrams and typeset documents where additional colours are required. These should not be used as the dominant colour scheme.

Tertiary colour palette



Blue

C82, M44, Y11, K0
R40, G125, B178
Hex #287DB2



Red

C0, M100, Y94, K47
R145, G4, B13
Hex #91040D



Cobalt

C100, M75, Y0, K6
R0, G79, B157
Hex #004F9D



Purple

C82, M97, Y0, K0
R87, G51, B147
Hex #573393

Tints 10–90%



Yellow

C8, M35, Y100, K0
R233, G169, B19
Hex #E9A913



Pink

C15, M68, Y23, K0
R211, G113, B144
Hex #D37190



Mint

C66, M0, Y39, K0
R71, G191, B175
Hex #47BFAF



Orange

C0, M76, Y99, K0
R242, G99, B34
Hex #F26322







Tints 10–90%













The tertiary colours and tints can be used for graphic elements, infographics, illustrations, charts and diagrams. This palette should be used to aid content visibility in various applications. These should not be used as the dominant colour scheme.

Accessibility

Primary palette

-  Graphite and White
AAA
-  Graphite and 82% tint Eucalyptus
AA Normal text
-  Eucalyptus and White
AA Large text only
-  Dark Eucalyptus and White
AA Normal text
-  Grey and Graphite
AA Large text only
-  Mid grey and Graphite
AAA

Secondary palette

-  Plum and White
AAA
-  Plum and Mid grey
AAA
-  Plum and Lime
AA Normal text
-  Plum and Teal
AA Large text only
-  Lime and Graphite
AA Normal text
-  Lime and Navy
AA Normal text
-  Teal and White
AA Large text only
-  Teal and Navy
AA Large text only
-  Navy and White
AAA
-  Navy and Mid grey
AAA

Australian Government agencies are required to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA, which includes Level A. WCAG 2.0 level AA requires a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large text. WCAG Level AAA requires a contrast ratio of at least 7:1 for normal text and 4.5:1 for large text. Large text is defined as 14 point (typically 18.66px) and bold or larger, or 18 point (typically 24px) or larger.

Fonts

Design font – Montserrat

abcdefghijklmnop
pqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890@#?&

**abcdefghijklmnop
pqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890@#?&**

Montserrat is a display font with a variety of weights, suitable for headers, social media and text-light assets.

It can be used for **designed** documents, publications and other print and digital collateral.

Design font – Myriad Pro

abcdefghijklmnop
pqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890@#?&

**abcdefghijklmnop
pqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890@#?&**

Myriad Pro is a semi-condensed, sans serif font suitable for headers, body copy and text-heavy assets.

It can be used for **designed** documents, publications and other print and digital collateral.

In-house font – Aptos

abcdefghijklmnop
pqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890@#?&

**abcdefghijklmnop
pqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890@#?&**

Aptos is a standard, modern sans serif font suitable for print and digital collateral.

It can be used for **in-house** documents and Microsoft Office applications.