The Writing Guide

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Government of Tasmania

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Contents

[Purpose 1](#_Toc167100400)

[Using this guide 1](#_Toc167100401)

[Support 1](#_Toc167100402)

[Communicate clearly 2](#_Toc167100403)

[Writing in plain English 2](#_Toc167100404)

[Writing for the Web 4](#_Toc167100405)

[Departmental style (A – Z) 5](#_Toc167100406)

[Abbreviations and acronyms 5](#_Toc167100407)

[Active versus passive speech 7](#_Toc167100408)

[Affect and effect 7](#_Toc167100409)

[Amount or number 8](#_Toc167100410)

[Apostrophes 8](#_Toc167100411)

[Australian/Commonwealth/Federal/Tasmanian Government 10](#_Toc167100412)

[Bulleted lists 11](#_Toc167100413)

[Capital letters 11](#_Toc167100414)

[Collective nouns 12](#_Toc167100415)

[Colons 13](#_Toc167100416)

[Commas 13](#_Toc167100417)

[Complement/Compliment 17](#_Toc167100418)

[Copies 18](#_Toc167100419)

[Currency 18](#_Toc167100420)

[Dashes 19](#_Toc167100421)

[Dates, times and periods 19](#_Toc167100422)

[Departments, divisions and offices 20](#_Toc167100423)

[Direction, distance and area 20](#_Toc167100424)

[Documents 21](#_Toc167100425)

[Dot points 21](#_Toc167100426)

[Fewer and less 22](#_Toc167100427)

[Font and formatting 22](#_Toc167100428)

[Full stops 23](#_Toc167100429)

[Geographical terms 23](#_Toc167100430)

[Headings 24](#_Toc167100431)

[Hyphenation 25](#_Toc167100432)

[Hyphenation 27](#_Toc167100433)

[Inclusive language 28](#_Toc167100434)

[ISBNs and ISSNs 29](#_Toc167100435)

[Italics 29](#_Toc167100436)

[It’s versus its 30](#_Toc167100437)

[Legislation 31](#_Toc167100438)

[Lists 32](#_Toc167100439)

[Local government 34](#_Toc167100440)

[Names and titles 35](#_Toc167100441)

[Non-breaking spaces 36](#_Toc167100442)

[Number and amount 36](#_Toc167100443)

[Per cent versus % 37](#_Toc167100444)

[Plurals 37](#_Toc167100445)

[Principal and principle 39](#_Toc167100446)

[Quotations 39](#_Toc167100447)

[References to publications 40](#_Toc167100448)

[Round brackets 42](#_Toc167100449)

[Salutations and closes 42](#_Toc167100450)

[Semicolons 45](#_Toc167100451)

[Spelling conventions 45](#_Toc167100452)

[States and territories 48](#_Toc167100453)

[Telephone numbers 48](#_Toc167100454)

[That and which 49](#_Toc167100455)

[URLs 49](#_Toc167100456)

[Glossary of Grammatical Terms 50](#_Toc167100457)

[Further resources 52](#_Toc167100458)

[Tasmanian Government resources 52](#_Toc167100459)

[Australian Government resources 52](#_Toc167100460)

# Purpose

The Writing Guide is a collection of the preferred style and writing conventions for the Tasmanian Government’s Department of Premier and Cabinet.

It has been developed to:

* support the employees of the Department to communicate clearly with their audiences;
* save time by providing writers with the Department’s preferred use in spelling, grammar and punctuation in a handy reference document;
* ensure material produced by the Department is appropriate and consistent; and
* provide advice about preparing documents, such as correspondence, minutes and briefing notes.

Importantly, The Writing Guide also emphasises the importance of plain language in communication, and provides advice on how to structure and write communication in a way that presents information most effectively to an audience.

## Using this guide

The topics in The Writing Guide are listed alphabetically for easy reference. Each topic is illustrated by examples of good and bad usage.

**✓** marks examples of correct writing

**X** marks examples of how **not** to write

## Support

If you have any comments or queries about The Writing Guide please contact the Communications Unit by email at communications@dpac.tas.gov.au or by telephone on 6270 5667.

# Communicate clearly

## Writing in plain English

A communication is in plain English, or plain language, if its wording, structure and design are so clear that the intended audience can find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.

Writing in plain English does not mean language is as simple as it can be, but that it’s appropriate to the audience.

Communication from the Tasmanian Government should use plain language, proper grammar and be expressed in a clear and consistent style. We have an obligation to ensure that information about policies, programs and services is easily accessed and understood by the community.

Think about your reader:

* Who are they and what do they need to know or do?
* What words and terms are they likely to understand?
* What is their knowledge of the subject?
* Will they scan the document or read from cover to cover?

Organise your information:

* provide signposts
* table of contents
* introductory paragraph
* headings
* dot point lists;
* limit each paragraph to one idea or topic; and
* keep documents short by making sure every sentence you have written needs to be there.

Writing your content:

* Be personal. Using ‘you’ and ‘we’ makes it easier for readers to engage with the material.
* Keep sentences to an average of 15 to 20 words.
* Use the active voice. Say ‘I will do this by …’ instead of ‘This will be done by …’.
* Avoid acronyms, jargon, colloquialisms and technical language.
* Avoid repetition and use only necessary words, such as ‘an innovation’, not ‘a new innovation’.
* Use terms consistently, so a review is always ‘a review’ and not also ‘an evaluation’ or ‘a study’.

Check what you have written:

* Edit carefully, allowing time between edits where possible.
* Use a house style guide, such as this one.
* Fact check all information so it is up-to-date, relevant and can be proved if challenged.
* Test your document with readers.

Design and produce your document:

* Choose a readable font, preferably in 12 point text (the preferred Tasmanian Government typeface is the Arial font family).
* Make important points stand out clearly.
* Use left aligned text.
* Avoid background images.
* Use colour and shading with care.

See [**Further Resources**](https://www.tas.gov.au/communications/accessibility-and-inclusivity/plain-english)

## Writing for the Web

Readers behave differently online than when reading a hardcopy.

Web users scan pages, picking out words and phrases that stand out. They tend not to read from start to finish.

A web document should:

* be concise;
* divide the content into topics and subtopics;
* use descriptive headings and subheadings;
* use bulleted lists; and
* provide links to relevant online information rather than recreating it.

Screen and online document design should conform to [accessibility](https://www.tas.gov.au/communications/accessibility-and-inclusivity/making-your-communications-accessible) guidelines.

See [**Further Resources**](https://www.tas.gov.au/communications)

# Departmental style (A – Z)

## Abbreviations and acronyms

**(**see also **Departments, divisions and offices)**

Acronyms

An acronym is a string of initial letters pronounced as a word, for example DPAC or TasTAFE. Most are written in capitals, apart from a few acronyms that have become independent of their origins like radar, laser and Qantas.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are shortened forms of words, for example para for paragraph.

Usage

An acronym or abbreviation is not used if it only appears once in a document, unless the acronym or abbreviation is well recognised.

* DO:
* When an acronym or abbreviation is first used, spell out the entire word and place the acronym or abbreviation in brackets. For the rest of the document, use the acronym or abbreviation:
	+ The United Kingdom (UK) is a sovereign state. The UK…
* In general, acronyms and abbreviations are written without full stops:
	+ ATO (not A.T.O.), OA (not O.A.)
	+ CSR COAG OAA GBE GST OHS LGD
	+ USA UK
	+ PhD BEc LLB
	+ Ald Cr Dr Mr Mrs Ms
	+ Hon Jo Blogs MP
	+ Pty Ltd Inc
	+ 3rd edn
* Acronyms or abbreviations that are well recognised, such as CSIRO, do not need to be spelt out.
* When using an acronym for the first time in a possessive context, the ‘s appears after the acronym, not before:
	+ The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC)’s Annual Report…
* Always spell out page and pages, rather than pg or p, when using in a sentence.
* State and territory abbreviations are:
* Tasmania - Tas
* Victoria - Vic
* Queensland - Qld
* New South Wales - NSW
* South Australia - SA
* Western Australia - WA
* Australian Capital Territory - ACT
* Northern Territory - NT

X DON’T:

* Do not use the abbreviation s (for section) of legislation.
* Plurals of abbreviations do not include an apostrophe. For example:
	+ GBEs not GBE’s, FTEs not FTE’s, QTBs not QTB’s
* Do not abbreviate the title Professor.
* Do not use the acronym ATSI to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (for more information refer to the [Tasmanian State Service Acknowledgement of Aboriginal People and Country and Welcome to Country Guide](https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0032/164588/TasGov_Guide_Acknowledgement_and_WelcomeToCountry.pdf)).
* Do not use full stops in abbreviated expressions from Latin:
* eg etc et al ie NB No (in the number sense) pm am

## Active versus passive speech

Try to use active rather than passive verbs. In the active voice, the subject performs the action expressed in the verb.

* DO:
* The Department authorised the use of funds to purchase publications.
* The Government considers the proposal needs further work.
* The Secretary reviewed the paper.
* The office will send the cheque.
* I received the letter.

X DON’T:

* After authorisation from the Department, the publications were purchased.

## Affect and effect

The verb to affect means to act on or influence, for example:

* I was greatly affected by …

The verb to effectmeans to accomplish something or to bring it about, for example:

* The Government will effectnew legislation.

The noun effect means a result or outcome, for example:

* This had had a serious **effect** on …

## Amount or number

Amount is used when referring to the quantity of something, for example:

* There was a large amount of money.
* I would like to thank you for the amount of work you have tackled this week.

Number is used when counting or referring to more than one thing, for example:

* The number of accidents has decreased.
* The company is striving to increase the number of shareholders.

## Apostrophes

**(**see alsoIt’s versus its**)**

The apostrophe can be used to:

* show the omission of a letter or letters, for example: don’t.
* show when a singular common noun is possessive, for example: the Government’s policies.
* show plural possession, for example: all the governments’ budgets.
* DO:
* The apostrophe is placed after the s when qualifying plurals, for example:
	+ Department of Premier and Cabinet officers’ training days.
	+ the various Government agencies’ budgets.
* An apostrophe is placed before the s when showing possession of a singular common noun, for example:
* The Government’s policies
* Where a singular common noun ends in an s then the apostrophe is placed after the s when showing possession, for example:
* Charles’ dog recently had puppies.
* When there is joint ownership of two or more items, the apostrophe is attached only to the last noun in the group, for example:
* the Tasmanian and Victorian Governments’ concurrence…
* In a complex possessive where the ownership is separate, each noun has an apostrophe s, for example:
	+ the Government’s and the hospitality industry’s attitudes…
	+ the difference between an agency’s and a council’s auditing procedures…
	+ the cats’ and dogs’ homes…
* Where the plural noun is more descriptive than possessive, contemporary Australian English often omits the apostrophe, for example:
* Visitors Car Park
* travellers cheque.
* However, if these words are used in a non-generic sense an apostrophe is needed, for example:
* the young woman’s licence.

X DON’T:

* Apostrophes should not be used before the **s** of a plural word that is not directly qualified, for example:
* apples and oranges, not apple’s and orange’s.

The only exception to this is letters of the alphabet, for example:

* Dot the i’s and cross the t’s.

## Australian/Commonwealth/Federal/Tasmanian Government

The national government of Australia, formerly known as the Commonwealth Government, is now named the Australian Government.

The word Commonwealth still applies in the formal title Commonwealth of Australia and in reference to the Commonwealth Parliament. However, the Commonwealth Parliament is also known as the Australian Parliament and the Parliament of Australia.

The word Federal also applies in certain formal titles, such as the Federal Court of Australia.

* DO:
* When referring to Ministers who are in the Commonwealth Parliament, reference should be to the Australian Government Minster, for example the Australian Government Minister for Communications.
* Australian Government is the preferred term for general use at DPAC.
* The preferred reference to an Australian Government department is the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing or the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship.
* When preparing formal submissions to inquiries the term Tasmanian Government submission should be used when being ‘signed off’ at the Ministerial level. When the submission is being ‘signed off’ at the departmental level then reference should be made to it being the Tasmanian submission.

## Bulleted lists

**(**see Lists**)**

## Capital letters

Capitalisation of words should be kept to a minimum.

* DO:
* When referring to a specific entity, capitalisation should occur, for example:
	+ the Government (when referring to the Tasmanian Government) or the Department of Premier and Cabinet supports the proposal. However, the Department…
	+ the Victorian and Tasmanian Governments
	+ all states and territories of Australia but the State of Queensland and the State when you are referring to a specific previously named state.
	+ government regulations but Tasmanian Government regulations
	+ the Secretary of the Department and the Director of the Policy Division
	+ The Hobart City Council agreed to increase its rates by 2 per cent. The Council…
	+ Lindisfarne Primary School
	+ on the corner of Murray and Collins Streets.
* Committees or special groups that have a formal name are capitalised, for example:
* the Local Government Board.
* The expressions output, output group and outcomeshould be only capitalised when they are being used in budget documents.

X DON’T:

* The words state, territory, government, local government, councils, department, agency and authorityshould not be capitalised when the word is not referring to a specific entity or is used descriptively.
* Names of taxes or expenditure items should not be capitalised except when they form part of the name of a Bill or an Act, for example:
* *Land Tax Act 2000* but the associated land tax
* Headings and subheadings in DPAC documents do not require capitals except for their first word and any proper names, for example:
* Feedback about Communities, Sport and Recreation’s newsletter
* Improvements to computer systems.

## Collective nouns

Collective nouns (including terms such as department, division, branch, the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Company, Board, Cabinet, Council, the United Nations, group, audience, the publicetc) are singular.

* DO:
* Collective nouns are singular. For example:
	+ The Department **is** determined to stamp out racism.
	+ The Committee has decided not to proceed with that action.

X DON’T:

* Collective nouns are not plurals, such as:
	+ The Department are determined to stamp out racism.
	+ The Committee have decided not to proceed with that action.

An exception is the word staff, which is treated as a plural noun:

* The staff are progressing the matter.

There are some common pronouns that should always be accompanied by a singular verb: each, none, everyone, everybody, nobody, somebody, and someone. For example:

* Each of us has a particular job to do.
* None of us has taken leave this month.

A safe rule for number is:

* The number isexpected to grow.
* A number areexpected to attend.

## Colons

The colon (:) marks a shorter pause than a full stop. It usually has the function of introducing a list or an explanation. It should follow the preceding word without any intervening space, and should not be followed by a hyphen or dash.

* DO:
* The Department achieved a number of triumphs: fewer resignations, more awards and greater efficiency.

## Commas

Comma use falls into five categories:

1. The serial comma
2. The separator comma
3. The joining comma
4. The parenthical comma
5. The single inverted comma
6. The serial comma

The serial comma is the most common and is used in place of repeating the words and or in a list that has three or more words or phrases.

* DO:
* Put the serial comma between each listed item except for the last two items, for example:
	+ The diesel rebate scheme provided for a rebate to businesses engaged in agriculture, construction, excavation, fishing and forestry.

X DON’T:

* Comma and: In a list of three or more phrases, do not put the comma before the word and, for example:
* Topics discussed at the meeting were assets, current liabilities, and net assets.

In Australian English however, the comma and construction is generally restricted to quite complicated lists in which it is useful as protection against confusion or ambiguity. For example:

* The diesel rebate scheme provided for a rebate to businesses engaged in agriculture, construction, excavation, fishing, forestry, and mining and exploration.

In this example, the writer is using the comma and construction to make it clear that mining and exploration are separate from forestry and are to be regarded as two aspects of a single activity.

1. The separator comma

The separator comma indicates the rhythm of a sentence by signalling a small pause between its phrases.

* DO:
* Use a separator comma to enhance the reading of a sentence, for example:
	+ However, the Department undertook an evaluation of problem-gambling services.
	+ To clarify the matter, two draft papers were circulated for comment.
	+ In August 2020, the Government will ….

X DON’T:

* Don’t omit a comma that would specify precise meaning of a sentence. For example:
	+ The Policy Division is responsible for coordinating
	whole-of-government responses including information from the Department of Health.

The sentence should have included a comma after the word responses, to indicate that the responsibility is for coordinating all whole-of-government responses.

1. The joining comma

The joining commalinks two potential sentences to convert them into one complete sentence. In this case, the joining comma must always be followed by a connecting word (conjunction) such as and, or, but, because, yet or while.

* DO:
* When joining two sentences with a comma, follow the comma with a conjunction. For example:
* The program ran for six weeks, and it included a comprehensive health appraisal.

However, it should be noted that the Department’s preference is that two short sentences should be used rather than a longer sentence using the joining comma. For example:

* The program ran for six weeks. It included a comprehensive health appraisal.

X DON’T:

* Don’t use an inappropriate connecting word immediately after a comma. Inappropriate connecting words include: however, therefore, hence, consequently, subsequently and thus. For example:
	+ Bob called twice, however he did not speak to Bill.
1. The parenthetical comma

The parenthetical commais sometimes called the isolating comma. Commas of this kind always occur in pairs, because their job is to mark off a weak interruption in the flow of a sentence.

* DO:
* Use a parenthetical comma to isolate an interruption to the sentence. For example:
	+ A career opportunities page, including current vacancies, was launched on the website.
	+ The Division’s primary role is to undertake research into, and provide policy advice to the Government on, policy issues generally.

Note: In the second sentence, the first two commas mark off (and clarify) the interrupting phrase: and provide policy advice to the Government on.

X DON’T:

* Don’t leave out one of the commas. Make sure they appear in a pair. For example:
* A career opportunities page, including current vacancies was launched on the website.

This should read:

* A career opportunities page, including current vacancies, was launched on the website.
1. The single inverted comma

The single inverted commasare used when a word is not generally used or if their context needs to be emphasised.

* DO:
* Use single inverted commas to emphasise or single out a word. For example:
* The species was listed as ‘vulnerable’.

X DON’T:

* Don’t use quote marks to emphasise or single out a word. For example:
* Strong opposition is likely to lead to a “no” vote in Tasmania.

Single inverted commas should be used here, so the example reads:

* Strong opposition is likely to lead to a ‘no’ vote in Tasmania.

## Complement/Compliment

Complement and compliment are often confused.

* **Complement** is used in the context of something that adds to, for example one of two things that go together.
* **Compliment** is usually used in the context of a spoken or written expression of praise.

## Copies

When copying letters and memoranda to other people:

* In the body of the letter or memorandum, make a reference to who the copy is being sent to.
* Include the name or title of the recipient below the signature block. The formatting for this is 24 points below the signature block in Arial 10.

For example:

Given the Australian Government has responsibility for this matter I have forwarded a copy of your correspondence to the Federal Minister for Communications, Senator the Hon Alexander Graham Bell, for consideration.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Rockliff MP

Premier

Copy to: Senator the Hon [insert], Australian Government Minister for Communications

## Currency

The country notation should be placed before the $. For example, US$ rather than $US.

## Dashes

When separating different concepts, dashes should be used with a space before and after. For example:

* The Training Consortium has grown in recent times – it now involves 18 organisations – and has just added the University of Tasmania to its books.

## Dates, times and periods

(see also Non-breaking space)

* DO:
* Include specific date references, instead of time references like in the coming days, next week, today, last month or last year, which can be misleading to future readers. For example:
	+ During October 2015…
* Express dates as day followed by month followed by year with no commas, for example:
	+ 14 January 2015
* A space should appear between the time and the am/pm. For example:
	+ open from 8 am to 6 pm
* Use a hyphen to express the financial year, not a solidus, for example:
	+ 2014-15 not 2014/15 or 14/15.

X DON’T:

* Apostrophes should not be used when describing decades, for example:
	+ 1990s not 1990’s
* Don’t abbreviate the year, for example:
* 12 December 2015 not 12 December 15
* When referring to a particular date, for example 21 December 2015, the day (ie ‘Monday’) is not used. Exceptions are event packages (speech notes, function run sheets and function checklists) and advertising material.

## Departments, divisions and offices

The Department of Premier and Cabinet should only be abbreviated in the following circumstances:

* In shorter documents, such as memos, letters and briefs, abbreviate the Department of Premier and Cabinet to the Department after the title has been used once in full.
* In longer documents where there would be a risk of monotony in repeating the Department or there may be some confusion if more than one Department is referred to, use the alternative abbreviation DPAC (but not the DPAC or DPaC).
* In the case of the Department of Treasury and Finance, use the abbreviation Treasury rather than DOTAF or DTF. For the Department of State Growth, use the abbreviation State Growth, rather than DSG.
* Abbreviations of divisions and offices should not have ‘the’ in front of the abbreviation. For example, the Local Government Division is abbreviated to LGD (not the LGD), and the State Service Management Office is abbreviated to SSMO (not the SSMO).

## Direction, distance and area

* DO:
* Use upper case for definite geographical places, regions and areas, for example:
* the East Coast of Tasmania
* the North-East Coast of Tasmania
* the Tarkine
* Adjectives should be lower case, for example:
	+ eastern coastal waters
* When referring to a direction, distance and/or area use lower case, for example:
* I am travelling in a north-west direction.
* south-east south-eastern
* 4 km 5.6 km 150 km 2,500 km
* 7 ha 136 ha 1,840 ha

## Documents

(see also References to publications)

* DO:
* Titles of published documents should always be italicised.

X DON’T:

* Titles of unpublished documents, including Bills, should not be italicised. For example:
* Inter-governmental Agreement Establishing Principles Guiding Inter-governmental Relations on Local Government Matters
* State Service Amendment Bill 2012

## Dot points

(see Lists)

## Fewer and less

* Fewerrefers to a number of items where less refers to one thing, for example:
* There were fewer than seven meetings NOT there were less than seven meetings.
* People these days are buying fewer newspapers.
* There is less milk in that glass - there were fewer milk bottles yesterday.
* Use less than with measurable quantities, for example:
* less than $700
* I have less than an hour to do this work.

## Font and formatting

(see also Lists)

The preferred normal style typeface is the Arial family in the following style:

* Use Arial (Regular or Bold) for headings and subheadings, and Arial Regular for the body of the text.
* A minimum font size of 12 points is used for regular text. Disclaimers and footnotes have a minimum type size of 8 points.
* Check that you are using the English (Australian) language setting in Word.
* Use left aligned text (except for Cabinet documentation and event packages).
* The spacing between lines on lists for correspondence, minutes and briefing notes is generally 6 points, with 12 points between paragraphs.
* Use a single space between the end of one sentence and the start of another.

## Full stops

* DO:
* Use plenty of full stops. This keeps sentences short.
* Follow the full stop at the end of a sentence with a single space before the next sentence.
* In situations where an email address or website forms the end of a sentence, use a full stop. For example:
	+ The Department of Premier and Cabinet’s web address is [www.dpac.tas.gov.au](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au). It provides specific information…

X DON’T:

* Do not use a full stop after:
* headings
* page headers and footers
* certain types of shortened forms (for example, ie, eg)
* symbols for units of measurement (for example, ha, km)
* Ms, Mr, Mrs, Dr

## Geographical terms

* DO:
* Some conventional spellings are:
	+ Mt Roland Mt Lyell Cradle Mountain
	+ USA UK Washington, DC
* When referring to states, the following conventions apply:
	+ the states and territories of Australia – when referring to states generally
	+ the State of Queensland – when referring to a state specifically
	+ the State – when referring to a specific, previously named state. For example: Tasmania is a state of Australia. The State is renowned for its wilderness.

## Headings

Numbering

In documents that are likely to be frequently referred to, it is helpful for readers if headings and subheadings, as well as pages, are numbered.

* DO:
* When numbering headings, have as few layers as possible and use a simple style. For example:

9 Meeting Agenda

9.1 A draft agenda is prepared for each staff meeting and is circulated to staff prior to the meeting.

9.2 The minutes of the meeting are distributed to staff members as soon as possible after the meeting.

* 1. Staff meetings are usually held on Mondays.
* Alternatively, a mixture of numbers and letters can be used:

9 Issues Paper

(1) Developing the Issues Paper

Text text text …

(2) Invitation to consultants

*(a) Single submission*

Text text text …

*(b) Multiple submissions*

Text text text …

Capitalisation

* DO:
* For first level headings use capital letters. For second level headings use sentence case, for example:
* Guidelines for Writing Official Correspondence (first level heading)

Introduction to writing (second level heading)

## Hyphenation

(see also Spelling conventions)

Compound adjectives

A compound adjective preceding an associated noun should usually be hyphenated, for example:

* day-to-day life
* long-term management but management in the long term

The principle is that the hyphen guides the reader to a rhythm that helps convey the intended meaning.

Clarification

Hyphens can also be used for clarification. For example: “Four five-year-old children…”

Spellings requiring hyphens include:

* anti-avoidance
* anti-virus software
* Attorney-General
* Auditor-General
* bi-monthly
* cross-jurisdictional
* day-to-day management
* de-activate
* de-sex
* free-of-charge
* full-time (when preceding a noun)
* in-depth investigation
* in-principle
* long-term
* mid-century
* non-budgeted
* non-negotiable
* North-West
* not-for-profit
* one-quarter
* part-time (when preceding a noun)
* pay-roll (where legislation uses this spelling; otherwise spell it payroll)
* pre-printed
* self-explanatory
* short-term
* Solicitor-General
* whole-of-government
* whole-of-service

## Hyphenation

(see also Spelling conventions)

Spellings without hyphens include:

* benchmarking, benchmarks
* coexisting
* cooperate
* coordinate
* coordination
* database
* decommissioning
* email
* end of year
* interdepartmental
* intergovernment
* interjurisdictional
* interrelationships
* keywords
* microchip
* ongoing
* payroll (except when quoting from legislation that uses the term pay roll)
* postdates, predates
* proactive, proactively
* reactivate
* reappointment
* reassess
* redeploy
* redraft
* refinance
* reimburse, reimbursement
* relodge, relodgement
* reorganise, reorganisation
* resubmit
* rollout
* statewide
* subcommittee
* subcontractor
* subgroup
* sublease
* subset
* takeovers
* thank you
* website
* wellbeing

##

## Inclusive language

Inclusive language is language that is free from words, phrases or tones that reflect prejudiced, stereotyped or discriminatory views of particular people or groups. It is also language that doesn't deliberately or inadvertently exclude people from being seen as part of a group.

Using inclusive language assists government agencies in meeting the requirements of the:

* *Anti‑Discrimination Act 1998* (Tas)
* *State Service Act 2000* (Tas)
* *Age Discrimination Act 2004* (Cth)
* *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)
* *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act 1986* (Cth)
* *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth)
* *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth).

More comprehensive advice on the use of non-discriminatory language can be found in the *Australian Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers*, Chapter 4, “Effective and inclusive language”.

Gender-sensitive writing

In the interests of clarity and linguistic representation of the sexes, an instruction that might once have said ‘The applicant should fill in this form using his own handwriting’ should now be worded more inclusively. There are several easy ways to do this, for example:

* Rewrite the sentence as a plain imperative: Fill in this form using your own handwriting.
* Rewrite the sentence to make it plural: Applicants should fill in this form using their own handwriting.
* Their can also be used in the singular: The applicant should fill in this form using their own handwriting.

Chair

The person who chairs a meeting (or a committee or any other formal group) should be referred to as Chair. However, if an Act refers to a statutory title, such as Chairman, then that terminology should be used.

## ISBNs and ISSNs

International Standard Book Numbers (ISBNs) and International Standard Serial Numbers (ISSNs) are used as unique identifiers for publications including different editions and formats eg electronic version. They also assist in identifying the correct publication when titles of different publications are similar.

* ISBNs (International Standard Book Numbers) are generally used for books or one-off publications.
* ISSNs (International Standard Serial Numbers) are used for periodical publications such as magazines and annual reports.

It is recommended that ISBNs/ISSNs are provided to major publications that must be deposited with the [National eDeposit](https://ned.gov.au) service (NED) to fulfil [legal deposit requirements](http://www.communications.tas.gov.au/policy/availability_and_accessibility_of_information/6.1_availability) under the *Libraries Act 1984*.

Further information on [International Standard Book Numbers](https://www.myidentifiers.com.au/) (ISBNs) and [International Standard Serial Numbers (ISSNs)](https://www.nla.gov.au/the-australian-issn-agency) is available on the [Tasmanian Government Communications website](https://www.tas.gov.au/communications/toolbox/tasmanian-government-websites/communications-policy-requirements).

## Italics

(see also Documents and References to publications)

* DO:
* Italics are used for the titles of:
* books and periodicals
* newspapers and magazines (eg *The Mercury*)
* films, video, and television and radio programs
* works of art
* legislation and legal cases
* the name of ships, aircraft and other vehicles
* the scientific names of animals and plants (at the genus, species, and lower taxonomic levels)
* letters, words, and phrases being cited.
* Published documents including the names of Acts or Regulations of the Australian and state parliaments are also written in italics, provided they are named exactly and include their dates, for example:
* *Gaming Control Amendment (Tasmanian Gaming Licence Taxation) Act 2000*
* *Vehicle and Traffic (Driver Licensing and Vehicle Registration) Regulations 2000.*

## It’s versus its

It’s the contracted form of it is or it has. This should not be confused with the possessive pronoun its (which means belonging to it).

* DO:
* it's = it is. The apostrophe in it’smarks the omission of a space and either one or two letters, just as in can’t or doesn’t, for example:
	+ It’s a nice day today.
* it is one of a whole set of possessive pronoun forms which all end in s without any apostrophe, for example: hers, his, its, ours, theirs, yours, for example:
* The Committee reviewed its decisions.

## Legislation

Acts and regulations

* DO:
* Acts or regulations of the Australian or state parliaments should be written in italics, provided they are named exactly and include their dates, for example:
* *Gaming Control Amendment (Tasmanian Gaming Licence Taxation) Act 2000*
* *Vehicle and Traffic (Driver Licensing and Vehicle Registration) Regulations 2000*
* As required by Section 10, subsection 1(b) of the *Debits Duties Act 2001*…
* Once the title of an Act or Regulation has been written once, it can afterwards be referred to as the Act or the Regulation, and written without italics, eg the *State Service Act 2000* and thereafter the State Service Act.
* It is important to make clear distinctions between various jurisdictions’ legislation by specifying whether it is Tasmanian (Tas) or Commonwealth (Cth) legislation, for example:
	+ The *Anti-Discrimination Act 1998* (Tas) as well as the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth)

X DON’T:

* Do not use the abbreviation s (for section) of legislation.

Bills

* DO:
* Bills before Parliament are not italicised because they are ‘unpublished’ at that stage, for example:
* the Regulation of Genetic Material Bill 2010

More extensive guidance on conventions governing the naming of legislation and references to legal authorities can be found in the *Australian Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers*, Chapter 12, “Methods of Citation”.

## Lists

For first level dot points, use a standard dot. For second level, use an open bullet. For example:

* Use the standard dot for the first level dot point
* Use an open bullet for the second level dot point
* DO:
* Use verbs that are consistent with any introductory phrase at the top of the list.
* Spacing between lines in a list for correspondence, minutes and briefing notes is generally 6 points (and between paragraphs 12 points).

Three kinds of lists

There are three kinds of lists: lists of items, fragmented sentences and full sentences. Each kind of list requires slightly different formatting. In choosing which style of list suits your document, there are two guiding principles:

* Choose the style that is best suited to the immediate context in your document.
* Don’t drift from one style to another part-way through the set of dot points.

Example 1 – list of items

In general, a printed publication will involve:

* writer(s)
* editor
* graphic designer
* typesetter or desktop publisher
* proofreader
* printer

Note: No punctuation is used in those six dot points as the listed items are too short to require punctuation for clarification. There is no full stop at the end.

Example 2 – sentence fragments

You can use photographs in a number of ways:

* as an integral part of the page layout (taking care to have the required number and ensuring that they are suitable);
* as separate items distributed throughout the document; or
* as a pictorial section using a montage effect, with several photographs spread over consecutive pages.

Example 3 – full sentences

During a brainstorming process you should take special care to do three things:

* Identify and jot down topics by program, region or outcome.
* Consider what sort of introduction or overview is needed. Allow for any ‘big news’, major achievements or changes which should be highlighted.
* Decide whether any of the information would be better dealt with in appendices to the main text.

Note: Notice that all the items in Example 3 are complete sentences, as distinct from being only phrases that contribute to a single, over-arching sentence. The presence of two sentences within its second dot point dictated Example 3’s choice of list style.

## Local government

* DO:
* Use lower case for local government, for example:
* A number of rallies were held in support of local government responsibilities.
* Garbage collection is a local government responsibility.
* The management of rates is the responsibility of local government.
* In relation to references to mayors, alderman and councillors, note that:
* all councils have a Mayor, except the Hobart City Council which has a Lord Mayor; and
* city councils have aldermen and the other councils have councillors.

X DON’T:

* The word councildoes not need initial capitals unless it is referring to a specific entity, for example:
* The Mayor of Launceston City Council represented local government on the committee. The Council argued its case…
* A number of councils will be represented at the meeting.

## Names and titles

* DO:
* If you are unsure of the preferred title of a woman (Mrs, Ms or Miss) use Dear Ms [Family Name].
* It is customary to sign correspondence Yours sincerely. However, when addressing Dear Sir/Madam the complementary close is Yours faithfully.
* The first reference to the Premier in a text should appear as the Premier, Jeremy Rockliff MP. When referred to again in the same text it can be Mr Rockliff or the Premier. The same applies to Ministers.
* Reference to the Secretary of a Department should appear as the Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet.
* The title His Excellency Mr Jim Khamalis, High Commissioner of Moldovia would be followed by using His Excellency through the remaining text.
* Tasmanian House of Assembly members have the letters MP added after their name. Legislative Council members have the letters MLC after their name.
* The Premier and Ministers have preferred styles when addressing people such as the Prime Minister, Lord Mayor, aldermen and councillors. Adopt the formal styles even though the Premier or Minister may know the person very well. For further information on forms of addresses for dignitaries refer to [How to address dignitaries](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/corporate_and_governance_division/communications_and_protocol/forms_of_address/_nocache) on the DPAC website.

## Non-breaking spaces

A non-breaking space prevents words or numbers breaking inappropriately across two lines. To insert a non-breaking space, hold the control and shift keys down and press the space bar (Control +Shift + Space bar).

* DO:
* Use non-breaking spaces between titles and names (Mr\_John\_Brown), when writing dates (14\_January\_2008) or street addresses (15\_Murray\_Street), and when naming amounts in words ($21\_million).
* Use a non-breaking space when a line ends with a pronoun (eg I, she, they) so that the pronoun moves to the beginning of the next line. This aids readability.

## Number and amount

* DO:
* In general, numbers in text should be written to one decimal place only, for example:
	+ 0.1, 3.2 and $55.3 million.

If it is appropriate or necessary for numbers to be presented to two or more decimal places, this should be applied consistently throughout the text.

* Write numbers greater than one million as a combination of numbers and words, for example:
	+ $12.3 million.
* A number equal to or greater than 10 but less than one millionshould be expressed as a digit, for example:
	+ 10 computers

Unless the sense is intentionally approximate, for example:

* several thousand computers were faulty.
* A number less than 10 that is not a dollar amount or percentage should be written in full, for example: 3 per cent BUT three reports.
* A number larger than 999 has its groups of digits separated by a comma, for example:
	+ $1,000 $8,400 $18,400 $180,400
* Ranges of numbers should be set with spaced hyphens separating their elements, for example:
	+ 50 - 270 km a range of $5,000 - $8,000
* However, when referring to a financial year there is no space, for example:
	+ 2014-15
* Words can also be used as the separators, for example:
* ranging between $5,000 and $8,000
	+ varying from 19.3 to 22.6 per cent
* Depending on context, write fractions either as numbers or in words. For example:
	+ 0.25 ¼ 0.75 ¾ one-quarter three-quarters
* For numbers less than one, place a zero before the decimal point.

X DON’T:

* The abbreviation M should not be used except in charts. Use a non-breaking space between the number and word million.
* Don’t start a sentence with a number. If a sentence starts with a number, rewrite the sentence, or write the numbers in word. For example:
	+ Twenty two units were sold, NOT 22 units were sold.

## Per cent versus %

(see also Number and amount)

* DO:
* In text, spell out the expression per cent in full. Use the symbol % in tables and charts.
* Link the preceding number to the per with a non-breaking space, for example: 28\_per\_cent

## Plurals

| singular | plural |
| --- | --- |
| agenda | agendas |
| analysisAttorney-General | analysesAttorneys-General |
| census | censuses |
| criterion | criteria |
| forum | forums |
| memorandum | memoranda |
| Mr | Messrs |
| Mrs | Mesdames |
| Ms | Mss or Mses |
| phenomenon | phenomena |
| stadium | stadiums |
| stratum | strata |
| synopsis | synopses |
| Head of Agency | Heads of Agencies |

* An exception is the word staff, which is treated as a plural noun.
	+ The staff are progressing the matter.
* The more frequently a Latin-derived word appears in everyday use, the more likely it is to take ums as its plural rather than the Latin ending a, for example:
	+ ultimatums
	+ vacuums

## Principal and principle

Principalmeans first in importance. The same word, when used as a noun, can mean a principal person, such as the head of a school or (in law) someone who engages another to act as an agent. In finance, the same word, principal, means capital or property.

Principle means rule or standard. Its adjectival form is principled, having high moral principles.

In principle describes a basic ideal, eg if your aunt supports your travel plans in principle, she likes the idea of you getting out and seeing the world.

## Quotations

* DO:
* Use single quotation marks (also referred to as a single inverted comma) to indicate:
* the title of an unpublished work, essay, article or lecture when it is used for the first time, for example: the ‘Role of Local Government Discussion Paper’;
* technical terms the first time they are used in a document; and
* a matter to be emphasised, for example: The papers are classified ‘Top Secret’.
* Use double quotation marks for the names of articles, journals, chapters in books, individual papers in conference proceedings and direct quotes.

X DON’T:

* Use quote marks for quotes covering three lines or more. Quotes over three lines should be presented as an indented paragraph, approximately one centimetre from the left-hand margin and in a smaller font size (10). For example:
* According to NAIDOC’s website ([www.naidoc.org.au](http://www.naidoc.org.au)) this year’s theme:

celebrates the champions who lived to review the spirit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972. Forty years ago, the embassy became a powerful symbol of unity. Its founders instilled pride, advanced equality and educated the country on the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## References to publications

(see also Italics and Legislation)

Referencing is a standard method of acknowledging sources of information and ideas in written material. DPAC’s preferred method of citation is the Harvard system.

In-text citations

* DO:
* The reference appears at the end of the sentence, before the concluding punctuation. The author’s name is given first, followed by the publication date and often the page number/s for the source. For example:
	+ The initiative was proposed in 2020 (Tourism Taskforce 2020, p. 245).
* However, if the citation refers to only part of a sentence, it appears at the end of the clause or phrase to which it relates. For example:
	+ The Tourism Taskforce (2020, p. 245) proposed the initiative.
* Additional information, for example lists of statistics, can be put into numbered footnotes at the bottom of a page.

Reference list and bibliography

A reference list contains the details of those works cited in the text.

A bibliography lists information sources, not all of which are cited in the text.

* DO:
* The Reference list or Bibliography is arranged alphabetically, by the author’s name. If an item has no author, it is ordered in sequence by the first significant word of its title.
* References to books or parts of books should include the author’s or editor’s name, the year of publication, the name of the publisher and the place of publication. These should all appear in normal font type, for example:
* Arens, A A, and Loebbecke, J K, 1988 *Auditing: An Integrated Approach* (4th edn), Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.
* McGrath, M, 1994 *Financial Institutions, Instruments and Markets in Australia*, McGraw-Hill, Sydney.
* References to articles in journals, chapters in books or individual papers in conference proceedings should appear in normal type enclosed in double quotation marks. Journal titles must be fully spelt out and not abbreviated, for example:
* McDonald, J, 1999 “A most unnatural unemployment rate for Australia”, *Economic Record*, 75, 229, pp. 167–70.
* Beresford, R, 2000 “Greenhouse gas emissions: Woodside’s view”, *Outlook 2000, Proceedings of the National Outlook Conference, Canberra 29 February to 2 March 2000, Volume 1: Natural Resources*, Australian Bureau of Agricultural & Resource Economics, Canberra.
* Suzuki, R, 1982 “Workers’ attitudes toward computer innovation and organizational culture: The case in Japan”, paper presented to 10th World Congress of Sociology, Mexico City, August.
* References to reports, including reports submitted to the Australian or state parliaments, should treat the sponsoring committee or other source body as the author. For example:
* Access Economics, 2000 *Access Economics Five Year Business Outlook: June Quarter 2000*, Access Economics, Barton, ACT.
* Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1985 *Projections of the Population of Australia, States and Territories*, 1984 to 2021, Cat No 3222.0, ABS, Canberra.
* Where an Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publication is used as a source for a chart or table, the preferred citation style is:
* *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed*, ABS Cat No 6291.055.001
* If it is clear from a government report that an appointed individual either chaired the relevant inquiry or was the sole author of the report, it is appropriate to name that person, for example:
* Antarctic Science Advisory Committee, 1997 *Australia’s Antarctic Program Beyond 2000: A Framework for the Future* (Professor D M Stoddart, Chairman), Department of the Environment, Hobart.
* Ergas, H, 1986 *Telecommunications and the Australian Economy*, Report to the Department of Communications, AGPS, Canberra.

 X DON’T:

* The year of publication of an item should not be written in italics unless it forms part of the name of an act or regulation, book, report or collection of conference papers.

Note: More extensive guidance on the presentation of references, whether embodied in text or listed at the end of a document, can be found in the *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers* (6th edn), Chapter 12, “Methods of Citation”.

## Round brackets

* DO:
* Use round brackets to enclose expressions that are not essential to the meaning of the sentence but add detail, for example:
	+ Employees in agencies are also eligible for awards for shorter periods (25 and 35 years) of service with the State Government.

## Salutations and closes

(see also Names and titles and Plurals)

Memoranda

Memoranda are generally used when Tasmanian Government ministers write to their Tasmanian colleagues or when secretaries of Tasmanian Government departments write to their counterparts (this does not include Heads of State Authorities, Government Business Enterprises and State Owned Companies – which are done by way of a letter).

* When corresponding within the Tasmanian Government in a memorandum style there is no need to use a salutation or close, other than the name of the person signing the memorandum. Dear and Yours sincerely are not required.

Letters

Letters are used to correspond to stakeholders and the general public, including Heads of State Authorities, Government Business Enterprises and State Owned Companies.

* When corresponding using letters, you should use the salutation Dear Mr, Mrs, or Ms and the close Yours sincerely*.*
* If you do not know the name or correct title of the recipient, use Dear Sir/Madam and the complementary close Yours faithfully.

When responding to jointly signed letters the DPAC preference is:

The Hon Nigel Lawson MP

Treasurer

Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2600

The Hon Christine Lagarde MP

Minister for Revenue and Financial Services

Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Lawson and Ms Lagarde

Thank you for your letter regarding…

Note: If the second addressee has a different address then a copy of letter is sent to that addressee in a separate envelope.

For more than two people:

Ms Helen Keller

Chief Executive Officer

Occupational Therapy Australia

Unit 6/340 Gore Street

FITZROY VIC 3065

Dear Ms Keller

Thank you for your jointly signed letter with Ms Gail Mulcair and Mr Cris Massis regarding ….

Thank you again for writing to the Government about this matter. I would appreciate it if you would arrange for a copy of this response to be forwarded to Ms Mulcair and Mr Massis.

Note: The lead person is generally identified as the person who has signed the correspondence first unless it is a Mayor or politician, then it is according to seniority.

## Semicolons

Semicolons (;) mark a break that is stronger than a comma, but weaker than a full stop.

* DO:
* Use a semicolon as a separator between the various items in a list of a fragmented sentence. For example:
	+ You can use photographs in a number of ways:
		- as a part of the page layout;
		- distributed throughout the document; or
		- as a montage.
* Use a semicolon within a sentence to separate items that are too cumbersome to be separated by comma. For example:
	+ You can use a photograph as a part of the page layout; distributed throughout the document; or as a montage.
* DPAC’s style is to include and or or (whichever is appropriate) at the start of the final item in such a list.

X DON’T:

* A semicolon should never be used to introduce a list. DPAC’s preferred use is a colon. Refer to the section on Lists for further information.

## Spelling conventions

(see also Hyphenation)

* Adviser (not Advisor)
* Advisory
* and (not &)
* Auditor-General (not Auditor General)
* benchmarking (not bench-marking)
* budgeted (not budgetted)
* cannot (not can not)
* co-location (not collocation)
* cooperate (not co-operate)
* coordinate (not co-ordinate)
* copyright (not copy-right)
* eg (not e.g.)
* email (not e-mail)
* etc (not etc.)
* focused/ing (not focussed/ing)
* FTEs not FTE's
* full-time (not full time)
* GST (not Goods and Services Tax)
* Government Business Enterprises - GBEs (not GBE's)
* Head of Agency or Heads of Agencies (not Head of Agencies or Heads of Agency)
* ie (not i.e.)
* ill health (not ill-health)
* interagency (not inter-agency)
* intergovernmental (not inter-governmental or inter-government)
* interdepartmental (not inter-departmental)
* internet (not Internet)
* interstate
* intrastate
* long‑term (not long term)
* national is not capitalised
* nationwide (not nation-wide)
* No as an abbreviation for number (not No.)
* non-government
* North-West Coast, the North-West
* Northern Tasmania
* one-off
* outcome
* part-time (not part time)
* payroll (except where legislation uses **pay-roll**)
* per cent (not percent). Use % in tables but not in text.
* program (not programme)
* programed (not programmed)
* rollout (not roll-out or roll out)
* sea level (not sea-level)
* Solicitor-General
* short-term (not short term)
* State Service
* statewide (not state-wide)
* targeted (not targetted)
* taxpayers
* thank you (not thankyou)
* trialling (not trialing)
* user pays (not user-pays)
* wellbeing (not well being)
* whole-of-government (not whole-of-Government or whole of government)
* whole-of-service
* workers' compensation
* workforce (not work force)
* website

## States and territories

* DO:
* When mentioned as a group and not individually named, the words statesand territoriesare lowercase.
* If a specific state or territory that has been named in a document (for example, Tasmania or the Northern Territory) should be capitalised (the State, or the Territory).
* When referring to states and territories, it is normal practice to refer to the states and territories once and then to jurisdictions, for example:
	+ The states and territories agreed to local government reforms. The jurisdictions are to meet again in …

X DON’T:

* The word statewide should not be capitalised.

## Telephone numbers

* DO:
* Write telephone numbers using only digits and spaces.
* There is no need to include the 03 area code when writing for individuals or organisations in Tasmania or Victoria.
* If writing for international audiences, insert the international code prefix, for example:
* In Tasmania and Victoria 6233 1234
* Elsewhere in Australia 03 6233 1234
* Internationally +613 6233 1234
* Mobile numbers 0400 331 234
* Internationally +61 400 331 234
* When referring to a telephone number in letters, there is no need to refer to ‘telephone or phone’, for example:
	+ Mrs Smith can be contacted on 6233 3333 or robyn.smith@dpac.tas.gov.au.

## That and which

A defining (or restrictive) clause limits the meaning of the noun to which it applies.

* DO:
* Use that to introduce a defining or restrictive clause. For example:
* The advice that she drafted last week has been accepted by the Minister.

A refining (or non-restrictive) clause adds information about a noun that has either already been defined or does not need to be defined.

* DO:
* Introduce a refining or non-restrictive clause with which, for example:
* The article, whichwe wrote last year, has been accepted for publication.
* Pride and Prejudice, which was written by Jane Austen, is a classic novel.

In this sentence the clause, ‘which we wrote last year’, could be removed without obscuring the meaning of the sentence.

A mnemonic rhyme to help recall the that/which distinction is:

That defines. Which refines.

## URLs

* DO:
* Write URLs in lowercase without italics.
* If the URL appears at the end of a sentence, use a full stop.
* Include ‘www’ before the domain name but not ‘http://’, for example:
* [www.dpac.tas.gov.au](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au).

# Glossary of Grammatical Terms

Adjective: A word that describes a noun or pronoun (see below for definitions of these). For example: purple, soft, heavy, regulatory.

Adverb: Modifies verbs, adjectives and other verbs by describing how something is done. For example: quickly, slowly, safely, and immediately.

Compound adjective: An adjective that consists of more than one word. For example: a part-time employee, a fast-moving car, and a five-year lease.

Conjunction: A word that links other words or phrases or clauses. For example: and, but, yet, or, though, while.

Form: Many words exist in various forms. For example, the verb ‘go’ can also occur in the forms ‘going’ and ‘gone’. The noun ‘child’ also has the forms ‘children’ and ‘children’s’. The form a word takes will often signal what its grammatical job is in a sentence.

Noun: The name of a thing, creature, person, place, idea etc. When a noun represents a person or place it begins with a capital letter and is called a proper noun. For example: Tasmania.

Parenthesis**:** A short aside or interruption in a sentence usually marked off from the main statement by brackets, dashes or commas. Punctuation marks used in that way are said to be parenthetical.

Phrase: A group of words forming part of a sentence but not necessarily containing a verb. For example: The timetable for Monday’s training course.

Prepositions: Words such as to, for, near, at, by, from, of, in, over, with, beside. A preposition usually connects to a following noun or pronoun, placing it in relation to other words in the sentence. For example: The payment of dividends.

Pronoun: A word that stands instead of a noun that either has just been used or is about to be used. For example: I, me, you, she, her, he, him, it, each, none, everyone, everybody, nobody, somebody, someone, whoever, we, us, ourselves, themselves, they, and them. Pronouns are known as possessive pronouns when they indicate ownership. For example: hers, his, its, ours, theirs, and yours. Possessive pronouns never have apostrophes in them.

Refining clause: A clause that makes the meaning of its sentence more exact by providing the reader or listener with additional information.

Sentence: A sequence of words capable of standing alone to make an assertion, ask a question or give a command. Most sentences include at least one verb. In English, every sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop. In a very simple sentence, such as Harry tricked the Muggles**,** the noun ‘Harry’ is the subject, ‘tricked’ is the verb and ‘Muggles’ is the object both of the verb and of the whole sentence.

Tense: The tense of a verb is what shows whether it describes a past, present or future action. ‘You are reading’ is a statement in the present tense. ‘We will go this afternoon’ is in the future tense. ‘We went yesterday’ is in the past tense.

Verb: A word that expresses an action or occurrence – a doing word. For example: walk, do, make, calculate, think. An auxiliary verb has the function of extending the meaning of another verb. For example: having gone, had written, will write, would have seen.

# Further resources

The Writing Guide should be used in conjunction with the following publications:

## Tasmanian Government resources

[*The Tasmanian Government Style Guide and Logo Policy*](https://www.tas.gov.au/communications/policy-overview)

[Microsoft Word templates](https://www.tas.gov.au/communications/toolbox/templates) for frequently used documents

[Writing for the web: guide](https://www.tas.gov.au/communications/toolbox/tasmanian-government-websites/writing-for-the-web-guide)

[26TEN Guide to Plain English](https://26ten.tas.gov.au/PublishingImages/Tools/26TEN-Communicate-Clearly-2016.pdf)

## Australian Government resources

The Australian Government Publishing Service S*tyle manual* (6th edn, Canberra, 2002; now distributed through AusInfo) or its shorter derivative *The* *Little Book of Style* (AusInfo, Canberra, 1998).

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