

BRAND & GRAPHIC DESIGN

# Writing style manual

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# Writing style manual



At AMSA, we often deal with complex information that needs to be communicated clearly to the public. Well-designed content, written in plain English enhances our reputation and ensures we are perceived as a reliable authority.

We follow the [Australian Government Style Manual](#) (Style Manual) for general writing advice and standards for non-technical documents such as emails, documents, reports, articles, speeches and website content. We also make use of the guidance provided in the [Content Strategy Guide](#).

The Style Manual will help you produce clear and simple content. Rather than duplicating this content, below you'll find key tips and links to specific pages to help you get started. In addition, there is also AMSA-specific advice, to compliment the Style Manual.



Australian Government Style  
Manual

## See these pages for guidance on:

### [Writing in plain English](#)

To write in plain English means to write concisely, using familiar words. It is writing that is free of jargon, thoughtfully structured and has a clear message.

The Style Manual recommends you write to a reading level – after the removal of proper names and titles – of Year 7 (age range 12 to 14 years). Using [literacy statistics](#), this means around 83% of the Australian population is likely to understand your content.

Reading your draft out loud is an easy way to identify sentences that are unclear or too long.

### [Structuring content](#)

Design content with a structure that helps the user navigate and understand.

### [Grammar, punctuation and conventions](#)

### Inclusive language

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

### Government terms

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

### Names and terms

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

## ^ **Tone of voice**

Engaging, confident, inclusive, action-orientated, authentic and clear.

A consistent tone of voice is essential for our content so it reads like it is coming from a single source - AMSA and is united with the Australian Government digital service standard.

Our content must meet the needs of diverse audiences with differing levels of literacy and education and who use languages other than English in their communications.

Our audiences are largely not familiar with the language of government or our jargon, so we need to present content that is easy for everyone to understand.

Our content should make complex information simple for all our readers to understand, rather than regurgitating legislations, regulations and other technical resources.

Depending on who you're writing for and on what channel, you can choose from 3 tones of voice.

<b>Tone</b>	<b>How to use</b>	<b>Channels</b>
Standard tone	Can use contractions and personal pronouns	AMSA websites Emails and letters

Tone	How to use	Channels
Formal tone	Doesn't use contractions and often uses third person	Legal writing, policies, reports and ministerial letters
Informal tone	Informal tone uses contractions and personal pronouns	AMSA's social media channels

The Communication team specialises in writing for audiences, please [contact us](#) if you want advice or help with producing content.

## ^ Acknowledgement of Country

### What is an Acknowledgement of Country?

An Acknowledgement of Country recognises and pays respect to the Aboriginal peoples on whose country or ancestral land you are meeting. This can be delivered by (usually) the convenor of the meeting or gathering.

An Acknowledgement of Country is usually delivered when opening meetings and events. It should be delivered at significant/large internal meetings or meetings with external participants. This includes AMSA-hosted stakeholder meetings, events and forums, organisation-wide meetings, divisional meetings, and inter-departmental meetings.

The below guidance from the [National Indigenous Australians Agency](#) regarding Acknowledgement of Country.

### Generic Acknowledgement of Country

If you don't know the name of the people on whose land you are gathered, or if there are disputes about the land (i.e. multiple Aboriginal peoples identify as Traditional Custodians for that area), you can use this wording:

'I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we <gather/meet> today and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.'

## Specific Acknowledgement of Country

This can be used where there are no disputes, and you know the name of the people on whose land you are gathered. If you're unsure on whose Country you are meeting, take a look at this list.

'I would like to begin by acknowledging the <insert name of people here (e.g. Ngunnawal)> people, Traditional Custodians of the land on which we <gather/meet> today, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.'

## General

### Australia-wide webinar/ website/ printed material

'In the spirit of reconciliation, the [organisation] acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.'

### Virtual meetings

Example if hosted from Canberra – adjust for your region as needed

'I acknowledge that I am hosting this session from the lands of the Ngunnawal people (Canberra). I also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which you all work today and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in this session. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of Australia.'

## ^ Gendered language alternatives

Gendered noun	Gender-neutral noun
man	person, individual

Gendered noun	Gender-neutral noun
mankind	people, human beings, humanity
freshman	first-year student
man-made	machine-made, synthetic, artificial
the common man	the average person
chairman	chair, chairperson, coordinator, head
mailman	mail carrier, letter carrier, postal worker
policeman	police officer
steward, stewardess	flight attendant
actor, actress	actor
congressman	legislator, congressional representative
Sir (in "Dear Sir," etc.)	Dear Sir or Madam, Dear Editor, Dear Members of the Search Committee, To Whom it May Concern

## ^ AMSA terms

Title case = the principle words are capitalised.

Sentence case = first word and proper nouns are capitalised.

Term	Preferred spelling, usage or capitalisation
aids to navigation (AtoN)	Use sentence case

Term	Preferred spelling, usage or capitalisation
AMSA Executive/ the executive	<p>Sentence case except when referring to the 'Australian Maritime Safety Authority Executive' or AMSA Executive.</p> <p>For example: <i>the AMSA Executive agreed. The executive also stated ...</i></p> <p>When referring to exact titles of a person's position use capitals.</p> <p>For example: <i>said Mick Kinley, AMSA Chief Executive Officer. The chief executive officer said ....</i></p>
AMSA Search and Rescue	Use capitals if using as a proper noun, but search and rescue for general usage, such as <i>search and rescue operations</i> .
Australian 406 MHz Distress Beacon Register	Use capitals if using full title.
Australian General Shipping Register	Use cpaitals if using full title.
Battery-powered vessel	Compound adjective: <i>I have a battery-powered vessel</i> . When used as a noun no hyphen: <i>My vessel is battery powered</i> .
certificate of competency	<p>Use capitals only when you are using the full title of the certificate. Otherwise use sentence case.</p> <p>For example: <i>Certificate of Competency (General Purpose Hand)</i>. <i>The general-purpose hand certificate will allow you to ...</i></p> <p>Note the use of a hyphen if the term is used as an adjective. This makes the sentence easier to comprehend.</p>
certificate of operation	Use sentence case certificate of operation.
certificates of survey	Use sentence case certificate of survey.
class C restricted operations	<p>Use sentence case but uppercase 'C' for the class of operations (this just makes it easier to understand).</p> <p>For example: <i>apply for class C restricted operations</i>.</p>
coronial report	Use sentence case.

Term	Preferred spelling, usage or capitalisation
differential global positioning system (DGPS)	Use sentence case. In the first instance write it as <i>differential global positioning system (DGPS)</i> in full, then every time thereafter as DGPS.
e-navigation	Sentence case. Hyphenate.
email	Not e-mail.
engine room	Use sentence case. Two words, not hyphenated.
exemptions	Use title case when writing out the full exemption, use <i>exemption 2</i> in short.  For example: Exemption 2—Marine Safety (Certificates of survey). <i>When applying for exemption 2 ...</i>
Far North Queensland	Title case. No hyphens.
fixed-wing aircraft	Hyphenated.
flag State control (FSC)	Always uppercase S: flag State control. In the first instance write it as flag State control (FSC) in full, then every time thereafter as FSC.
float-free EPIRBs	Lower case and hyphenated float-free.  EPIRBs is an acronym.
flotation	not floatation
focused, focusing	Not focussed, focussing.
foreign-flagged	Hyphenate for easier understanding if used as an adjective.
form/forms	When talking about AMSA forms, a lower case f should be used. e.g. AMSA form 426.
forward looking infra-red (FLIR)	Sentence case. In the first instance write it as <i>forward looking infra-red (FLIR)</i> in full, then every time thereafter as FLIR.
human-powered vessel	Sentence case and hyphenated: human-powered when used as an adjective.
Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC)	Title case when using full term. Otherwise, use lower case.  For example: <i>the AMSA Joint Rescue Coordination Centre sent out a search response. The coordination centre then reported ...</i>



Term	Preferred spelling, usage or capitalisation
laser airborne depth sounder (LADS)	Always lower case. In the first instance write it as <i>laser airborne depth sounder (LADS)</i> in full, then every time thereafter as LADS.
Laws, legislation, government programs and other government related terms	<p>Use title case for titles of publications, policies, programs, books, films, photographs, TV programs, paintings, songs and albums.</p> <p>Do not use italics for legislation.</p> <p>Capitalise the principal words only. Exceptions are when the title begins with a, for, on, to and so on.</p> <p>For example: <i>The National System for Domestic Commercial Vessel Safety ... At the implementation of the national system.</i></p> <p>For example: <i>Marine Order 44 (Safe containers) 2019. When applying for marine order 44 ...</i></p> <p>See the following sections in the DTA guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">guide for legislation, titles, policies, programs and so on</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">guide for italics</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">guide for government</a></li> </ul>
legally binding	Not hyphenated legally-binding. Legally binding at the start of a sentence.
life raft	Two words.
lifejacket	One word.
load line	Two words.
long-range identification and tracking (LRIT)	Sentence case. In the first instance write it out in full: <i>long-range identification and tracking (LRIT)</i> , then every time thereafter as LRIT.
marine notice, marine order and exemption	Lower case except when the full title is used then use title case.
marine order	Lower case except when the full title or abbreviated form is used then use title case. Example: Marine Order 97. Italicise as per Acts of government (see use of <a href="#">italics in the Style Manual</a> ).

Term	Preferred spelling, usage or capitalisation
Maritime Emergency Response Commander (MERCOT)	As with executive. Use 'the MERCOT' after first usage.
maritime safety information (MSI)	Sentence case. In the first instance write it as maritime safety information (MSI) in full and every instance after can be referred to as MSI.
memorandum of understanding (MOU)	Sentence case. Plural = memoranda of understanding.
National Marine Safety Regulator (national regulator)	Title case when referring to the full title. In the first instance write it as National Marine Safety Regulator (national regulator) in full, then every time thereafter as national regulator.
National Maritime Emergency Response Arrangements (NMEMA)	Title case when referring to full title. In the first instance write it as National Maritime Emergency Response Arrangements (NMEMA) in full, then every time thereafter as NMEMA.
National Plan	Title case. National Plan for Environmental Emergencies, National Plan. Don't ask why—I was not privy to those discussions.
National Seafarers Welfare Advisory Council (NSWAC)	National Seafarers Welfare Advisory Council (NSWAC) in full, then every time thereafter as NSWAC.
National Plan Management Committee (NPMC)	National Plan Management Committee. In the first instance write it as National Plan Management Committee (NPMC) in full, then every time thereafter as NPMC.
non-survey	Hyphenated.
occupational health and safety (OHS)	Sentence case. In the first instance write it as occupational health and safety (OHS) in full, then every time thereafter as OHS.
official designated shipping areas	Sentence case.
on board	Two words when used as a preposition + noun, for example: All passengers are on board the vessel. <i>Onboard</i> when used as an adjective, for example: onboard computer.

Term	Preferred spelling, usage or capitalisation
on site	Preposition + noun. Onsite when used as an adjective.
Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA)	In the first instance write it as Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) in full, then every time thereafter as PSSA.
personal flotation device (PFD)	Use sentence case. In the first instance write it as personal flotation device (PFD) in full and every instance after can be referred to as PFD.
personal watercraft	Not abbreviated.
port State control (PSC)	Always uppercase S: port State control. In the first instance write it as port State control (PSC) in full, then every time thereafter as PSC.
port welfare committee (PWC) program	Not programme.
remotely operated and autonomous vessels	No longer referring to unmanned and autonomous vessels.
routeing	Not routing when referring to ships
safety management system	Use sentence case.
search and rescue (SAR)	In the first instance write it as search and rescue (SAR) in full and every instance after can be referred to as SAR.
search and rescue officer	Uppercase if title of a person, for example Search and Rescue Officer Bill Smith
subcommittee, subcontract	Sub-Committee if written that way in a formal name, for example IMO Sub-Committee for...
the Coroner	Not the coroner. Always uppercase.
time frame	Time frame is two words, not timeframe.
Torres Strait Marine Safety Program (TSMSP)	In the first instance write it as Torres Strait Marine Safety Program (TSMSP) in full, then every time thereafter as TSMSP.
under keel clearance (UKC) and	In the first instance write it as under keel clearance (UKC) or under keel clearance management (UKCM) in full, then every time thereafter as UKC or UKCM.

Term	Preferred spelling, usage or capitalisation
under keel clearance management (UKCM)	
unique vessel identifier (UVI)	In the first instance write it as unique vessel identifier (UVI) in full, then every time thereafter as UVI.
very high frequency (VHF)	In the first instance write it as very high frequency (VHF) in full, then every time thereafter as VHF.
very high frequency data exchange system (VDES)	In the first instance write it as very high frequency data exchange system (VDES) in full, then every time thereafter as VDES.
vessel traffic services (VTS)	In the first instance write it as vessel traffic services (VTS) in full, then every time thereafter as VTS.
work health and safety (WHS)	In the first instance write it as work health and safety (WHS) in full and every instance after can be referred to as WHS.

## ^ Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full word or phrase
AAC	AMSA Advisory Committee
AAD	Australian Antarctic Division
AASB	Australian Accounting Standards Board
ACCL	Australian Certificate for the Carriage of Livestock (issued by AMSA)
ACMA	Australian Communications and Media Authority
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AFMA	Australian Fisheries Management Authority
A/g	acting (in front of a title)
AGS	Australian Government Solicitor

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Full word or phrase</b>
AHS	Australian Hydrographic Service
AIS	Automatic Identification System
AMC	Australian Maritime College
AMSA/the authority	Australian Maritime Safety Authority
AMSA Act	<i>Australian Maritime Safety Act 1990</i>
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
ANZSBEG	Australia New Zealand Safe Boating Education Group
APASA	Asia-Pacific Applied Science Associates
APHoMSA	Asia-Pacific Heads of Maritime Safety Agencies forum
APM	associated protective measure
AQIS	Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service
ASWC	Australian Seafarer Welfare Council
ATBA	Area to be Avoided
ATCM	Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting
AtoN	aid to navigation
ATSB	Australian Transport Safety Bureau
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
AusENC	Australian Electronic Navigational Charts (official AHS)
AUSREP	Australian ship reporting system (MASTREP as of 1 July 2013)
AWA	Australian Workplace Agreement
BASARNAS	Indonesian search and rescue authority
CAC Act	<i>Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997</i>
CASA	Civil Aviation Safety Authority
CCAMLR	Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources
CCS	Maritime Safety Administration of the People's Republic of China

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Full word or phrase</b>
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
Chicago Convention	<i>Convention on International Civil Aviation</i>
China MSA	China Maritime Safety Administration
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CIO	Chief Information Officer
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
COO	Chief Operating Officer
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DCEO	Deputy Chief Executive Officer
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DGPS	differential global positioning system
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
ECDIS	Electronic Chart Display and Information System
ETC	emergency towage capability
ETV	emergency towage vessel
the executive	AMSA's executive
FOI	Freedom of Information
FSC	flag State control
GBR/the reef	Great Barrier Reef
GBRMPA	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
GIS	geographic information system
GM	general manager (capitalised if used in formal title)
GMDSS	Global Maritime Distress and Safety System
GPS	global positioning system

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Full word or phrase</b>
HAZMAT	hazardous material
HF	high frequency
HFO	heavy fuel oil
HSE Committee	Health, Safety and Environmental Committee (AMSA)
HSMA	Health and Safety Management Arrangements
IALA	International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities
IATA	International Air Transport Association
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
IDC	inter-departmental committee
IGA	Intergovernmental Agreement
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMDG	International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IMSBC	International Maritime Solid Bulk Cargoes Code
IOPC	International Oil Pollution Compensation Funds
IPAA	Institute of Public Administration Australia
IPIECA	International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association
ISC	Information Steering Committee (AMSA)
IT	information technology
ITS	information technology services (AMSA)
ITSAP	Indonesian Transport Safety Assistance Package
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
JRCC	Joint Rescue Coordination Centre
KPI	key performance indicator
LEOSAR	low earth orbiting search and rescue system

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Full word or phrase</b>
LLMC	<i>Convention on Limitation of Liability for Maritime Claims</i>
LRIT	Long-Range Identification and Tracking
MAF	Maritime Agencies Forum
MARPOL	<i>International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution From Ships</i>
MASTREP	Modernised Australian Ship Tracking and Reporting system
MEOSAR	Medium-altitude Earth Orbiting Search and Rescue system
MEPC	Marine Environment Protection Committee (IMO)
MERCOM	Maritime Emergency Response Commander
MHS	Medibank Health Solutions
MIAL	Maritime Industry Australia Limited
MLC/MLC, 2006	Maritime Labour Convention, 2006
MNZ	Maritime New Zealand
MO	marine order (capitalised if used in full name)
MOU	memorandum of understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
MSC	Maritime Safety Committee (IMO)
MSQ	Maritime Safety Queensland
national plan	National Plan for Maritime Environmental Emergencies
national regulator	National Marine Safety Regulator
national system	National System for Domestic Commercial Vessel Safety
NATSAR Council	National Search and Rescue Council
NEMO	National Environmental Management Operations (database)
NESMG	North-East Shipping Management Group
NESMP	North-East Shipping Management Plan
NCVS	Non Convention Vessel Standards



Abbreviation	Full word or phrase
NMERA	National Maritime Emergency Response Arrangements
NMSA	National Maritime Safety Authority (Papua New Guinea)
NMSC	National Marine Safety Committee
NSCV	National Standard for Commercial Vessels
NSIR	Navigation Safety and International Relations (division)
OHS	occupational health and safety
OOWG	Oil Operations Working Group
OSRA	Oil Spill Response Atlas
OPRC	<i>International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation</i>
OSTM	Oil Spill Trajectory Model
PACSAR	Pacific Regional Maritime Search and Rescue Workshop
PGPA Act	<i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i>
PICT	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
PID Act	<i>Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013</i>
PMP	property management plan
PSC	port State control
PSSA	Particularly Sensitive Sea Area
REEFREP	Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait mandatory ship reporting system
REEFVTS	Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait Vessel Traffic Service
ROPES	Record of Practical Experience and Sea-Service (National System)
RTO	registered training organisation
SAR	search and rescue
SAR Convention	<i>International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue</i>
SARO	search and rescue officer
SCOTI	Standing Council on Transport and Infrastructure

Abbreviation	Full word or phrase
SCWG	Staff Consultative Working Group (AMSA)
SOLAS	<i>International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea</i>
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SPREP	South Pacific Regional Environment Program
STCW	<i>International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers</i>
TISOC	Transport and Infrastructure Senior Officials Committee
TSMPP	Torres Strait Maritime Pathways Program
TSMSP	Torres Strait Marine Safety Program
UHF	ultra high frequency
UKC	under keel clearance
UVI	unique vessel identifier
UKCM	under keel clearance management
VDES	very high frequency data exchange system
VHF	very high frequency
VMR	Volunteer Marine Rescue
VTS	vessel traffic services
WADoT	Western Australian Department of Transport
WHS	work health and safety