

# How we write

Our aim is to create communication products that are accessible for everyone. This means we use straightforward, familiar language wherever possible.

## On this page

- [Audience](#)
  - [Plain English](#)
  - [Readability](#)
  - [Technical language](#)
  - [Shorter sentences](#)
  - [Active voice](#)
  - [When to use passive voice](#)
  - [Pronouns](#)
  - [Redundant words](#)
  - [Inclusive language](#)
  - [References to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#)
  - [New Zealand Māori](#)
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## Audience

Your writing will be most effective if you understand who you're writing for. For multiple audiences, make your writing as easy to read as possible so everyone can understand it.

## Plain English

Plain English isn't about dumbing down content. Writing clearly, simply and concisely helps readers understand your message the first time they read it. This point is crucial.

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 – so it's important we keep language as simple as possible.

**Use:** We will implement the project

**Not:** We will be responsible for the implementation of the project

Stuck for a word? Check out the Plain English Campaign's [A-Z list of alternative words](#).

## Readability

Readability is a reflection of Plain English and how easy content is easy to understand. The Australian Government Style Manual's [writing style guide](#) tells us we should aim for a reading level of Year 7 (age range 12 to 14) and includes links to commonly used readability tools.

As we reference a lot of scientific terms, this will be very difficult for us to achieve. The words aren't used in everyday English and have high syllables. We must strive for a **readability score of 60 or as close as possible**. This equates to a reading **Grade level of year 9**.

**Remember:** the higher the readability score the better. The lower the grade level score the better. The grade level score reflects the readability of your content.

## Technical language

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

However, you will need to simplify your language when explaining technical concepts to general audiences.

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.

## Shorter sentences

A longer sentence is harder to understand than a shorter one. We get to the core message in a more pleasant way using short sentences.

The length of the sentence determines how difficult they are to understand.

- **Fairly difficult**, medium long sentence length: 21-25 words
- **Difficult**, Long sentence length: 25-30 words

- **Very Difficult**, very long sentence length: 30-40 words
- **Extremely difficult**, extremely long sentence length: 40+ words

## One thought one sentence

Avoid using lots of commas and sub-clauses. The idea of the sentence may get confused and this will lose the reader. Instead, express one thought per sentence. This will also help you figure out what you really want to say.

## Using lists

Instead of listing things in a sentence, use bullet points instead. They're easier for the eye to scan, and gives the items space to breathe on the page.

## Aim for less than 5%

A variety adds to pleasant reading. But we should aim for an average of less than 5%. Research shows this is the ideal level for ease of reading.

### Example 1:

The Code is enforced by state and territory departments, agencies and local councils in Australia; the Ministry for Primary Industries in New Zealand and the Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources for food imported into Australia.

VisibleThread readability scores:

- Long sentences: 1
- Readability score: 0
- Grade level: 22.8

### Could be rewritten to

All of the following enforces the code:

- state and territory departments
- agencies and local councils in Australia
- the Ministry for Primary Industries in New Zealand
- the Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources for food imported into Australia.

VisibleThread readability scores:

- Long sentences: 0
- Readability score: 26
- Grade level: 11.4

### Example 2:

FSANZ has developed information on a range of topics of interest to consumers, which appear in the left hand menu. If you can't find what you're looking for or if you're after something specific, try using our search box above. In addition, feel free to [email us](#) if you have any feedback or suggestions.

VisibleThread readability scores

- Long sentences: 2
- Readability score: 60
- Grade level: 9.3

### Could be rewritten to:

We've developed information on a range of topics appearing on the left hand menu. If you can't find what you're looking for, try using our search function. It can help you find something specific. We're always welcoming feedback and suggestions. Feel free to [contact us](#).

VisibleThread readability scores:

- Long sentences: 0
- Readability score: 67
- Grade level: 6

## Active voice

We use active voice, subject-verb-object. Use first and second person such as we and us. Avoid use of third person such as, FSANZ, he, she, it and they.

Active voice gets straight to the point:

- Judy wrote the report.

Avoid passive voice, object-verb-subject. Passive voice usually makes it difficult to know who did what to whom and sends the reader backwards:

- The report was written by Judy.

## When to use passive voice

While you should aim to make most of your writing active, passive voice is common in scientific writing to describe processes rather than the people conducting them:

- The rate of hydrogen production was increased by 25%.

## Pronouns

When writing for the web or developing promotional material (articles, fact sheets, speeches and presentations) using personal pronouns for example 'you' and 'we' is a simple way to build rapport with your readers and make government language sound friendly and helpful.

Using personal pronouns such as you and we is a simple way to build rapport with your readers. It makes government language sound friendly and helpful. This is evident when writing for web or developing promotional materials such as:

- articles
- fact sheets
- speeches
- presentations.

We need to talk *to* our readers, not *about* them. Readers respond to 'you'. It makes the organisation seem approachable and makes it clear when they have to take notice or complete an action.

Use: 'You can sign-up for email alerts from our subscription page'

Not: 'Interested parties wishing to receive email alerts can do so from the FSANZ subscription page'

For official documents including approval reports for applications and proposals you should continue to use FSANZ for clarity.

## Redundant words

Effective writing thrives on the 'less is more' principle, so look for any opportunity to shed excess words. Stuck for a word? Check out the Plain English Campaign's [A-Z list of alternative words](#).

Instead of	Say
at a later date	later
at this moment in time	now
collaborate together	collaborate
conducting an investigation	investigating
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
take a look	look
take into consideration	consider
with regard to	about

## Inclusive language

You need to take into account 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.

Terms to avoid	Acceptable language
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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 disability
Blind, the blind, the visually impaired	Vision-impaired, person who is blind, person with 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, deaf  The deaf—this refers to people who identify as part of the deaf community and who use sign language. Using 'deaf community' is only appropriate when referring to this particular community.
Deaf and dumb, deaf-mute	Person who is deaf and non-verbal, person with multiple disabilities

## References to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Refer to the Australia Government Style Manual's [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples page](#).

## New Zealand Māori

When referring to New Zealand's Māori, the first letter should similarly be capitalised, i.e. Māori. Māori should also be marked up correctly with an 'ā' macron (available in the symbol tab in Word – for consistency select font: Arial subset: extended-A).

## Related pages

- [Writing and editing guide home](#)
- [Writing for the web](#)
- [Grammar and punctuation](#)
- [FSANZ specific requirements](#)