



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of the **Premier and Cabinet**
Office of **Digital Government**

Digital Services Policy Framework

Digital Services Content Writing Guide

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Contact:

Office of Digital Government
2 Havelock Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Telephone: 61 8 6552 5000
Email: dgov-strategy@dpc.wa.gov.au

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Overview

This writing guide is to be used as the single point of reference for common terms, spelling, punctuation and naming conventions.

If there is a term that you wish to add or amend, please contact us by emailing dgov-strategy@dpc.wa.gov.au. This will be forwarded to the Content Guide Working Group for review.

Punctuation and Grammar

Capitalisation

Capital letters are hard to read. Keep them to a minimum.

Use sentence case for most things (capitalise the first word).

Use title case for proper nouns (capitalise the principal words).

Example:

- How to apply
- Rules of engagement
- While working at the Department of Transport the department has implemented various initiatives.

Headings and subheadings

Use sentence case for headings and subheadings.

In general, capitalise the first word only.

Headings and subheadings example

- Business innovation incentives
- Applying for a visa
- Visiting Australia

Nouns

Use title case for proper nouns — for example, names of people, places or organisations.

Capitalise the principal words only, to distinguish them from common nouns or the generic meaning.

Example: capitalising proper nouns

- Jane Bloggs
- United Kingdom
- Digital Transformation Agency
- The Department of Transport is a Western Australian Government department.

People's titles

Do not capitalise formal titles, unless referring to a person's official title.

Example: capitalising people's titles

- The doctors at the hospital treat illnesses.
- Doctor Jane Boggs treated my illness.

Title contractions do not require punctuation.

Example: title contractions

- Ms
- Mr
- Mrs
- Dr
- Prof

Publications

Use title case for legislation, acts and other publications.

Example: *the Liquor Control Act 1998*

Department titles

Example: capitalising department titles

The Department of Treasury is a West Australian Government department. The department's head office is in Perth.

Apostrophes (')

Apostrophes can indicate possession.

Example: possession

- Jess's start-up (singular possession)
- the girls' start-up (plural possession)
- a week's time (singular)
- in 2 weeks (plural)

Use 's for words that end in 's' to show possession if you pronounce the 's' (for example, personal names).

If you don't pronounce the 's' just use an apostrophe.

Don't use apostrophes for plural abbreviations or decades.

Example: plural abbreviations and decades

- CDs — not CD's
- 1980s — not 1980's

Use apostrophes for substitutions of 'is', 'us' or 'are' and in other contractions.

Full stops (.)

Do not use full stops after email addresses that end sentences as they may be misread.

Example: email address at the end of a sentence

You can email the department at example@department.wa.gov.au

Use full stops for other kinds of hyperlinks that end sentences. The link text should form part of the sentence.

Example: link at end of sentence

The People team manage the add a [new employee form](#).

▾ Contractions

Use contractions to create a more conversational voice. But make sure the user can understand them.

Example: contractions

- it's difficult (it is difficult)
- who's the right person? (who is the right person?)
- let's go (let us go)
- you're right (you are right)

Low-literacy users and people who speak languages other than English may find contractions difficult to understand.

Avoid less common colloquial contractions like 'you'd'.

Always consider the context.

Don't use contractions where a user may misunderstand what they are being asked to do, for example on a form.

Hyphens (-)

Use hyphens when 2 or more words form an adjective.

Example: using hyphens for adjectives

- a first-class experience
- Do not use a hyphen if the first word of a compound is an adverb ending in ly.

Example: not using hyphens to join adverb to noun

- highly intelligent — not highly-intelligent

Some nouns are also hyphenated. Check the [Macquarie Dictionary](#).

Example: hyphenated nouns

- about-face
- air-conditioning

Don't hyphenate login or sign in.

Example: punctuating sign in and log in

- You need to use your sign in (noun) to sign in (verb) to the site.
- You need to use your login (noun) to log in (verb) to the site.

Hyphens can change the meaning of a verb.

Example: hyphen changing meaning of verb

- The group is going to re-form (join up again) to reform (change) the policy.

Use a hyphen when the second word is 'up' or when the first and second words end and start with the same letter.

Example: using hyphens with 'up'

- meet-up
- call-up
- re-engage

Em dashes (—)

You can use an em dash with spaces to add a related idea to a sentence instead of creating a new sentence. Be careful the sentence does not become too long.

How to type an em dash:

- Windows: hold Ctrl + Alt keys and type -
- Mac: hold Option + Shift keys and type -
- HTML: —
- Hold Alt while typing 0151 on the numeric keypad

En dashes

Don't use en dashes (–).

Use spaced em dashes (—) instead of en dashes (–) to break up sentences.

Use 'to' in time and date ranges — not hyphens or en dashes.

Eg, ie, etc and nb

Avoid the Latin abbreviations eg, ie, etc (et cetera) and nb.

eg

Use 'for example' instead of 'eg'.

If space is limited you can use 'eg' (for example, in a table). Only do this if your users can understand it. Sometimes screen readers won't read 'eg' correctly.

ie

Avoid using 'that is' or 'meaning' as an alternative to 'ie'. Rewrite and restructure your content instead.

etc

Try to rewrite the sentence so the user does not need to guess what the 'etc' refers to.

nb

Do not use 'nb' (nota bene or 'note well').

Exclamation mark (!)

Don't use exclamation marks.

Ampersands (&)

'And' is easier to read and easier to skim.

Don't use an ampersand in a sentence, except if it is part of an organisation's name. Ampersands can be used in logos.

Avoid the use of ampersands in headings, subheadings, navigation labels or graphics.

Colons (:)

Use a colon to lead into a bullet point list after a sentence fragment.

You can use a colon in a sentence fragment — but bullet point lists are easier to read.

Semi colons (;)

Avoid using semicolons. Use shorter sentences, em dashes or bullet point lists instead.

Commas (,)

Use commas minimally.

Commas increase clarity because they bring in a natural pause. Too many commas however, are a sign a sentence should be shorter, or needs to be changed into a bullet point list.

Oxford commas

Restructure content to avoid sentences that need Oxford commas (a comma before the final 'and' or 'or' in a sentence).

Ellipsis (...)

Use ellipses after text when deliberately leaving something out — for example in the middle of a long quote.

Use a space on either side of the ellipsis except when it's followed by a question mark.

Quotation marks (' ' and " ")

Use single quotation marks when quoting a person or a source.

Example: single quotation marks

- The manager said, 'Balancing work and home life is an important part of our organisation's success.'
- The report concluded, 'Focus on user needs.'

Use double quotation marks for a quote within a quote.

Example: double quotation marks

- The team leader said, 'We need to follow the director's advice that "balancing work and home life is an important part of our organisation's success" in order to build good services.'

Punctuating unusual or colloquial expressions

Use single quote marks to enclose and emphasise an unusual or colloquial expression.

At symbols (@)

Use the '@' symbol in email addresses and social media handles only.

Terms and phrases

Abbreviations

Only use abbreviations of general terms if the abbreviation is the clearer and more common form.

See also guidance on abbreviating numbers and measures.

Example: abbreviations

- Ms — instead of Miss/Mistress or Mrs/Misses
- Mr — instead of Mister

- Pty Ltd — instead of Proprietary Limited

Honours, awards and distinctions

Abbreviate honours, awards and distinctions without full stops.

Example: abbreviating honours, awards and distinctions

- AO (Officer of the Order of Australia)
- OM (Member of the Order of Merit)
- BA (Bachelor of Arts)
- DipEd (Diploma of Education)
- PhD (Doctor of Philosophy)

Accessibility

Refer to the WA Government Digital Services [Accessibility and inclusivity Standard](#) for preferred inclusive language terms.

States and territories

Use the names of states and territories in full.

Use contractions and acronyms if space is limited (for example, a table) or to avoid lengthy repetitions.

Use alphabetical order by default. There may be some cases when ordering by another factor, like population size, might be better for the user.

State and territory governments

Capitalise the formal state or territory government title only.

Acronyms

Write out the full name first before you introduce the acronym or initialism.

Example: acronyms

- The Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) supports the Premier as head of the Western Australian Government.

Don't use full stops in acronyms.

Example: initialisms

- Western Australia (WA)

Dictionaries

Use the most recent edition of the [Macquarie Dictionary](#).

Set your spell checker to Australian English.

If you are using Microsoft Word, set it to English UK rather than American English.

Use the spelling organisations use for their own names.

Digital terms

The following are common digital terms:

- blog post
- email
- e-learning
- HTML
- homepage
- internet — not the Internet
- intranet — not the Intranet
- online
- PDF
- standalone
- sub-site
- text message — not SMS
- URL
- web — not the Web or World Wide Web
- web page
- website
- wi-fi — not wifi, WiFi or Wi-fi
- world wide web
- XML

Sign in versus log in

Use 'sign in' and 'sign out' (note, no hyphen) instead of 'log in' or 'log out' in text, links and buttons.

Gender

Use gender-neutral and avoid gendered pronouns.

Refer to the WA Government Digital Services Accessibility and Inclusivity Standards for preferred inclusive language terms.

Government agencies

Write your agency's name in full on first mention and then as 'the agency' (or 'the department').

Use first-person pronouns through the rest of the text: we, us.

Example: referring to a government department

- WA Health is Western Australia's public health system. With a State spanning over 2.5 million square kilometres, it is the largest area in the world covered by a single health authority. We employ 50,000 dedicated staff in metropolitan, regional and remote areas of the State to attend to the health needs of our growing population.

When naming other departments, use the name in full followed by the acronym in brackets.

Example: using department acronyms

- We worked closely with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA).

Write whole of government in full, without hyphens.

When referring to a department such as DBCA in a sentence, there is no requirement to add 'the' in front of DBCA.

Example:

- We worked closely with DBCA

Legislation, acts and other publications

Use title case for titles of publications, policies, programs, books, films, photographs, TV programs, paintings, songs and albums.

Capitalise the principal words only. Exceptions are when the title begins with a, for, on, to and so on.

Use italics for primary legislation and legal cases but not for delegated legislation or bills.

Example: Digital Strategy for the Western Australian Government 2021-2025

Numbers and measurements

Numbers

Use digits instead of words for most numbers. This makes numbers easier to read on a screen.

Use words for:

- common expressions where digits would look strange — for example, 'one or two of them'
- ordinals (first, second) but not dates and date periods (19th century)

Add a comma between the third and fourth digit from the right, for numbers 10,000 and above.

Use the word million instead of digits.

Example of numbers:

- zero to nine – not 0 to 9
- one or two of them
- 10 to 9999
- 10,000 to 1 million
- first, second, third
- 100s of them
- 5kg
- 50KB
- 10am
- \$2
- 75%
- Section 10
- 19th century
- 1980s
- 25 people went to the launch

Abbreviate thousand, million, billion and trillion in headings, tables and graphics.

Use digits at the beginning of a line, bulleted item or sentence.

Example: digits at the beginning of a line, bulleted item or sentence.

When writing an effective email, there are three things to consider:

1. **Choosing** a clear subject and addressing the email correctly to the appropriate recipient.
2. **Stating** your message concisely and using paragraphs or bullet points for clarity.
3. **Closing off** with an appropriate sign-off and including your name, title, and contact information.

Dates

Don't punctuate dates

- Example: 4 July 1984)

Use the correct International date standard of DD MM YYYY

- Example: 21 September 2021

Use numbers for date periods.

Use 'to' in time and date ranges — not hyphens or en dashes.

Hours and minutes

Write 12 noon and 12 midnight instead of 12pm or 12am to avoid confusion.

Use 5:30pm not 1730hrs.

Use 6 hours 30 minutes not 6h 30m.

Per cent

Use % when using a digit.

Telephone numbers

Do not use phone number linking. Modern mobile browsers automatically detect phone numbers and enable click to call.

Land line

Use full number including international code

Example land line numbers

- Contact us by telephoning 61 8 6551 1000

1300 or 1800 number (10 digit numbers)

1300 numbers are ten-digit 'Local Call' numbers that your customers can call from any fixed line in Australia.

Example: 1300 or 1800 numbers

- Contact us by telephoning 1300 000 000 or 1800 000 000

13 13 13 (6 digit numbers)

Example: 13 13 13 (6 digit numbers)

- Contact us by telephoning 13 13 13

For further guidance please refer to [Telephone numbers | Style Manual](#).

Measurement and weights

Spell out measurements when not using a number.

Example:

- The length of the object should be measured in centimetres.

Abbreviate measures when using a number. Do not put a space between number and measure.

Example:

- The length of the object is 50cms.

Abbreviate measures in headings, tables and graphics, with or without a number.

Formatting

Italics

Avoid using *italics* unless it used for full titles of Acts and legal cases.

Screen readers interpret italics in different ways.

Users with dyslexia can find italics very difficult to read.

Don't use italics in headlines.

Use title case not italics for publications. Link to the source where possible.

Bold

Avoid using bold unless it adds clarity or readability.

Bolding a word can help a person scan text. However, blocks of bold text are hard to read.

Underline

Don't underline or underscore any text.

Underlining makes text look like a link. Underlined text should only form a part of a link.

Accordions

Accordions can be used to simplify long content pages and minimize scrolling; however, they can also diminish content visibility. For further guidance on when and how to use accordions for desktop and mobile devices refer to [Accordions on Desktop](#) and [Accordions on Mobile](#).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Avoid using FAQs to present information.

Example, do not use:

- **What time are our opening hours?**
Our opening hours are 9am to 5pm.

Instead use:

- **Opening hours**
9am to 5pm.