Document revision

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<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
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Document approvals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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1. Introduction

These guidelines have been published to assist in improving the quality, consistency and readability of the Conservatorium’s online communications.
The guidelines are at this stage non-mandatory.
2. About this guide

A website is as good as its content

A Conservatorium’s online presence plays a key role in delivering information regarding its music education programs and services, and sponsorship arrangements and opportunities.

All staff producing written material for publications should keep in mind that what is published invariably has some form of impact on people’s work, or on broader aspects of people’s lives that relate to dealings with the Conservatorium.

Good web content is vital as it:

- helps the Conservatorium’s staff and clients find the information they need
- promotes trust in the Conservatorium as a community service provider.

The online environment

It is difficult to read large, dense tracts of text online. This makes the writing style, structure, design and layout of online information very important.

These principles apply to all online documents, whether web pages or documents intended to be printed out.

This document makes a basic distinction between writing text and content design.

Text writing guidelines - how you use language, categorise information, structure text.

Content design guidelines - how the overall page looks, how to guide the reader to information.
3. Text writing guidelines

How you use language, categorise information and structure text has a big impact on the usability and credibility of your content.

Focus on the reader

The most effective writing targets the specific needs of the reader.
Websites need to be user-friendly and include information regarding the conservatorium, terms and dates, music education programs, tuition, workshops, enrolment procedures, fees, available scholarships, events, ticket sales, news, staff, sponsorship opportunities, current sponsors and partners, location and contact details.

Say it simply

There is much written about the need for plain language in government writing. See Useful links for further information.

Plain language improves readability and comprehension for any reader. It is even more important when writing documents for a general audience.

As a guide, use:

- one idea per paragraph
- use the active voice (‘The Conservatorium promotes’, not ‘promoted by the Conservatorium’)
- reduce acronyms
- use half the word count (or less) than conventional writing.
- opt for the simpler, shorter word – ‘use’ not ‘utilise’.
**Content length guidelines**

- Headings: 8 words or less.
- Sentences: 15-20 words.
- Paragraphs: 40-70 words.

**Example**

**Welfare of Students While Engaged in Activities Conducted Under the Auspices of the Conservatorium**

The deliberations of the Police Royal Commission have made it apparent that there is a need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of Conservatorium staff working with children and young people.

Our Conservatorium staff who work with children as tutors, performers, or supervisors on excursions, either in a voluntary or paid capacity, have all completed a Working with Children Check form and been screened for approval. The office staff have also been screened. Here at the Conservatorium we are very meticulous about these matters and would like to take this opportunity to assure parents of young students that the utmost has been done to ensure their safety.

**Student Welfare – Child Protection**

The Conservatorium has a responsibility for the safety of students by ensuring staff are suitable for working with children and young people. All of our employees have undergone a Working with Children Check as required by the *Child Protection Prohibited Employment Act (1998)*. Parents can be assured that this is an important part of our recruitment and screening process to prevent unsuitable people from working with students.

**Orwell’s rules**

In his essay "Politics and the English language," George Orwell provides six simple rules for all writers of English:

- Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

**Put key messages first**

Online readers scan the page quickly in an 'F' pattern, down the left hand side, according to Jacob Nielson.

This is the reason many navigation panels are put on the left hand side by website designers.
For the same reason web writers should put **key messages at the top of the page.**

The first **two words** of each line are the ones most likely to be read, so make them effective.

**Chunk topics**

Research suggests that human beings understand and remember no more than nine items of information at a time *(Miller 1956)*. The online limit is even lower, more likely five to seven.

By chunking information you can improve the reader’s comprehension:

- break down content into topic chunks
- use headings to separate topic chunks
- no more than 7 separate items of information per chunk (eg no more than 7 bullet points)
- one topic chunk per web page when the purpose of that page is to hyperlink to other information
- one topic chunk per paragraph for long pages or attached documents.
4. Content guidelines

Well written, chunked and structured text will go a long way to helping your reader.

You can assist them even more by presenting your text to suit the online environment.

Use visual formatting

This helps the reader find their way around online text.

**Don’t do this** – Long sentences and long paragraphs which are difficult to scan.

**Do this** – Fewer words, short sentences, bullet points, heading and sub-headings all help users more easily scan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heading one</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heading level two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph and body text. Paragraph and body text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Bullet point text</td>
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<table>
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</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heading level two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Use heading levels

Readers can quickly understand the visual hierarchy to scan topics.

**Heading 1 – Ducks**

**Heading 2 – Feathers**

**Heading 3 – Tail feathers**
Make it easy to scan

Key messages first
- Key messages should be in the first two paragraphs.
- Put information-carrying words at the beginning of subheadings, paragraphs and bullet points. Readers scan down the left side of your content. They'll read the third word on a line much less often than the first two words.

People read bulleted text
- Condense important points to bulleted lists.

Bold text stands out
- Use it sparingly, such as for lead in headings at the start of a paragraph. Bold words scattered inside the text can be confusing.

Use minimal punctuation
- Punctuation such as commas, hyphens and full stops can reduce readability online because the rapidly scanning eye has to stop to interpret the marks.
- Err on the side of minimal punctuation except where the punctuation is required for sense or proper emphasis. See Corporate style guide for reference.

Use an online font
- Web page fonts are automated.
- Attached documents should be in a san serif font such as Verdana or Arial for headings and body text.

Be consistent
Ensure consistency throughout your content:
- capitalisation
- use of bold
- bulleted lists
- the meaning of terms
- hyphenation
- versions match between web pages and attached files.

For DET style treatment of these elements refer to Corporate style guide.
Make it easy to get around

Use links and cross-references

Help your reader get around the content with a table of contents, links to related pages and cross references to information in the same document.

- Always provide a way back to the table of contents from a cross reference within a document (eg 'return to top').
- When your link sends a reader to another page, provide a link back to the place they came from. Use the page title as the link text.
- If you are providing a link to one place from several pages, send the reader back to the table of contents. They can then find their way back to the topic they hyperlinked from.
- Provide links to and from all related documents and forms.

Long pages are OK

Web pages don't have to be short. For example, government documents can require a lot of detailed information.

You can put a long web page online, but make sure you guide the reader through it well.

Signpost the information they need by using headings, bulleted lists, and bolding a few key words.

Long pages must have a hyperlinked table of contents, and options to return to it throughout the document.

A long page is any web page or attached document requiring scrolling to get to further information.

Consider the needs of the reader

Use longer pages to:

- facilitate quicker reading of detailed information
- align with the structure of a paper counterpart
- make pages more convenient to download, print, bookmark and share.
Make it findable

Relevant keywords

Authors can attach keywords to a document when putting it online.

Keywords help search tools find a document.

Readers generally put phrases of two or more keywords into the search bar, so use a few keywords or phrases specific to the content:

- **Tuition Payment policy:**
  Use ‘tuition payment’, or ‘paying fees’ not generic terms like ‘policy’

Effective titles and descriptions

Titles are very important for document searches.

The following example would be hard to find. It would appear under “I” in the A-Z list, rather than ‘C’ for child protection:

- **Introduction of changed procedures for reporting risk of harm to children and young people from 18 December 2000 - Memorandum.**

  This title is trying to do too much work.

  Titles should be succinct, clearly describing the document subject and purpose:

  - ✔️ **Child protection, Reporting, Dec 2000 [Procedure]**

Correct location

Consider how you would search for your document, and place it in the closest category the system allows.

For example, the following placement of a document on web publishing ensures it will rarely be found by navigation:

- **Home > Our Policies > Child Protection**

You can set one document to display in several places.

Organise documents by the subject not by the organisational structure.
Make it accessible

The Conservatorium’s online information and services must be accessible to all people. As a writer you need to be aware of how you can make content accessible at a textual and content design level.

People you need to consider

- blind or visually impaired people reading your web content using screen readers
- people whose first language is not English
- people who do not have a high level of literacy in English
- People using older computers, different browsers and/or dial-up internet access.

Supply text only versions

- Provide content in html or as a Word document (saved as an RTF file).

Structure content to indicate hierarchy

- Use heading styles to indicate information hierarchy. This enables a screen reader to emulate the process of scanning a web page and read content out loud.

Provide alternative text for graphics

This is a textual description of an image for readers using text only versions of the web page or screen readers.
Screen readers read aloud the alternative text assigned to images.

See [ALT text](#).

Minimise file size

To reduce problems for people relying on dialup, and to make documents easier to print, limit file sizes to:

- 20 KB for images
- 500 KB for attached documents.

Don’t animate text

This includes animated, blinking, flashing or scrolling text.
Moving text may be inaccessible to some users with visual disabilities, cognitive disabilities or learning difficulties.
Screen readers can’t read moving text.
Each page should stand alone

Readers can arrive at your web page from many directions, through a Google search, Departmental site search or by navigating through links from the home page.

Readers can arrive directly into an attached file (such as a PDF or word document).

They can arrive into the middle of a long document split into parts.

Your content must quickly give them enough clues to know whether they’re in the right place, and where to go from here.

Make sure:

- the ownership of the document is clear (eg logo or name of organisation)
- the context is clear (eg reference to main web page or umbrella topic)
- the reader can get around (provide links).

See also Attached document standards.
5. Writing checklist

**Message**
Are you clear about the message you want to send?
Have you checked all the facts and other information?
Is what you’ve written in line with Departmental policy and guidelines?
Do you need to find out more?
Have you checked numbers, dates, times, titles, names and places?

**Reader**
Do you have a clear idea of who your reader is?
Have you answered the reader’s questions?
Will the reader understand it?
Could anyone else understand what you’ve written?
Will the reader know what to do after reading it?

**Style**
Spelling, punctuation, abbreviations, numbers, names and titles correct?
Short sentences?
Active voice?
One idea per paragraph?
Inclusive language used?

**Online design**
Uncluttered layout?
Heading levels structure text?
Bulleted lists rather than long, unbroken paragraphs?
Punctuation and other style elements follow Corporate style guide?
Is the document an attached file (eg a PDF or Word document)? Have you complied with Attached document standards?
Have you proof-read your text? (Not just run spell-checker?)

**Accessibility**
The text is provided in either html (web page) or as a Word document (saved as an RTF)?
All images or multi-media have alt text?
Attached files not more than 500 KB?
Images not more than 20 KB or 2-3 sec download?
6. Online writing style guide

This guide is designed as a reference to individual style elements specific to the online environment.

For general corporate style see Corporate style guide.

ALT text

This is a textual description of the meaning of an image for readers using text only versions of the web page or screen readers. Screen readers can't understand images, but rather read aloud the alternative text assigned to them.

- Remember that ALT takes the place of the graphic:
  - tell us what the picture is or represents or sum up its function, but don’t tell us that it’s a picture
  - don’t use the image filename
  - use ALT = space for decorative images which have no inherent meaning.

Animated text

This includes animated, blinking, flashing or scrolling text. Don’t use animated text because:

- Static text is easier to read than moving text for everyone.
- Moving text may be inaccessible to some users with visual disabilities, cognitive disabilities or learning difficulties.
- Screen readers can’t read moving text.

Bold, italics, underline

- Use bold sparingly, such as for lead-in headings at the start of a paragraph.
- Italic style is difficult to read on screen. Use bold wherever you would normally use italics:
  - titles of books, works of art, TV and radio programs, Latin terms and legislation and legal cases
  - technical terms
  - words used with a particular tone or emphasis.
- Don’t use underlining to emphasise text. Underlined text is easily confused with a hyperlink.
Bullet points

Bullet points are OK directly under headings which act as a leading sentence.

Example

✔️ Use bold for
  - key words
  - titles
  - legislation.

See also Lists and Corporate style guide.

Capitals

Lower case letters are more readable than capitals on the web.

Capitals break up the flow of a sentence for the scanning eye:
  - use minimal capitalisation style
  - capitalise only the first word in headings.

Examples

✘ Capitalised Headings Make Slow Reading
✔️ Capitalised headings make slow reading
✘ DON’T USE ALL CAPITALS

Error messages

• Precisely indicate the nature of the problem.
• Use plain English, instead of technical codes or abbreviations.
• Provide constructive advice on how to fix the problem.
• Make the error message clearly visible and identify errors in a consistent way.

File naming convention

For importing files into TeamSite content management system:
  - folder/file names must be in lowercase
  - must be alphabetic letters or numerals only
  - cannot commence with a number
  - limited to 15 characters
  - no spaces between characters (use underscore instead eg det_kiosk_policy).
File size limits

- Attached files 500KB.
- Images 20 KB or 2-3 second download time.

File storage

- Attached files must be imported into TeamSite under the folder media/downloads/.
- Images must be imported into Team Site under the folder media/images/.

Fonts

- Web page fonts are automated.
- Attached file fonts should be suitable for online reading (e.g., Verdana, Arial or other sans serif font).

Headings

- Use minimal capitalisation.
- Only the first letter should have a capital letter.
- Use no more than 8 words.
- Use bold for headings in attached files (automated on web pages).

Numbered headings

Numbered headings should only be used where:
- frequent internal cross-referencing is required
- it is necessary to show priority or chronology in a series
- individual items need to be identified for later reference (such as legal documents).

Heading levels

Heading 1 – Ducks
Heading 2 – Feathers
Heading 3 – Tail feathers

When the purpose is to hyperlink to other information

Use inbuilt heading styles 1, 2 only.
Readers will be scanning quickly for information so these pages should not carry too much text.

**Long web pages or attached documents**

Use heading styles 1,2,3 on.
Readers are prepared to spend more time on long pages.

**Images**

**File size**
File size for images and attached files should not:
- exceed 20 KB
- take longer than 2-3 seconds to download (Photoshop gives you this information for each image).

**Format**
Refer to the web design guidelines.

**Instructional text**

Used to instruct users on how to perform a task related to functionality or interactive elements on the web page:
- Use precise, consistent instructional text.
- Provide one task per line.

  *Example*  
  - ✔️ 1 Read the terms and conditions  
  - 2 Select OK

- Use bold text to highlight interface elements.

  *Example*  
  - ✔️ ‘Select Submit’

- Refer to the interface element exactly as it appears on screen - if it is fully capitalised, repeat this style in your instructional text.
- Don’t refer to the object characteristics (eg button, radio button, dialogue box).

  *Example*  
  - ✔️ ‘Select Submit’  
  - ✗ ‘Select the Submit button’

- Don’t hide key information necessary for users to complete a task in popup or secondary help pages, tool tips or mouse rollovers.
Links

Linking policy
Link only to credible websites for supporting or related information.

- You may link to other Federal and State government agencies and stakeholder groups such as sponsors.

Naming links

- Don't waste words explaining the process, but let the hypertext do the work.

  Example ✗ 'Click here for full details in the latest newsletter'.
  ✓ 'The latest newsletter has full details'.

- Place important words at the front of the link text.

  Example ✗ Find out more about next week's music camp
  ✓ Find out more about the music camp next week

- Use the name of the linked site or page not the URL.

  ✓ More information is available from the Sydney City Council'

- Use a unique link name for each URL. Only use the same link phrase more than once on the page if the link points to the same target.

Return links
Use the protocol:

  o Return to page title (for links back to another web page).
  o Top of page (for links within a document).

Top of page links should be placed every 2 or 3 standard scrolling pages.

Don’t crowd the page

Don't put too many links into sentences and paragraphs as it can be confusing for the reader.

Consider collecting links into a list at the end of the paragraph.

Limit deep links

Before linking below the home page of another site consider whether the link will change, and how often you will check links.

An option is to link to the home page of a site (which rarely changes) with instructions on how to get to the required page.
Example  ✔ Follow the Building Stronger Communities link on the Sydney City Council website.

Links to attached files
Web readers have a general expectation that a link navigates them to another html page.
A link to a large attachment can lock up the reader’s browser while the attachment downloads and the external viewer loads.
Provide information about the file type and size to avoid reader frustration.

Example  ✔ NSW Healthy School Canteen Strategy [.pdf, 800 KB]

Links to email addresses (Mailto links)
Display the destination email address in the email link.

Example  ✔ For further information email jane.doe@det.nsw.edu.au

Some people’s browsers are not correctly configured with their email client, and they get an error when clicking the link. If the email address is spelt out they can still send an email.

Lists

• No more than 7 points in an online list.
• Make bullet points short.
• Use minimal punctuation online.

Bullet points are OK directly under headings which act as a leading sentence.

Example  ✔ Use bold for

• key words
• titles
• legislation.

Logos
Use the Conservatoriums logo in the template on every page. Use sponsor logos on the sponsor acknowledgement page.
**Metadata**

Web authors should think about metadata because it helps the online reader find the document.

Search engines search titles and metadata.

Metadata is the information attached to a web page to help make it findable and give it a unique identity. It may not be visible on the web page.

The key metadata elements online writers need to consider are:

- keywords – use a few keywords specific to the subject
- document title – use a short title which describes the subject matter, currency and ownership
- document description – should be concise and provide enough information for the reader to decide whether to go to the document.

**Page numbers**

All pages in an attached file should have footers identifying page number and number of pages in the format "Page X of X".

See [Attached document standards](#).
PDF and Word documents

As a guide, use Word document format for attached files if the content is not available on the html (web) page.

Word documents should be saved as RTF files for web publishing as they are more accessible.

Generally, PDF should only be used:
- where the original formatting of the document must be retained, eg legal documents, fact sheets, forms
- for image based documents such as maps where there is no alternative format for displaying the resource.

Related links

Related links are links you think the reader will find useful.

If you have not directly taken ideas or quotes from them they are not references.

Table of contents

There should be a list of contents for every web page or attached file requiring scrolling.

Use as heading: Contents

Titles – naming convention

Ensure the title is a concise, useful description of the document content, eg:

✓ 2008 Events Calendar
✘  Calendar

Policies

Use the naming convention: Topic, Action [Document type]

Example

✓ Child protection, amended procedures, Dec 2000
   [Procedure]

✘ Introduction of changed procedures for reporting risk of harm to children and young people from 18 December 2000 - Memorandum

Version control

Make sure versions match between web pages and attached files.
Web terms

When using web terms for a general audience use simple, consistent terms, even if they are not technically precise. For example, use web page not html.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attached file</th>
<th>Any file attached to a web page, intended for printing out. Another term you may see is ‘downloadable’ file.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Email and other ‘e’ words | No hyphen, no capital unless forming the beginning of a sentence.  
 email, ecommerce, egovernment |
| Internet | Lower case. Refers to the world wide web (www). |
| Metadata | Information attached to a document in the web publishing system, not visible on screen.  
 For example: Title, creator, description, publisher, date, resource type, unique identification number, keywords. |
| PDF | Portable Document Format. Portable Document Format. A format from Adobe that enables a document to be distributed on different systems while preserving the layout (.pdf). Must be read by Adobe software. |
| RTF | Rich Text Format. An open source document formatting scheme that allows files to be saved with formatting intact where it would otherwise be lost if simply saved as a text file. |
| Site | A “site” is a location for a bunch of related pages linked to from that site. Use once you have already established context. Eg:  
The Department of Education’s website went online in 2005. This site was awarded the Plain English in Government prize in 2006. |
| Unique identifier | The unique identifier is a number automatically generated by the system for each web page. |
| URL | Universal Resource Locator. The unique address of any Web document.  
The URL is [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)  
URLs do not necessarily start with www. |
| Web | Use lower case. The web. The world wide web. |
| Web page | Not html page. Separate words, no hyphen. A single entity, one URL, one file on the web. |
| Website | Separate words, no hyphen. |
7. Attached document standards

An attached document is provided as an attached file to a web page (eg PDF or word document).

These documents need to serve the dual purpose of being readable online, and making sense when printed out.

Information which is automated on web pages has to be added to attached documents by the author. These standards ensure that readers arriving directly into an attached file can understand the ownership and currency of the information, and how it relates to other information.

On the web page

- **Summary of key points** on the web page which links to the document
- **Link text on web page** must match title of attached document
- **Same versions.** Ensure that information is consistent between the web page and attached file.

Attached file

- **Document title** must be a concise, useful description of contents
- Make it obvious **who** the document belongs to (eg Departmental logo or name of business unit on an internal document)
- **Linked table of contents** for documents requiring scrolling
- **Font:** Verdana or Arial for headings and body text
- **Headers and footers**
  - correct DET logo
  - URL of related web page
  - page number, number of pages (Page X of X).

File size limit

- 500 KB (larger documents should be broken into sections)

Format

- If the content of the attached file is not provided on the web page, consider making the attached files a Word document (saved as an RTF file).
- The reason for saving Word documents as RTF is because RTFs are more accessible to different systems and browsers.
- As a guide only use PDF format where the original formatting needs to be retained (eg legal documents, forms, or graphics-rich documents such as maps.)
Links to attached files

Provide the name of the document, file type, size in kilobytes.

Example ✓ Working with children check [.doc, 134 KB].

Links in attached files

- Use links in attached files sparingly, if at all.
- Hyperlink the full URL (eg www.google.com) not the name, as the document may be printed out, and the reader will need the full URL to access the site. It should still be an active link for those reading online.
8. Corporate style guide

This is a general guide to the use of common styles and terms.
The reference guides to style, spelling and grammar are Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers, and The Macquarie Dictionary.

Acronyms and abbreviations

Abbreviations
Use the whole word version the first time and abbreviate thereafter.

Example
New South Wales (NSW)
Thereafter: NSW

For every new document or web page the full version will need to be restated before using the abbreviation. This is because if a reader lands at a page deep within the site, they may not have had the opportunity to read the first instance of the acronym.

Acronyms
An acronym is a word made from the first letters of others words forming a long name.

Example
Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board Accredited
Acronym: VETAB Accredited

Write the full version the first time with the acronym in brackets afterward and use the acronym thereafter.

For every new document or web page the full version will need to be restated before using the acronym. This is because if a reader lands at a page deep within the site, they may not have had the opportunity to read the first instance of the acronym.

Example
✓ The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) has the area under review. A report is expected from CALM within the month.
Apostrophes

- Used to show possession (Joe’s hat) or contraction (it’s = it is).
- If you’re not sure whether a noun ending in “s” should be followed by an apostrophe, ask yourself whether you could substitute “his” or “her” for the “s.”
- When the “s” is added to a word simply to make it a plural, no apostrophe is used.
- Apostrophes should not be used in abbreviations and are not required for place names, such as Batemans Bay or St Georges Basin.
- “It’s” always means “it is” or “it has” and nothing else. Try changing the “its” in your sentence to “his” and if it doesn’t make sense, then go with “it’s.”

`Example`

- The government’s policies (one government)
- The students’ fees (many students)
- Doesn’t meaning does not
- It’s a boy meaning it is
- cucumber’s for sale
- the baby dropped it’s dummy

Capitals

- Headings: only the first letter of the first word or a proper noun should have a capital letter.

`Example`

- Working with Children Check
- Working with children check
- Teaching Music in government schools

- Don’t use capitals for government if not referring to a particular government.

`Example`

- government control, and elected government

- Only use capitals when the thing or person referred to is specific. Eg name of person, place or organisation.

`Example`

- The New South Wales Government
The Premier of New South Wales

- Don’t use capitals for government if not referring to a particular government. However, it is customary to use the Department (and Departmental) when referring to the Department of Education and Training.

  Example
  ✔ government control, and elected government
  ✔ other departments

**Colons**

Useful when introducing further information to a sentence or listing:

  Example
  ✔ Three components make up this weekend’s Music Camp: Choral, Wind, Symphonic. There will also be masterclasses.

**Commas**

Use commas in communication rarely.

Use when you need to create a pause or break in a sentence.

  Example
  ✔ Those affected included pilots, train drivers, and concierge workers.

**Contraction**

Refer to the first time in full and thereafter in the contracted form.

  Example
  ✔ He cannot be expected to walk over rocks without shoes and certainly can’t make more than 20 kilometres in a day.

**Currency**

There should be at least two figures after the decimal point.

  Example
  ✔ $25.00
  ✔ $2.75 million
  ✔ 5c
Dates

Preferred style:

Example ✔️ 7 February 2005

Conservatorium of Music

Refer to the first time as the eg Coffs Harbour Regional Conservatorium of Music and thereafter as the Conservatorium.

Do not refer to the Conservatorium as the Con.

‘e’ words

A contraction involving the word ‘electronic’. This should have no hyphen or capital unless forming the beginning of a sentence.

Example ✔️ email, ecommerce, egovernment.

Full Stop

Use a full stop after a complete sentence only.

Do not use a full stop after a heading, to express dates, signatures, symbols for units of measurement or currency, or between capital letters which make up an abbreviation.

Headings

Can be bolded for contrast but should not be entirely in capitals.

Only the first letter should have a capital letter, unless the heading contains a proper noun.

Example ✗ Working with Children Check
✔️ Working with children check
✔️ Teaching Music in government schools
Hyphens, dashes and dots

Hyphen

Use minimal hyphenation.

Hyphenate when:

- leaving the hyphen out could cause confusion of meaning
  - re-cover (to cover again)
  - recover (to regain health)
- the hyphen prevents the word being read as one syllable
  - de-ice not deice
- leaving the hyphen out makes it difficult to read:
  - anti-aircraft not antiaircraft
  - semi-official not semiofficial

The rules of hyphen use are complex. If in doubt, refer to the Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers.

En-dash (–)

The en dash usually means "through" to indicate inclusive dates and numbers.

Example  1992–94
          pages 45–50

The en-dash also indicates an association between two different words.

Example  TAFE–industry partnerships

To separate years using words use from... to or between... and.

Example  from 1980 to 1990
          between 1980 and 1990
          from 1980–1990

Hold down Alt and type 0150 on the numeric keyboard to type an en-dash.

Em-dash (—)

- Creates a strong break in the structure of a sentence.
• Dashes can be used in pairs like parentheses—that is, to enclose a word, or a phrase, or a clause—or they can be used alone to detach one end of a sentence from the main body.
• There is no letter space on either side of them.
• Don’t use where commas give sufficient indication of a break.

Example ✓ In 1992–93 more than 425,000 people in New South Wales—nearly nine per cent of the working population over the age of 16—were enrolled in a TAFE course.

Hold down Alt and type 0151 on the numeric keyboard to type an em-dash.

**Dots (ellipsis)**
Use three spaced dots to (an ellipsis) to indicate that words have been left out in a quotation or an example.

Example ✓ If the required standard is not reached...overall performance is recorded as 'not yet competent'.

**Italics**
Don’t use italics for online documents.
In other documents use italics:

- to emphasise a single word or quoted phrase
- for book titles, works of art, TV and radio programs, and legislation and legal cases
- technical terms.

**Lists**
If each dot point completes a leading sentence:

- use a colon after the leading sentence
- no initial capital is used
- no commas
- there is a full stop at the end of the last bullet point.

When the leading sentence and each bullet point is a complete sentence:

- Use a capital at the beginning of each bullet point.
- Use a full stop at the end of each bullet point.
Non-discriminatory language

Use non-discriminatory language, taking care not to cause any controversy or offence to any section of the community.

Numbers

Should be expressed in words for numbers zero to nine and figures for numbers 10 and upwards. The exception is when using lists or tables or when beginning and ending a sentence, in which case words should be used.

Example
✓ A crowd of 2500 people.
✓ Five tutors and 20 students went on the excursion.
✓ The investment cost $7290.

The traditional comma dividing groups of three digits has largely been replaced by a space, but where the total number of digits is only four, no space is required:

Example
✓ 1000 10 000 100 000

People and positions

When referring to a staff member at the Conservatorium, include title, and contact number.

Example
✓ If you have further queries contact John Smith, Manager, (02) 9856 5826

Per cent

Express in words unless as part of a table, in which case use the % sign.
**Punctuation**

Use open punctuation, ie exclude all unnecessary punctuation marks such as full stops in abbreviations.

Leave one space after an initial of a name, for example, D Watson.

Don’t use punctuation in dates.

> **Example**
> - ✔ Mr D R Bright
> - ✔ eg
> - ✔ ie
> - ✔ etc
> - ✔ 7 November 2005
> - ✗ Mr. D.R. Bright
> - ✗ e.g.
> - ✗ i.e.
> - ✗ e.t.c.
> - ✗ 7th November 2005

**References**

Always acknowledge information from other sources.

Provide a direct link to an online source in an online document.

> **Example**
> - ✔ Readers scan a web page in an F-shaped pattern ([Nielson 2006](#)).

Paraphrase the ideas from a print source and provide footnote references or a reference list at the end of your document.

Reference style:

> **Example**

**Quotations**

Use double quotation marks for direct speech, and single quotation marks for quotes within existing quotation marks.

> **Example**
> - ✔ “I love Mondays” said the public servant.
> - ✔ “As Oscar Wilde said ‘experience is simply the name we give our mistakes’” said the teacher.
Semicolons

If clauses are long and already contain commas then a semicolon can aid in separating a lengthy sentence.

For online text, consider breaking long sentences into shorter ones rather than using semicolons and colons.

Example ✓ The report concludes that governments must provide more political and financial support for vocational training; that further research and development is needed; and that increased coordination and cooperation between education sectors should be encouraged.

Slashes

Avoid altogether.

Example ❌ Example: his/her or and/or are not to be used.

Spelling

- Proof read text rather than relying solely on spell-checking programs.
- Use Australian English rather than American English spelling.
- Watch out for automatic spelling correction in Microsoft Word which is defaulted to American spelling.
- Use “ise” instead of “ize” for verbs, eg organise, harmonise.
- Use “our” instead of “or”, eg harbour, colour, favour.
- Do not drop the “e” from “ment” words, eg judgement, lodgement.

See Common Errors in English. (This is an excellent grammar resource but be aware it uses American spelling).

Telephone and fax numbers

Use brackets for area codes and where appropriate include the international dialling prefix. The access code for dialling into Australia is (61).

Example ✓ (02) 9211 5679
✓ (61-2) 9211 5679
Underlining

Should only be used for showing hyperlinks on screen.
Use bold to highlight rather than underlining as it shows more clearly on print outs and photocopies.

**URL**

Should be placed in brackets when referred to within a string of text.

*Example* ✔️ The Google website ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)) provides a search facility.
9. Useful links

Standards and guidelines
Internal guides are found under Corporate style guide.

**Good Communications Guidelines for Writing Government Publications** (Victorian Government)

**Better Information** Australian Government Information Management Office

**Good Communications Guidelines for Writing Government Publications** State Government of Victoria

**Web publishing standards** Tasmanian Government
Writing and grammar resources

Please note – some of these are American sites using American spelling.

**Brians, Paul** Common errors in English (Washington State University)
http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/errors/errors.html

**Department of Education, Science and Training** What’s Plain English?

**Plain Language Checklist** (American government site)
http://plainlanguage.gov/howto/quickreference/index.cfm

**McGovern, Gerry** Writing for the Web: Part 1 April 2003

**NETnet** Content chunking for distance learning
http://www.netnet.org/instructors/coursedev/chunking/

**Nielson, Jacob** F-Shaped Pattern For Reading Web Content April 2006
http://www.useit.com/alertbox/reading_pattern.html

**Orwell, George** Politics and the English Language

**Strunk, William** - The Elements of Style. An oldie but goodie. See Elementary Principles of Composition.
http://www.bartleby.com/141/

**University of Illinois** Grammar Handbook The Writers Workshop – Centre for Writing Studies

**Watson, Don** Weasel Words (Anti-bureaucratic language movement in Australia).

**Will-Harris, Daniel** Writing for the web

**Webcredible** Writing effective ALT text for images May 2005
http://www.webcredible.co.uk/user-friendly-resources/web-accessibility/image-alt-text.shtml
10. Legislation and guidelines

Legislation relevant to online information

Anti-Discrimination Act 1977

Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998

Freedom of Information Act 1989

Copyright Act 1879

Spam Act 2003

Guidelines

Use of the Internet for Electronic Messaging Guideline (NSW)

Government online service obligations (Commonwealth)