AFP Corporate Writing Style Guide

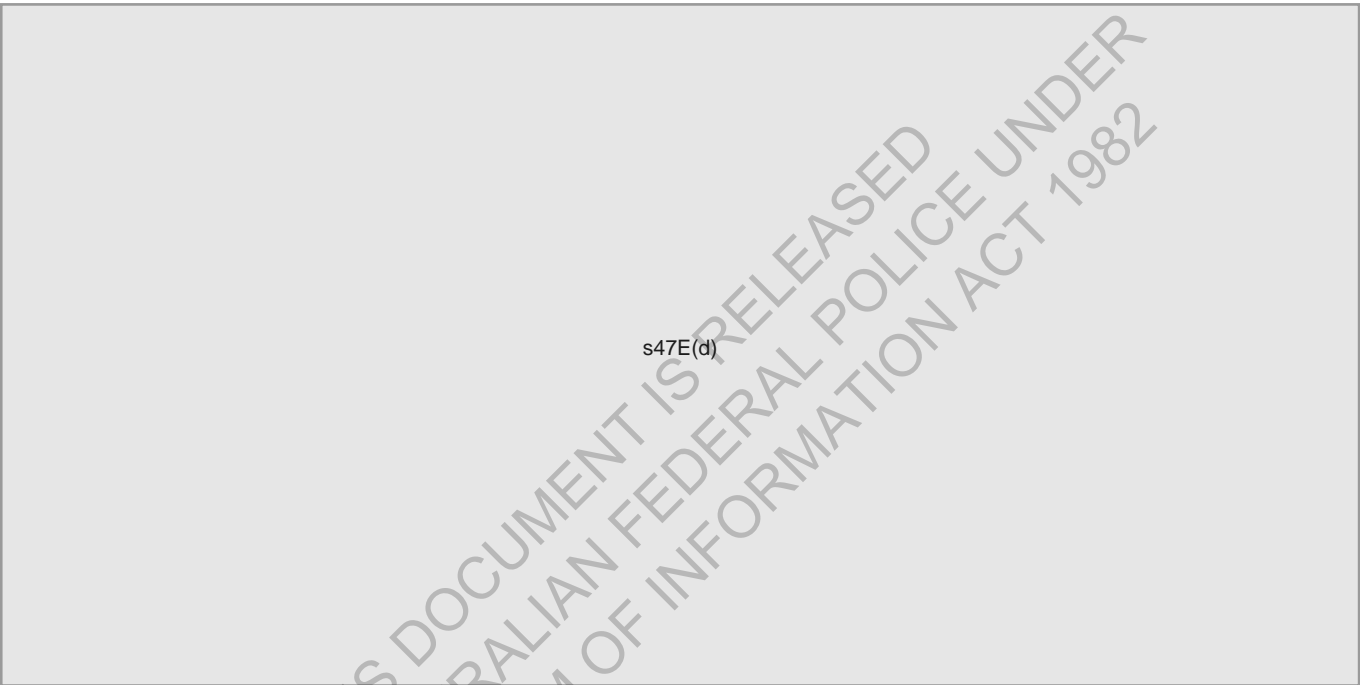Communications and Customs

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Introduction

The *AFP Corporate Writing Style Guide* maintains a consistent style of written and spoken communication in formal and day-to-day corporate communication products on behalf of the agency.

The guide has 5 chapters

1. Accessible and inclusive content

2. Language guide

3. Grammar and style

4. Policing considerations

5. Resources

Guidance should be applied to all communication products and formal documents, including briefs and corporate reporting documents. Not all style recommendations are relevant for media releases or court documents which follow traditional news writing techniques.

The *AFP Corporate Writing Style Guide* is consistent with the *Australian Government Style Manual* and has been developed by Enterprise Communications, in partnership with ACT Policing and Government Relations. Its spelling is consistent with the *Macquarie Dictionary* which is the preferred Australian English dictionary for the agency. Where relevant, Australian New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency (ANZPAA) protocols have been incorporated.

Reference is made where AFP style differs from the *Australian Government Style Manual*.

Contact [s47E(d)]@afp.gov.au for queries.

1.0 Accessible and inclusive content

People can experience ongoing, temporary or situational barriers to access the information they need. We make all information available to them by designing accessible and inclusive content.

The Australian Government's aim is that all government services are digital first. This aim is described in the _Government Digital Strategy_.

Australian Government digital services must be usable and accessible – a requirement under the _Digital Service Standard_.

1.1 Accessible content

The _Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2_ (WCAG) set the accessibility standard for Australian Government content. It addresses how to meet the specific needs of people with disability and should be used for all communication products.

The WCAG outlines 4 accessibility principles to ensure content is:

1. perceivable
2. operable
3. understandable
4. robust.

Each principle provides practical ways to ensure content meets the users' needs, for example:

- text alternatives for images
- adaptable formatting to avoid the user losing information or structure
- using inclusive, everyday language.

Additional resources include:

- The _Web Content Accessibility Guidelines_ which provides detailed information on how to implement accessibility on in relation to writing and editing.
- The _Australian Government Style Manual_ which outlines the basics for accessible and inclusive content.

1.1.2 Inclusive content

Inclusive content recognises Australia's diversity and the diversity of technology we use to engage online.

For example, inclusive content accommodates:

- cultural and linguistic diversity among users
- diversity of abilities among users
- how users interact with technology in different contexts.

1.2 Literacy and access

Literacy is a person's ability to read and write. It's also how well they can access written text in digital and print formats.

The preference for everyday language (plain English) increases with a person's level of education and the complexity of the topic.

Typically, writing to an Australian Year 7 level (age range from 12 to 14 years) makes content usable and accessible for most people. That said, content should be written for the audience rather than to meet a strict readability score.

There are 5 recommendations for addressing literacy and access:

1. use simple, everyday language
2. use a simple layout and design (people skim read headings and page structure)
3. avoid content with too many unfamiliar words and phrases
4. avoid long and complex sentences
5. maintain tense and rhythm and directly address when this may change.

See 2.2 for more information on using everyday words (plain English).

1.3 Inclusive language

1.3.1 Age

Age should only be referred to when it's relevant to context. If it's relevant, there are 2 main style conventions:

- Punctuate with hyphens (3.12) when the reference to age comes before a noun.
- Use numerals (3.20) unless the age reference begins a sentence.

Example

- A 39-year-old man faces court today on several charges. [age comes before the noun]
- You can withdraw super when you're 65, even if you're still working. [age reference after the noun]
- Fourteen-year-old Heather is the youngest Australian on the Paralympic Games squad. [age starts the sentence and is before the noun]

Further considerations when referencing age:

- Using age ranges rather than specific references. For example, 'people aged 15 to 17 years …'
- Referring to level of study instead of age. For example, the preschool students, high-school students etc.

See 4.2.1 for policing specific considerations when discussing age.

1.3.2 Content warnings

Content warnings precede potentially sensitive or upsetting content so readers, viewers or listeners can choose whether to engage with it.

The warnings aren't specific to law enforcement-based content.

They should be applied when addressing cultural sensitives or broad themes such as:

- nudity
- blood
- cancer
- death
- violence.

The warning should provide the audience with the information to decide on when and how to consume the content. However, they shouldn't include details that may cause upset or offence.

> **Example:**
>
> **Do write**: Nudity, blood and violence.

1.3.3 Trigger warnings

Trigger warnings forewarn audiences of content themes that may cause intense physiological and psychological symptoms for people living with post-traumatic stress and other disorders.

They allow the audience to decide how to engage with the content, based on their specific experiences. They should be applied to specific themes such as:

- child abuse and exploitation
- suicide
- pregnancy, childbirth, miscarriage or abortion
- racism and racial slurs etc.

> **Example**:
>
> - **Trigger warning:** The following content contains discussion on, and imagery of, sexual violence.

A content or trigger warning may only apply to one section of the communication product. A single warning for the specific section or a blanket warning is appropriate.

1.3.4 Cultural and linguistic diversity

Use inclusive language that respects and accurately represents cultural diversity.

When writing about multicultural communities:

- Speak to/about the person, not their difference.
- Only mention cultural affinity or identity when it's relevant.
- Refer to people living in Australia as 'Australians'.
- Use the terms 'given name' and 'family name' (in place of first/last name or surname).
- Avoid using words such as 'ethnic Australians' or 'ethnic groups'.
- Inform yourself of the many languages, cultures and religious beliefs in your audience.

1.3.5 Disability

People with Disability Australia (PWDA) define 'disability' as the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers.

In all communications, we should challenge the physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers to accommodate impairment as an expected part of human diversity.

When writing about disability:

- Focus on the person, not the disability.
- Use respectful language acknowledging people's preferences to identify with a particular community or characteristic.
- Avoid wording that characterises people with disability as heroes or victims.

Refer to the _PWDA Language Guide: A guide to language about disability_ for examples of acceptable, current terminology

1.3.6 First Nations Australians

There's a wide range of nations, cultures and languages across mainland Australia and throughout the Torres Strait. Respectful language depends on what different communities find appropriate.

The First Nations Unit endorses the following terminology for use across the agency:

Terminology	Correct use
First Nations	Should be used as a general (and often primary) reference of culture/group/race.
	For example, First Nations culture is respected and celebrated at the AFP.
First Nations people	Should be used when referring to specific individuals/groups.
	For example, there were 30 First Nations people at the gathering.

Terminology	Correct use
Aboriginal	A broad term that groups nations and custodians of mainland Australia and most of the islands, including Tasmania, K'gari (Fraser Island), Palm Island, Mornington Island, Groote Eylandt, Bathurst and Melville Islands. This term should only be used in reference to this culture. For example, 30 members identify as aboriginal.
Torres Strait Islander	A broad term grouping the peoples of at least 274 small islands between the northern tip of Cape York in Queensland and the south-west coast of Papua New Guinea. Many Torres Strait Islander peoples live on the Australian mainland. There are also 2 Torres Strait Islander communities at Bamaga and Seisia, within the Northern Peninsula Area of Queensland. This term should only be used in reference to this culture. For example, 30 members identify as Torres Strait Islander.
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	Is specific reference to both cultures.

When writing for, or about, First Nations Australians:

Do use respectful language such as:	Don't use discriminatory or offensive language such as:
Specific terms, like the name of a community, before using broader terms	s 47E(d)
Plurals when speaking about collectives (peoples, nations, cultures, languages)	
Present tense, unless speaking about a past event	
Empowering, strengths-based language	

Consultation protocols and respectful language use depend on the preferences of the peoples involved. Contact [s47E(d)]@afp.gov.au for further guidance.

1.3.7 Gender and sexual identity

Using inclusive language when discussing gender conveys equality and respects peoples' preferences around gender and sexual identity. It applies to pronoun choice, job titles and personal titles.

In general, use terms that recognise gender equality and avoid terms that discriminate based on a person's gender or sexual identity.

- Learn preferred pronouns, choosing gender-neutral pronouns (they/them) if it's not clear and you cannot ask.
- Avoid gender specific job titles, for example, police officer instead of policeman.
- Consider the appropriate and preferred title, for example, Ms and Mx instead of Mrs or Miss.

The use of gender-neutral pronouns to refer to a person of unknown gender has a long history. Usage now covers when the gender is unknown and people who either don't wish to identify as a particular gender or identify as non-binary or gender-fluid.

Use the general-neutral 'they' if someone's pronoun isn't clear and restructure the sentence to remove the reference if gender isn't relevant to context. Pronouns 'they/them' should be used when you would otherwise use a singular pronoun such as:

- she/her
- he/him.

> **Example**
>
> **Do write**: Every candidate must provide copies of the application to referees. [sentence restructured to remove irrelevant reference to gender]
>
> **Don't write**: Candidates should provide copies of the application to **his/her** referees. [pronouns are unknown and not relevant to context]

The following table outlines the most common gender and sexual diversity terms according to the _Australian Government Style Manual_.

Term	Description
Gender	Is about social and cultural differences and identity. 'Gender' and 'sex' both mean 'the state of being male or female' but are often used in different ways.
Gender expression	Is the way a person expresses their gender.
Gender identity	Is about who a person feels themselves to be. It refers to the way a person identifies or expresses their masculine or feminine traits.
Gender-queer and non-binary	Refers to people who don't identify as either male or female. They may identify as both or neither. 'Gender-fluid' refers to people who don't identify with a fixed gender.

Term	Description
Intersex	Refers to people with innate genetic, hormonal or physical sex characteristics that don't conform to medical norms for female or male bodies.
Sex	Refers to the legal status initially determined by sex characteristics observed at birth.
Sex characteristics	Are a person's physical sex features, such as their chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs.
Sexual orientation	Is a person's romantic or sexual attraction to another person, such as heterosexual, gay, lesbian or bisexual.
Sexuality	Includes biological sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, pregnancy and reproduction.

See 4.2.2 for policing specific considerations when discussing gender and sexual identity.

1.3.8 Mental illness

Mental illness is a broad term that covers many different conditions that influence the way people act, think, feel or see the world.

Use people-first language when you refer to a person with mental illness.

Describe the person as 'having' mental illness, not as 'being' a disease.

The term 'psychosocial disability' is specific to some people with severe mental health conditions. It covers both psychological and social factors. It focuses on restrictions on participating in society.

Mental illness sometimes attracts social stigma which may prevent people from acknowledging their mental health conditions and talking about them with others. Refer to the _Australian Human Rights Commission_ and _Everymind_ for more detailed information.

See 4.7 for policing specific considerations when discussing mental illness.

1.3.9 Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity' refers to the idea that neurological differences, such as autism and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, sit within the normal spectrum of human variation. Neurological differences aren't always a disability.

Advocates refer to the diverse range of differences in the brain and behaviour and say societal barriers are the main factors disabling people. Neurodiversity was first used for people on the autism spectrum. It's now also applied to other conditions, such as dyslexia.

Refer to the _Australian Government Style Manual for_ a detailed breakdown of respectful language for various disabilities.

2.0 Language guide

2.1 Tone of voice

Tone of voice is the emotional connection created with an audience through written and spoken words.

Our tone of voice is:

- **Genuine** – authentic and believable.
- **Appropriate** – to content and reader.
- **Consistent** – over channels and time.

Our tone adapts with each of our 4 key audiences: community, employees, partners and offenders, to allow us to communicate authentically, respectfully and clearly.

In practice, our tone of voice may sound like:

Audience	Tone of voice
Community	Outsmart crime with a career at the AFP. Visit our website for more information.
Employees	SHIELD is a new way of delivering health and wellbeing services to all employees. Contact SHIELD today.
Partners and stakeholders	Together we'll protect children and ensure those involved are identified and brought before the courts.
Offenders	You will be caught and prosecuted if you import drugs into Australia.

Tone of voice is a key element of the AFP brand and should be given considerable thought when creating any communication product on behalf of the agency.

2.2 Using everyday words (plain English)

How people read depends on how well they already understand the subject and how familiar the vocabulary is.

Using everyday words people are familiar with will make your content easier to read and understand.

> **Example**
>
> **Do write**: Email your receipt by 5 pm today to claim the prize.
>
> **Don't write**: You are required to disclose financial documentation in a timely manner or you will be deemed to be disqualified from this prize offer.

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Other everyday language considerations include:

- limiting or explaining unusual or policing specific words and phrases
- using personal pronouns such as 'we', 'you', and 'us'
- avoiding jargon, slang and idioms
- replacing longer words and phrases with simpler alternatives
- limiting the use of adjectives and adverbs
- using active voice and shorter sentences.

2.2.1 Everyday word alternatives

Instead of ...	Use ...
Accordingly	So
Accustomed to	Used to
Amongst	Among
Approximately	About
As a consequence of	Because
In/as regards to	About or concerning
Assist	Help
Be of the opinion	Think, consider or conclude
Cease	Stop
Close proximity	Near
Cognisant of	Aware of
Commence	Start or begin
Component	Part
Concept	Idea
Concerning	About
Consequently	So
Constitute	Make up/form
Despatch	Send
Despite the fact that	Although or despite
Due to the fact that	As or because
Emanate from	Come from
Endeavour	Try
Entitlement	Right

Instead of ...	Use ...
Enter into negotiations	Negotiate
Eventuate	Happen or result
For the duration of	During or while
Furthermore	Also
Henceforth	From now on or from this point
Indicate	Show
Initial	First
In lieu of	Instead of
In order to	To
In regard to	About or concerning
In the near future	Soon
Obtain	Get or receive
Prior to	Before
Whilst	While
Utilise	Use

2.3 Active vs passive language

The active-voice construction of sentences — subject/verb/object — makes a sentence more direct and easier to understand.

Active voice should be used for all written communication products and formal documents as it's more engaging for the reader.

Passive	Active
The lamp was knocked over by the boy.	The boy knocked over the lamp.
The application was filed by the student	The student filed the application

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3.0 Grammar and style

3.1 Abbreviations

Abbreviations contain the first or first few letters of a word and at times may be a shorted form of the Latin equivalent. For example:

- p for page
- cont. for continued
- para for paragraph.

Abbreviations should be avoided for any public-facing content and broader communications products as they are typically only easily understood by people within your business area or the author.

> **Example**
>
> **Do write:** Thank you for your email about the wording in the third paragraph on page 3.
>
> **Don't write**: Thank you for your email about the wording in the 3rd para on p 3.

Similarly, Latin abbreviations should be spelt out in full and only used where there is limited space such as in tables and charts, or in technical and specialist publications. In these instances, the most common Latin abbreviations are 'e.g.' and 'i.e.' which don't need to be spelt out before being abbreviated. Both terms should be followed by a full stop after each letter.

> **Example**
>
> **Do write:** Some aspects of grammar can be confusing – for example, the difference between an initialism and an acronym.
>
> **Don't write**: Some aspects of grammar can be confusing, e.g. the difference between an initialism and an acronym.

In general, the following style should be followed when using abbreviations:

- Capitalise the same way as the spelt-out version, for example misc. for miscellaneous and Dec for December.
- Don't abbreviate the first word in a sentence.
- Don't place a full stop after an abbreviation unless:

    – it ends a sentence and isn't followed by another punctuation mark

    – It references a scientific name for plants and animals

    – you are using the abbreviation 'n.d.' (meaning 'no date') for the year of publication in references, e.g. or i.e. Abbreviations that start and end with the first and last letters of the whole word they replace don't use a full stop. For example 'Dr' for 'Doctor'.

Semi-formal and informal content uses abbreviations more often, however should only be used if they will be easily understood by the audience. If there is any doubt, define the abbreviation on first use.

3.2 Acronyms (and initialisms)

Acronyms comprise the initial letters (and sometimes syllables) of the words in a term or phrase. They're often pronounced as a word. Initialisms comprise initial letters (or sounds) of the words in a term or phrase and are pronounced as letters, not as a word.

Acronym	Initialism
Qantas	AFP
Anzac	ABC
Tafe	GST

Some shortened forms are a combination of an initialism and an acronym, for example DFAT, JPEG, and NDIS.

Acronyms and initialisms are frequently used across the agency, however it's important to remember your audience and the intent of your communication product. To maximise the reach of your communications:

- Write out acronyms in full on first use, followed by the acronym in brackets.
- Limit the use of acronyms to avoid confusion. If a document has multiple acronyms or is particularly long, spell out some of the words or phrases in full only using broadly recognised acronyms.
- Don't end acronyms with a full stop.
- Avoid plural and possessive forms on the first use.
- Don't include an acronym or initialism if the term is only used once.

Exceptions to the above may include when objects or institutions are most commonly referred to by its acronym (for example, Anzac, Tafe, and CSIRO).

In some cases, it may also be appropriate to write the reference in full followed by the acronym in brackets, where the acronym is not used again through the document. This is usually to accommodate an audience who know the reference by the acronym and not the full reference. For example, public order management (POM) is easily recognised by its acronym to members and public service officers, while corporate employees will understand the content more easily with the full reference.

Quotes should be written exactly as the speaker said it with the full phrase written in square brackets when referencing an acronym or initialism in a direct quote.

> **Example:**
>
> 'The AFP [Australian Federal Police] is Australia's national policing agency' he said.

3.3 Ampersands (&)

An ampersand (&) represents the word 'and'. We use them sparingly and only in cases where they're:

- already part of an established acronym, for example, in an abbreviated team name, where Emergency Management and Planning becomes EM&P in a table (excludes headings)
- for web-based titles where character space is limited
- for social media.

We avoid using symbols unless necessary, such as when reproducing a mathematical calculation, as computers/programs may not recognise the symbol in specific styles.

3.4 Apostrophes

Apostrophes indicate possession or a contraction (see 3.10 contractions). In general, an apostrophe:

Should be used ...	Shouldn't be used ...
With an 's' to form possessive acronyms or initialisms - for example, 'the fire destroyed some of ASIO's files'.	For descriptive phrases - for example, 'the drivers licence'.
To show a contraction - for example, 'I haven't seen that report yet'.	For plural shortened forms unless demonstrating possession – for example, MPs vs the MP's entitlements are current.
For singular time reference - for example 'a day's work'.	When defining an acronym or initialism – for example, 'The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA)'.
	For possessive pronouns – for example, 'please put the report in its place'.
	For Australian place names – for example, 'Kings Cross'.
	For plural periods of time – for example 'in six weeks' time'.

3.5 Attributions

Attributions are placed at the end of the first whole sentence of a quote, where the only thing the person speaking did was say something. In general:

- Only one attribution is required if the quote is continuing across several lines.
- The final quote from a spokesperson should end with a full stop and single quotation mark.
- A new speaker, or a new quote from the same speaker, both require a new attribution if it comes after content that isn't part of a continuing quote.

Example one:

'This style guide ensures members are following best practice when communicating on behalf of the agency' Manager Corporate Communications and Customs said.

Example 2:

'Policing is a challenging job,' AFP Assistant Commissioner Waller said.

'There will be times when our officers are required to deal with confronting situations.

'When that occurs, we need to support them.'

3.6 Capital letters

Capital letters are mostly used for proper nouns – the names of specific people, places, organisations or things. By not overusing them, you'll improve the readability and credibility of your writing.

Within the AFP, we often use capital letters as a sign of respect to ranks, specialist areas, or professions, however this is incorrect and can make your content harder to read.

Remember, we're writing to an Australian year 7 level (age range 12 to 14) and should follow the 'less is more' rule for capital letters.

Do use capital letters for:	Example
Proper nouns (a specific person, organisation/agency, place or thing)	Northern Command is in Brisbane [official reference]
	The commands are spread across Australia [general reference]
Distinguishing between proper nouns and common nouns in a sentence	Police and employees walked with their state and territory police counterparts to the National Police Memorial [correct usage]
	Police and Employees walked with their State Police Counterparts to the National Police Memorial [incorrect usage]
The first letter in a sentence and table cells	The first letter in this sentence and cell is a capital.
Official references to legislated titles and all references to an Act	The Act strengthened ties between … [reference to an Act]
	The government passed several bills this week [general reference]
Professional titles when written before the person's name	Forensic Scientist, Heather Waller is the lead for the project [official reference]
	Heather Waller is the leading forensic scientist [general reference]

Do use capital letters for:	Example
The initial reference for formal names and titles of government entities and office holders	The ACT Government is … [official reference]
	The Australian and New Zealand governments [general reference]
Reference to the Australian Government when the 2 words are used together	The Australian Government has decided … [official reference]
	The government decided … [general reference]
Roads and streets	You'll have to visit George Street [street name]
The initial or full reference for buildings, structures and places	We are visiting St Paul's Cathedral [official reference]
	The cathedral is in Griffith [general reference]

3.7 Collective nouns

Collective nouns are a type of common noun that refers to a group in a single word.

The AFP, ACT Policing, and individual portfolios, commands, and business area are all collective nouns.

Correct	Incorrect
The AFP is …	The AFP are …
ACT Policing is …	ACT Policing are …
Crime Command is …	Crime Command are …

When referring to police officers, it's correct to say 'police **are** investigating …' as police means a group of officers (more than one). Similarly, protective service officers '**are**' and the Specialist Protective Command '**is**'.

3.8 Commas

A comma may be used to:

- separate introductory words, phrases and clauses
- mark out non-essential information within a sentence
- punctuate sentences lists and strings of adjectives
- depict numbers of 4 or more digits
- mark pauses for the speaker when speech writing
- connect 2 or more principal clauses joined by a conjunction ('and', 'or', 'but' etc.).

Don't overuse commas or make the reader pause more than they need to. Rephrase the content into shorter sentences where possible.

Example

Do write: The executive brief was submitted for approval late last week. The brief is about demographic changes in rural areas in Western Australia.

Don't write: The executive brief, detailing demographic changes in rural areas in Western Australia, was submitted for approval late last week.

3.8.1 Oxford commas

The oxford comma (or serial comma) is the final comma in a sentence list.

When applied correctly, oxford commas may prevent ambiguity in complex sentence lists, however when used incorrectly they may affect the intended meaning. They should therefore be used sparingly.

Example

The analysis outlined demand for barley, wheat and hay for stockfeed. [all crops are for stockfeed]

The analysis outlined demand for barley, wheat, and hay for stockfeed. [only the hay is for stockfeed]

3.9 Compound adjectives

A compound adjective is when 2 adjectives (describing words) are joined with a hyphen. They can also be made up of an adverb and a verb, however a hyphen shouldn't be used with most adverbs ending in 'ly'.

Example

- 2-day counterterrorism conference (number + noun)
- Built-in gun lockers (verb + preposition)
- Alcohol-related crime (adjective + adjective)
- White-coloured station wagon (adjective + adjective).

3.10 Contractions

Contractions combine 2 or more words using an apostrophe. They're also used as shortened versions of single words.

We use them in more informal content including *The Pulse, AFP News Online*, and internal newsletters. Single-word contractions use the first and last letters of a word and sometimes other letters in between.

Single word	Grammatical phrases
Cth (Commonwealth)	Aren't (are not)
Dr (doctor)	Don't (do not)
Ltd (limited)	Isn't (is not)

3.11 Captions and credits

Captions describe the 'who, what, where and when' of an image or video. They should be applied to all imagery and video unless its use is decorative.

Credit (attribution) is typically included within or after a short caption to acknowledge the creator or copyright holder.

> **Example**
>
> Figure 1: ACT Police circa 1994. Photo courtesy of *The Canberra Times*. [The Canberra Times is italicised as it's the name of the publication]

3.12 Dashes (en/em) and hyphens

Dashes indicate a relationship, pause, range or a strong interruption to a sentence. They come in pairs — unless the interruption is at the end of a sentence — in which case a single dash should be used.

- There are 2 types of dashes categorised by their length: the em dash and the en dash.
- The length of the dash relates to the width of the letters ('m' and 'n'), meaning the em dash is longer.
- A dash and hyphen are not the same thing.

Dashes can affect readability for people using screen readers. Phrases should therefore be used where possible for paragraph text and headings.

Spaced en dashes are Australian government style and should be used in digital content where the full wording can't be used.

3.12.1 En dash (−)

The en dash marks ranges and replaces 'to' in phrases. However, use the full words over an en dash to reduce overuse of punctuation. For example:

- 'from' is paired with 'to'
- 'between' is paired with 'and'.

This guidance may not apply to technical content when spans and ranges are frequently represented. More generally:

- Join nouns with en dashes to show equal relationships.
- Rewrite sentences to avoid joining prefixes with an en dash.
- Space en dashes in sentences to set off non-essential information.

> **Example**
>
> She worked **from** 10 **to** 28 January 2023. ['from paired with 'to']
>
> Rainfall **between** 2017 **and** 2019 was lower than the long-term average. ['between' paired with 'and']

3.12.2 Em dash (—)

The em dash can be used in place of colons, commas or brackets to separate parts of a sentence. They can also be used to show a sudden interruption in quotations – in this instance, 2 em dashes in a row should be used (——).

> **Example**
>
> Our social media platforms — and the teams behind them — are working hard to promote the agency every day. [em dashes replace commas to separate the sentence]

3.12.3 Hyphens

Hyphens are short dashes connecting words and prefixes to demonstrate the relationship between the 2 words. They're commonly used:

- to create compound adjectives [comprising multiple individual words]
- in words with prefixes to distinguish them from words that would otherwise look the same.

Hyphens shouldn't be used with spaces at either end.

> **Example**
>
> - The 30-year-old-woman [compound adjective] vs. the woman was 30 years old.
> - Re-creation [create again] vs. recreation [leisure-related activity]

3.13 Date, time and time zones

3.13.1 Date

Dates should be written day of the week, date, month, year. When writing dates:

- The day of the week and month should be spelt out in full – **Tuesday** 17 **January** 2023.
- The day and year should be reflected using numerals – Tuesday **17** January **2023**.
- Don't include any commas, punctuation or ordinal numbers – 20th

The day of the week should only be included when relevant to the context, and the year for historical or future references. **Remove the year if referring to the current year.**

> **Example**
>
> At the last all-staff muster held in September 2022, the Commissioner announced … [specific day and date isn't relevant]
>
> The social club will hold its next meeting next week on Tuesday 3 January 2023. [year is relevant for context]

3.13.2 Time

Numerals should be used to represent both 12 and 24 hour time. Twelve hour time should be used unless using 24 hour time benefits your audience in understanding content.

When using 12 hour time:

- Use a colon to separate the hours from the minutes and remove zeros for whole hours.
- Write am/pm in lower case with a non-breaking space between the final numbers.
- Write 'o'clock' when quoting someone directly or transcribing a recording.
- Use 'noon', 'midday' or 'midnight' instead of '12 am' or '12 pm', or exclude the time altogether where appropriate.
- Use the phrase 'at approximately' or 'about' where the exact time isn't known, exclude the time altogether where appropriate.

> **Example**
> - At 11:30 am on Friday 20 January [colon used between hours and minutes]
> - On Friday 20 January at 11 am [zeros removed for the full hour]
> - 'Commissioner Kershaw is speaking at 10 o'clock' they said [o'clock used]
> - At 12 noon on Friday 20 January [noon used for 12 pm]
> - She logged off at approximately 3 pm that afternoon ['at approximately used to show exact time isn't known]

Twenty-four-hour time numbers the hours from 00:00 to 23:59. When using 24 hour time:

- include a minimum of 4 digits (hours and minutes)
- use a colon to separate the hours, minutes and seconds
- don't include am/pm.

> **Example**
>
> - 00:35 [24 hour time for 12:35 am]
> - 13:00 [24 hour time for 1 pm]

3.13.3 Time zones

Time zones should be written as the official acronym when used directly after a timestamp. The acronym doesn't need to be introduced and follow traditional acronym style, however it's recommended the time zone is written in full where it supports the readers understanding.

Australian time zones

- CST (Central Standard Time)
- CDT (Central Daylight-saving Time)
- EST (Eastern Standard Time)
- EDT (Eastern Daylight-savings Time)
- WST (Western Standard Time)

An 'A' for Australia should be added to the front of each acronym if it might be confused with a time zone of another part of the world

3.14 Ellipsis points (…)

The ellipsis is made up of 3 full stops with a single space on each side (…) and is primarily used to:

- show the omission of word(s) from quoted material
- mark an unfinished phrase, clause or sentence.

No punctuation should precede or follow an ellipsis except for quotation, question and exclamation marks.

> **Example**
>
> He said 'The AFP needs to stay modern and progressive … the refreshed brand will go a long way in supporting this.' [ellipsis shows the omission of words]
>
> They said that it 'doesn't sounds quite right (… ') [marks an unfinished phrase and is followed by punctuation]

3.15 Font and style

Roboto is our primary typeface (font) for both print and digital.

Segoe UI is our system font and should be used only if Roboto isn't available. In general:

- Sentence case should be used across all communication products unless there is a specific reason − for example, graphic design.
- Text should be left aligned.
- Use single line spacing − 0pt space after paragraphs and 6pt paragraph (before) spacing in lists and tables.
- Use single spacing after a full stop, not 2 spaces.

3.16 Italics

Italics is used to draw people's attention to specific content. It should be used sparingly as overuse can affect readability and accessibility. At the AFP, we only use italics for:

- the official titles of stand-alone works, legislation, Acts and publications
- foreign words or phrases
- First Nations languages are Australian languages and shouldn't be italicised). The _Australian Government Style Manual_ references using italics sparingly for emphasis, however this isn't the preferred AFP style. Instead, **emphasis should be demonstrated using bold text**. Don't underline bolded text to further emphasise a point − underlining is only used to indicate hyperlinks.

> **Example**
>
> Deputy Commissioner McCartney represented the AFP at a parliamentary committee hearing on the _National Anti-Corruption Commission Bill 2022_. [italics used for legislation]
>
> 'The Commissioner's favourite publication is _The Pulse_', they said. [italics used for title of newsletter]
>
> _The Pulse_ is distributed on **Thursday**, not Friday. [name of publication in italics, while emphasis is demonstrated using bold text]

3.17 Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks (links) are words or images users can click on to go through to other content.

Hyperlinks should:

- be included within the content
- clearly identify the target of the link using the name of the website or document and not the URL − for example, visit the AFP website for more information.

3.18 Legislation

The name of the legislation should be italicised and written in full the first time it appears in a document, followed by a shortened reference to it throughout the document.

> **Example**
>
> *The Australian Federal Police Act 1979* (the Act). [The second reference should simply be 'the Act']

If referring to an associated charge against an individual use both italics and capitals in your content.

We use everyday language when listing these charges, rather than directly quoting the terminology of the official legislation. Exact charges are only used where this detail is of particular relevance or significance.

> **Example**
>
> An 18-year-old man was charged with *Intimidate Commonwealth Official* and will face the ACT Magistrates Court this morning (Tuesday 17 January 2023). [quoting legislation]
>
> An 18-year-old man was charged with intimidating a Commonwealth official ... [referencing the charge]

3.19 Lists (bullet points)

Lists are typically used throughout written communication products to make it easy for the reader to scan and understand a series of items. There are 3 types of lists:

- fragment lists
- sentence lists
- stand-alone lists

Lists can be unordered, ordered (non-critical), or numbered (critical).

- Square bullet points should be used for unordered lists, or ordered lists where the order isn't critical.
- A numbered list should be used when the order is critical to the reader's understanding.

Each type of list has its own set of rules. In general:

- Don't use lists in a direct quote, media release or news story unless listing statistics or to summarise the key points of an activity or operation.
- Only include 'and' or 'or' after the second-last list item if it's critical to the meaning – for example, when transcribing legislation.
- Use 'for example', 'including', or 'includes' for lead-in sentences.
- Each set of bullet points shouldn't start with the same word.
- Follow the same grammatical tense throughout lists.

3.19.1 Fragment lists

Fragment lists represent a broken-up, full sentence. If you have more than 3 items in a sentence, consider using a fragment list instead of separating them with commas. Fragment lists have a:

- lead-in phrase or sentence followed by a colon
- list of fragments, each marked by a bullet.

Rules for fragment lists:

- Make sure each fragment can complete the lead-in phrase.
- Use a lower case for the first letter of each fragment (unless it's a proper noun)
- Add a full stop on the last list item only.

Example

Use lists to:

- group related information together
- help users understand how items relate to each other
- show an order or steps.

3.19.2 Sentence lists

Sentence lists have a list of sentences, each marked by bullets or numbers. If you have a series of related sentences, consider breaking them into a sentence list.

Rules for sentence lists:

- Follow normal sentence structure in each list item.
- Start each list item with a capital letter and end it with a full stop.

Sentence lists can have a:

- heading (without a colon or full stop)
- lead in sentence (ending in a colon or full stop)
- lead in phrase (ending in a colon).

Example

The committee decided on 3 actions. [lead in sentence]

1. The secretary will respond to each recommendation.
2. The secretary will allocate responses that need more work to members.
3. Members will discuss the recommendations at the next meeting.

[numbered list to indicate order in which actions need to happen]

3.19.3 Stand-alone lists

Stand-alone lists have a heading, not a lead in phrase or sentence. Stand-alone lists should be used when you're not breaking up a paragraph or sentence.

Rules for stand-alone lists:

- Include a heading without a colon.
- Start each list item with a capital letter.
- Don't add full stops to the end of any list items (even the last item).

Example

My weekly tasks

- Answer phone enquiries
- Book conference venue
- Order stationery
- Take meeting minutes

3.20 Numerical representation

Numerals (numbers) are easier to read and avoid any potential ambiguity for the audience.

3.20.1 Numerals vs. words

In text, the general rule is:

- write the numbers 'zero' and 'one' in full
- use numerals for '2' and above.

Exceptions to this rule may include when starting a sentence or writing:

- a fraction
- the date and time
- a proper noun that includes a number as a written word
- a publication title that includes a number as a written word
- government content that follows journalistic conventions – for example, media releases.

Large, rounded numbers (for example, $2 billion) is the only time a document should combine numerals and words within the one document.

Example

At **1:30** pm on Thursday **19** January, only **one** person agreed to the report. [time and date represented using numerals, 'one' spelt out in full]

> However, they were open to discussing **3** further options as appropriate. [numerals used for numbers 2 and above]

3.20.2 Exceptions to using 'one' and 'zero'

There are specific situations when representing 'one' and 'zero' as numerals may be appropriate including:

- in units of measurement
- to show mathematical relationships, such as equations and ratios and for decimals
- when comparing numbers
- in tables and charts
- for dates and times
- in a series of numbers
- in specific contexts such as steps, instructions, age and school years
- in scientific content.

3.20.3 Ordinal numbers

Ordinal numbers – 'first', 'second' and 'third' – show the order, position or importance of things in a list or sequence.

- Ordinals from first to ninth should be written out in full – for example, third and eighth.
- 10th onwards should use numerals – for example, 15th, 18th, 92nd.

Superscript (the small 'th' or 'nd' after a number) isn't accessible to people using screen readers and shouldn't be used in any communication products.

> **Example**
>
> **Do write:** In 2013, Canberra celebrated its 100th anniversary. [no superscript]
> **Don't write**: In 2013, Canberra celebrated its 100th anniversary. [superscript]

Additional style preferences include:

- creating a numbered list rather using ordinals in a sentence list
- using ordinals in reference lists – for example, 2nd edition
- writing large ordinals in full – for example, the millionth customer.

3.20.4 Numerous

Numerous means 'many individuals' or 'separate items that are too many to count'. Numerous shouldn't be used when individuals or items can be counted.

Example

The Australian Federal Police today charged a 21-year-old man with several counts of drug offences. [the number of charges can be counted, however don't need to be specified]

The following language should be applied for individuals and items that can be counted:

- a couple is 2
- a few is 3
- several is more than 3 (usually up to 5)
- many is more than several.

3.21 Quotation marks, omitting direct speech, and paraphrasing

3.21.1 Quotation marks

Quotation marks draw attention to speech and direct quotes and reference certain styles of titles.

Single quotation marks should be used to:

- show direct speech and the quoted work of other writers
- enclose the title of certain works
- draw attention to a word you are defining.

Double quotation marks should only be used for quotations within quotations.

Example

He also wrote, 'The decisions of the department for "major procurement" were always made with caution' [double quotations used within single quotations]

3.21.2 Omissions in direct speech

An ellipsis is used to represent an omission from direct speech (a quote) when a word, phrase or sentence isn't required for context.

It's important not to mislead the audience about the tone or meaning of the content.

Example

Quote: I don't agree with the proposal because we need to do more research.

Do write: He said, 'I don't agree with the proposal …' [maintains context and meaning of quote]

Don't write: He said, 'I … agree with the proposal' [changes the meaning of the quote]

3.21.3 Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is to state written or spoken content using different words. It's typically used to support the audience's understanding by making the content shorter or simpler, however may also be used to add minor detail for clarification.

Square brackets should be used in quotes material to show you have:

- paraphrased the original content
- inserted text that was not in the original content.

The paraphrased tense should remain consistent with the tense of the original content.

> **Example**
>
> 'ACT Policing traffic superintendent [Lucy Mills] said the incident was a reminder for all drivers to pay attention at all times.' [tense maintained throughout the sentence and name of the person being quoted added for clarity]

3.22 Web and email addresses

3.22.1 Web addresses

Web addresses should:

- be hyperlinked in active publications and online, but not in formal publications that are typically printed
- include the word 'at' before the link – for example, at afp.gov.au
- not include 'www' at the start of the URL – for example, afp.gov.au
- not be underlined in formal publications.

3.22.2 Email addresses

Email addresses should:

- be hyperlinked in active publications and online, but not in formal publications that're typically printed
- include the whole email address – for example s47E(d) @afp.gov.au
- not be underlined in formal publications.

3.23 Telephone numbers

Standard Australian telephone numbers should use no more than 10 digits:

- Landlines – 2 digits for the area code followed by 8 digits for the rest of the number.
- Mobiles – 10 digits (no area code).

Non-standard numbers may only have 6 digits – for example, 1300 numbers.

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Telephone numbers should be written in 'chunks' of digits and include the area or international code where appropriate – brackets are not required when including these.

Example	
Landline	02 1234 5678 [includes area code] +61 2 1234 5678 [international format]
Mobile	0412 234 567 [standard] +61 400 123 456 [international format]
Other	1300 123 456 [Australia-wide local-rate number] 13 12 34 [alternative Australia-wide local-rate number]

3.24 Writing for the web

When writing for the web:

- use meaningful headings and subheadings
- keep sentences short and text succinct
- summarise the main point of the text in the first paragraph
- use hyperlinks for more information, rather than providing great detail on each page
- use lists instead of blocks of text with the exception of news stories or media releases which use narrative style

The [s47E(d)] provides guidance for the management of content on the agency's websites and SharePoint-based intranet (the Hub, Governance Instrument Framework and Investigator's Toolkit) in accordance with AFP requirements, Australian Government policy and guidelines, and community expectations

Pages 33 through 40 redacted for the following reasons:
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5.0 Resources

- *Australian Government Style Manual*
- *PWDA Language Guide: A guide to language about disability*
- *Australian Human Rights Commission*
- *Mindframe*
- *The Macquarie Dictionary and Thesaurus*
- *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1*

Pages 42 through 83 redacted for the following reasons:
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