



AIATSIS

**Communications
Editorial Style Guide
2023**

Style guide

This style guide is for general use in AIATSIS publications and online content.

It brings together relevant material from the [Aboriginal Studies Press style guide for authors and editors](#) and the [Australian Government Style Manual](#). Please bookmark these resources for regular access.

In general, the advice here follows the guidance provided by the *Style Manual* with the exception of numbers. As detailed in the relevant section below, in passages of text AIATSIS uses words for the numbers one to nine, and then digits. In tables, however, use digits for numbers throughout.

AIATSIS does not use commas in numbers from 1000 to 9999 in standard text.

Language

It is preferable to use the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' or 'First Nations people/peoples/Australians' (according to context) rather than 'Indigenous'. If using the term 'Indigenous' or 'Aboriginal' ensure that it is only ever used as an adjective, not a noun (for example 'an Indigenous person' or 'an Aboriginal woman').

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' and 'First Nations peoples' can be used to encompass both Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people, though not for one or the other when it is known which group is being spoken about. When used to refer to the peoples of Australia, 'Aboriginal', 'Torres Strait Islander' and 'Indigenous' should be capitalised, as would be the name of any other group of people. Use a capital 'I' for Indigenous when talking about Indigenous Australians but not for other indigenous peoples. Do **not** use the acronym ATSI or TSI.

Avoid the use of words such as 'myth', 'folklore' and 'legend'. Dreaming stories or Creation stories (some people like to capitalise 'stories' in this instance) better impart the significance of the information. As well as providing Creation stories, the Dreaming provides Aboriginal people with the laws to live by, whereas words like 'myths' or 'lore' imply that the information is insignificant or untrue.

You might choose to capitalise 'Elder' when speaking about an individual to appropriately acknowledge their standing and their knowledge within their community, but use 'elders' when speaking more generically. The same goes for 'traditional owner'.

Avoid double negatives (for example 'not unconvinced') and keep an eye out for tautology (choose 'reversing' not 'reversing backwards').

Use 'more than' rather than 'over' when referring to quantities – for example 'more than a million items' rather than 'over a million items'. When referring to the past, use 'for the **past** three years' rather than 'for the **last** three years'.

Spelling

Use the Macquarie dictionary for spelling decisions. Some general rules are:

- Use '-ise' not '-ize' endings, as in 'capitalise' not 'capitalize'.
- Use '-our' not '-or' endings, as in 'colour' not 'color'.
- Use '-re' not '-er' endings, as in 'centre' not 'center'.
- Use 'practice' for the noun and 'practise' for the verb.

Also see [commonly used words](#) (below).

Punctuation and styles

Capitalisation

Use minimal capitalisation including in headings. That is, initial capital and then lower case – for example 'This is a heading'. Also use minimal capitalisation for the titles of books and reports but maximal capitalisation for the names of newspapers and journals.

Proper nouns and proper names (the names of specific people, places and organisations) should also have an initial capital. Use lower case when part of an organisational title is repeated generically – for example 'Canberra University' and then 'the university'; 'the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies' and then the 'institute'.

Use lower case for 'the' in reference to the titles of newspapers, journals, institutions, and other bodies, unless 'the' forms part of the formal name of the entity. For example: the Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, The University of Melbourne, the University of Canberra.

Numbers

Numbers one to nine are generally written in words but as figures in mathematical, technical, statistical and table contents.

However, if a number is used to begin a sentence it is always spelt out.

Ordinal numbers follow the same rule – for example 'first', 'ninth'. When referring to a century, again follow the general rule of 'third century', 'twenty-first century', and so on unless constrained by space.

Express percentages in words, for example '13 per cent'. Do not use the % sign except in tables. Use hyphens to express fractions in words; for example 'one-sixth', 'three-quarters'.

Full stops

Use full stops in shortened forms (such as e.g. and i.e.) and with abbreviations (such as cont., etc.). However, also note that shortened forms should only appear in tables, charts and illustrations where space is limited.

Don't use with contractions (Dr) or acronyms or initialisms (AIATSIS).

Don't use after people's initials (JM Brown) or in organisations' names.

Semicolons

Semicolons are used:

- To separate clauses when a stronger break than a comma is required but the parts are too closely related to be broken into separate sentences.

The photographers in regional Australia work in a different space and light; they do things differently there.

- In parallel clauses with no connecting conjunction ('and', 'but').

Having design ideas is easy; being a designer is difficult.

- To avoid misreading phrases or clauses already containing commas.

The practice of writing is a skill, not an art; a vocation, not a trade.

- To separate items in a series.

The results were surprising: adult males, 35 per cent; adult females, 52 per cent; and children, 13 per cent.

Bulleted lists

Each item in the list should have a consistent style of phrasing and start with the same part of speech (such as a noun or a verb). Numbered lists should only be used when the sequence or count of items are important.

Keep punctuation to a minimum. If all the dot points are full sentences each should start with a capital letter. If each dot point consists of, or begins with, a sentence fragment, no initial capital is used. Note that all items in a list should either be fragments or complete sentences, not a mixture of both.

Examples of bulleted lists

The committee came to two important decisions:

- Research should be funded in the two priority areas.
- All research funding must demonstrate Indigenous leadership.

Funding is available for the following areas:

- cultural resurgence and prosperity
- governance and prosperity.

Quotation marks

Use single quotation marks for quoted text and double quotation marks only for a quote within a quote. If the whole sentence is a quotation, place the closing quote mark outside the full stop.

Apostrophes

Don't use with plural acronyms – for example 'CDs' not 'CD's'.

Don't confuse the contraction of 'it is' (it's) with the possessive pronoun (its). For example 'It's hot today' (contraction) and 'The dog shook its head' (pronoun).

Hyphens

Use hyphens when two or more words form an adjective – for example 'a first-class experience'.

Italics

In general, do not italicise Australian Indigenous words.

Quotes can either be in italics or included in quotation marks but not both.

Commonly used Latin and French phrases such as *terra nullius*, *sui generis*, *inter alia*, *vis-à-vis* and *prima facie* should be in roman, not italics.

Published works, and full names of legislation and legal cases should be in italics. For example *Mabo and others v. Queensland (No. 2)* and *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*.

Other matters

For issues not covered by the notes above, please refer to the Australian Government's *Style Manual*, which is now online. Please bookmark these pages on the site:

- <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/>
- <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/inclusive-language/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples>

Commonly-used words

1967 Referendum, the

A

Aboriginal

Aboriginal land councils, but Northern Land Council, Central Land Council etc.

Aborigines Protection Board (also the Board)

acknowledgment

adviser

affectionately (not

affectionally)

am (not a.m.)

among (not amongst)

audiovisual

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (in the first instance and AIATSIS or the institute thereafter)

B

Bringing them home: report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families (or the Bringing them home report)

C

CDRom

Capitalise, not capitalize (and the same for other words ending in ise/ize)

Central Australia

centre (not center, and the same for other words ending in re/er)

coexist

Collection, the

Commonwealth of Australia, but

Commonwealth government

Constitution (Australian), the (but constitutional)

cooperation

co-worker

cross-cultural

Crown and Crown land

D

daytime

day-to-day

Dreaming, the

E

Ebook ecommerce

e.g. (not eg)

elders (or Elder if referring to an individual)

F

Federal Court / Federal Court of Australia / the court (when used both generically and specifically)

Federation

First World War, rather than World War I (do not abbreviate to WWI)

firsthand

Freedom Ride

front line (n)/front-line (adj.)

G

granddaughter

great-granddaughter

great-grandmother

I

i.e. (not ie)

Indigenous when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but indigenous when used for the original inhabitants of other countries

inquiry

intercultural

K

kilometres (spell out in main text)
Koori (NSW) and Koorie (Victoria)

L

Land Council
licence (noun), license (verb), licensed
(adjective)

M

Mabo and others v. Queensland (No. 2)
(or the Mabo case)

N

National Apology, the (or the Apology)
National Aborigines and Islanders Day
Observance Committee (or NAIDOC)
native title
National Native Title Tribunal
night-time
non-Indigenous
no one
north-east New South Wales
Northern Australia
NSW in official titles but New South
Wales when referring to the state/place;
also, New South Wales Government
(formal title) but the state government
when used generically

O

ongoing

P

people, not persons
per cent, not percent
pm, not p.m. (when referring to the
afternoon or evening)
postcolonial (one word)
postgraduate
postwar
practice (n), practise (v)

Prime Minister, the (when referring to
the current prime minister; lower case
when referring to former prime
ministers)

R

Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (in the
first instance and the Act thereafter)

S

saltwater
Second World War, rather than
World War II (do not abbreviate to
WWII)
secret–sacred (use en dash not
hyphen)
self-management
settler colonial/settler colonialism
short-lived
skilful
sociocultural (one word)
socioeconomic songlines
song titles: use italics, not quotation
marks
south-eastern
south-west, but South West (of Western
Australia) state (both for state and
territory and for the body politic when
used in its generic form)
stockwork/ers
Stolen Generations

T

terra nullius (roman)
Thursday Island, or T.I.
Top End
traditional owners

W

Wave Hill walk-off (or the Gurindji
strike)

website
Western

while, not
whilst
Worldview

Y

Years, not years' when used in the possessive (for example '45 years experience')