



DPIRD online writing style guide

Common style guidelines for writing and editing

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About the online writing style guide

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's (DPIRD) online writing style guide is for staff who write and edit information for the department's websites. This document contains guidelines for written style to ensure consistency across all forms of online communication. Both Our voice and

Our scientific voice are covered in this style guide. Guidelines for visual style and branding are covered in the [DPIRD brand guidelines](#).

This style guide includes adoption of the Federal [Australian Government Style Manual](#). For spelling of words which are not covered by this guide or the Australian Government Style Manual, please refer to the [Australian Macquarie Dictionary](#). This document is a guide only. Your use of language and tone should be flexible and should consider your audience and purpose.

Where this style guide conflicts with information in the Australian Government Style Manual, the guidance in **this** document should take priority.

This style guide does not provide instructions for writing Ministerial correspondence. This information is available from DPIRD's [Writing style guide](#).

Appendix 1: Quick style tips in this document includes a 'quick style tips' summary, addressing style questions which frequently occur. If you have any further questions, please use the search function of the Australian Government Style Manual in the first instance. If you need further clarification, please email your question to internetpresenceproject@dpird.wa.gov.au.

Our online channels

The online writing style guide covers all of DPIRD's online channels, including:

- dpird.wa.gov.au
- DPIRD's presence on wa.gov.au
- DPIRD's [Digital Library](#)

There are separate guidelines covering DPIRD's social media channels.

Accessibility

Written accessibility

DPIRD's written material must be accessible to everyone. This includes people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and older people.

To ensure your writing is accessible, follow these rules:

- Use plain English. The Australian Government Style Manual has more in-depth information on plain English use.
- Keep text left aligned, and do not justify the text.
- Do not use italics, except for Act titles.
- Do not use underlining.
- Include captions for photographs.
- Include alt text for images.
- Create descriptive hyperlinks (not 'click here').
- Wherever possible, avoid using footnotes. Incorporate the information into your text instead.

Accessibility and PDFs

PDF accessibility is currently under review and will form part of IPP's governance once completed.

PDF documents should have:

- the correct heading structure
- text alternatives for images
- the language identified
- the correct colour contrast levels in use
- hyperlinks that are displayed with meaningful text
- a table of contents, linking to the correct sections of the document
- bullet points for the presentation of information in lists
- no nested tables and – where possible – no merged, split, or blank table cells.

Accessibility for photos and videos

Alt text

Alt text must describe what a photo shows. It should not be a repetition of a caption. If the image does not add meaning to the page, assign it as a 'null-text', which will ensure that screen readers will skip over the image. With long descriptions, write the most important information first.

Video

To create an accessible video:

- Video transcripts must be captioned. They should also be accompanied with a text transcript and audio description.
- Captions should be as close as possible to the original wording.
- Speakers should be introduced (name and title).
- Include all significant sound effects in captions.
- Position and time captions appropriately to ensure they do not block critical vision in the video.
- Include any other significant sounds that may provide context or add interest.

Audio

Do not allow video or audio files to automatically play. To create an accessible audio description:

- Make sure important information such as locations, settings, facial and speakers are included.
- Where possible, include the audio in a written format, such as a transcript of a podcast. Transcripts should be uploaded as accessible PDFs.

Our voice

At DPIRD, we use plain English to ensure our writing is clear, concise, and direct. We do not use bureaucratic, long-winded, or jargon-heavy language. If you find the text you are working with is very technical and jargon-heavy, consider whether the scientific voice guidelines (

Our scientific voice) may be a better fit. The tone should be helpful, positive, and collaborative without adding unnecessary emotion or subjectivity to the information.

The reader (audience) must be front-of-mind when you write online content. Your role is to make sure that:

- they can find what they need quickly
- the content is clear
- if there is an action for them to complete, that it is clear and uncomplicated.

Keep it simple

Content must be clear and meaningful. You can use contractions. Only include information that is relevant to the task or current situation. Future states should only be mentioned if there is a requirement such as a registration closing date. Do not repeat information that is on another page; instead, add a hyperlink to that page.

Avoid metaphors, embellishment, and subjectivity. Do not use jargon or acronyms unless necessary. Write acronyms in full the first time they are used, followed by the acronym in brackets. Thereafter, you can use the acronym.

Know your audience

The readers of our online content come from a diverse range of cultures, education levels, ages and experiences. The state government recommends that online content intended for the general public is written to a Year 7 level as per Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

Structure

You may need to map out your content with the project team to understand its purpose, and make sure content is placed on the correct online channel.

Structure your content to ensure:

- important information is placed to the top left of the screen
- readers do not need to scroll down to find important information
- each headline tells the reader whether they are on the correct page
- content is arranged using headings, bullet points and white space.

Think about the communication medium

Some content may be suited to different communication methods, such as a graphic, map or video. Other options may be more effective in reaching your target audience. Contact the Strategic Communications team to discuss your options.

Our scientific voice

Scientific writing is clear, concise, and only presents the facts to readers, without aiming to sway or influence the reader. As DPIRD is a government agency that delivers research and development outputs, our scientific voice has been developed to help subject matter experts (SMEs) write to a consistent standard.

Write your content as if an intelligent non-specialist is reading it. Make sure everything is explained adequately. Although writing for non-scientists on the web should generally be written to a Year 7 level, this is not achievable or desirable for scientific content. SMEs must balance the conflicting requirements of keeping text simple without watering down the content, as this can cause the meaning of the content to be lost or misrepresented.

Apart from the information and exceptions in the Our scientific voice section, all other rules for accessibility and web page structure must be adhered to.

Structure

Make sure you structure your content logically. Use simple sentences and limit paragraph length. Aim for one idea per sentence.

Verb tense

The tense required will vary depending on what the writer is trying to convey. You will probably need to change tense while writing in our scientific voice.

Use **present tense** for introductions, as you are presenting facts and background information on your area of expertise.

Use **past tense** to discuss results or findings from the past. If you have a methods section, use past tense.

Incorrect (present tense)	Correct (past tense)
The sites are equipped with soil moisture probes and root architecture monitoring devices.	Sites prepared on sandplain country at Bolgart and Northampton in 2021 were excavated to a depth of 80cm.

Active or passive

Active voice is usually clearer and more succinct. For example, 'Birds build nests' is clearer than 'Nests are built by birds.' Favour the active voice but use passive if it makes your writing clearer.

Passive	Active
Extra credit was given to subjects in exchange for participation.	Subjects received extra credit in exchange for participation.

Jargon, acronyms, and abbreviations

Jargon is a word or phrase that only specialist readers will understand. DPIRD is a government agency, which means that our work should be accessible to the public. Make sure you define jargonistic language, even if you think that most of your audience will know what it means.

Acronyms and abbreviations can be useful, particularly where they will be repeated throughout a text. However, always write the phrase out in full the first time it is used.

Incorrect (abbreviations not clarified)	Correct (abbreviations clarified)
The SIBI project, in partnership with the department's ABD team, is delivering practical livestock management training to Aboriginal landowners.	The Sheep Industry Business Innovation (SIBI) project, in partnership with the department's Aboriginal Business Development (ABD) team, is delivering practical livestock management training to Aboriginal landowners.

Language use

When there is a choice between a familiar and a complex term, the more familiar term is preferable if it doesn't reduce the accuracy of the information. The table below shows some examples of complex words and their simple alternatives.

Incorrect (complex)	Correct (simple)
• efficacious • utilise • elucidate • proximal	• effective • use • explain • close

Webpage structure

General content

Keep webpages as short as possible to ensure they download quickly and to avoid information overload. DPIRD has a significant number of regional and rural stakeholders who may have issues with internet connection, so keeping pages short is a way to make content more accessible for these people.

Use clear headings and subheadings to direct the reader to relevant information. Break up the text using headings and subheadings to signpost key topics and themes. Use dot points rather than dense blocks of text.

Most webpages will include hyperlinks to provide readers with further information that sits on another webpage or site. Make sure your hyperlinks are accessible by using a descriptive term (not a website address) that lets readers know where they're going. This is especially beneficial for those using screen readers.

Incorrect	Correct
- The 2023 Publication Policy is available <u>online</u>. - The 2023 Publication Policy is available at <u>http://www.dpird.wa.gov.au/publications/2023-publication-policy</u>. <u>Click here</u> to read the 2023 Publication Policy.	The <u>2023 Publication Policy</u> provides more detail.

Scientific content

As a guide to writing scientific content for the website, the following headings are recommended to help guide your reader. This is particularly useful for projects with set funding and research outcomes.

The suggested headings are:

- Our challenge
- Our approach
- Activities
- Goals
- Outcomes
- Impact
- Link to full journal article

You do not have to use all the headings suggested above – use those that are best suited to your content.

A summary of the essentials

Referring to DPIRD

Always use in full when written for the first time, followed by the acronym (DPIRD) in brackets. Thereafter, use 'DPIRD' or 'the department' (with lower case 'd').

Do not use an ampersand '&' in place of the 'and' in the department's name.

Incorrect	Correct
- the Department - the Department of Primary Industries & Regional Development	- the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) - the department - DPIRD

Spelling

Make sure Microsoft Word is set to Australian English. Use the Macquarie Dictionary for any words not covered by either the Australian Government Style Manual or DPIRD's online writing style guide.

Incorrect (American spelling)	Correct (Australian spelling)
• Organize • Color • Center	• Organise • Colour • Centre

Government

Use 'Australian Government' to refer to the national government of Australia.

Do not use the phrase 'Commonwealth Government' to mean 'Australian Government'.

Use a lower case 'f' for federal when it is used as an adjective, such as 'federal issues'.

Use upper case 'F' when it is part of a formal name, such as Federal Court of Australia.

Exception: use capital letter 'F' for Federal Budget. Note: use lower case when used in the plural (federal budgets).

See also [Government terms in the Style manual](#) for examples, including in relation to parliamentary terms.

Non-specific references to local, state, and federal government agencies should be lower case. For example:

- "The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development liaises with local government agencies, such as the City of Melville."
- "The role of government is to..."

Capitalisation

Use minimal capitalisation, including sentence case for headings and publication titles.

Sentence case means only capitalising the first word and proper nouns.

Photo captions, credits, and copyright

It's important to provide accurate credits for photos. Make sure you have the rights to use images before publishing them online.

Copyright for photos and videos taken by staff during work is the property of DPIRD. The department may include the staff member's name in the caption, but there is no obligation to do so.

If you need to give or receive proof of copyright, ask the project area to complete the [DPIRD copyright request form](#) in full.

Example: 'Canola fields in York. Photo – Owen Lewis/DPIRD

Species/scientific names

Consider the audience and purpose when deciding whether to use common or scientific names, or both.

Content written using our voice (for a general public target audience) should use common names followed by scientific names in brackets and italics. When both common and scientific are used, write the common name first followed by the scientific name in italics in brackets for first usage, and thereafter just the common name.

For example:

Western rock lobster (*Panulirus cygnus*) is the target of WA's most valuable fishery.

Technical or scientific content for online channels should use common names followed by scientific names in brackets and italics in the first instance, and the scientific name in italics should be used thereafter.

Websites and hyperlinks

When formatting hyperlinks, omit the [http://](#) and [www.](#) part of URLs where possible. Make sure the text is still correctly hyperlinked. This means still using [http://](#) or [www.](#) in the back end so that it still works as a functional hyperlink. When a sentence ends on a hyperlink, use a full stop.

Appendix 1: Quick style tips

Use Australian English, not US English.

DPIRD style	minimal capitalisation
font	Arial, 12 point (minimum 11 point)
captions	no italics for web, italics for print

Abbreviations

centimetres	12 cm
dates	1 January 2024
degrees	22°C
carbon dioxide	CO ₂
e.g.	for example
i.e.	that is
grams	100 g
hectares	5,000 ha
kilograms	10 kg, 3 kg/h
litres	2 L
metres	10 m
millions	\$2 million (text) \$2 m (tables)
numbers	745,902,350
percent	15%
symbols	> 90%
time	10:30 am
units	kL, ML, GL, TL

Quotes

direct speech	He asked, 'But where's the money going to come from?'
quotations within quotations	He also wrote, 'The decisions of the department for "major procurement" were always political choices.'

Common terms

1990s	no apostrophe
department	lower case after initial reference
names	AD Hope
state	initially spell out, then WA
years (span)	2022–24
financial year	2023–24
phone	(08) 9363 3333 (local) +61 8 9363 3333 (international)

Dashes

hyphen (-)	Example: four-part (unspaced)
en rule (–)	Examples: pp 31–37 (unspaced) Murray–Darling Basin (unspaced)

Dot-point rules

Complete sentences:

- Use an initial capital.
- Put a full stop after each item.

Sentence fragments:

- no initial capitals
- full stop after last item only.

Refer to the Australian Government Style Manual

<https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/>



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