DVA Style Guide

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DVA Style Guide

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This new edition of the DVA Style Guide is based on the [Australian Government Style Manual](#) (AGSM) and was updated in early 2024. It is administered by the Executive Communications, Speechwriting and Editorial team in Communications Branch. If you have any questions, please email us (vetaffairs@dva.gov.au).

While the AGSM is comprehensive, not all the information in it is relevant to our daily work at DVA.

The AGSM also recognises that each agency and department has its own voice. We know our users best, so we know how to write for them.

Our style guide contains DVA-specific examples. Our recommendations are guided by our content principles ([clear, compassionate and useful](#)).

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Our dictionary

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Our [glossary](#) lists how to capitalise specific terms, which spelling to use when there are variations (for example, we write **adviser** not advisor) and more.

For general spelling advice, all staff have free access to the [Macquarie Dictionary](#) online. Click the **Did you mean?** toggle next to the search box before you search.

Some entries include a list of spelling variations at the end. Use the main entry in your content.

Example

The [main entry for recognise](#) is spelled with an 's'.

The version with a 'z' ('recognize') is listed at the end of the page.

So, we write 'recognise' in our content.

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Abbreviations

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In most cases, abbreviations don't take full stops.

Examples

Dr

Mr

Vic (Victoria)

Qld (Queensland)

Tas (Tasmania)

n/a (not applicable)

vs

AO

DSC

Exceptions include:

- e.g.
- i.e.
- etc.

Use **for example** and **that is** instead of **e.g.** and **i.e.** where you can. Only use **etc.** if you are listing 3 or more items.

Don't add commas after the short forms, but do use one before.

Example

This is open to anyone in the veteran community, e.g. veterans, veteran families, advocates, etc.

Australian Government Style Manual: [Abbreviations](#) and [Latin shortened forms](#)

See also:

- [Acronyms and initialisms](#)
- [Contractions](#)

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Acronyms and initialisms

Acronyms are pronounced as a single word and initialisms are pronounced letter by letter.
Examples
Acronym: Qantas (pronounced 'Quontas', of course)

Initialism: CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation), pronounced 'c – s – i – r – o'.

When you first introduce a phrase, write it out in full with the initialism or acronym in brackets afterwards. From then on, use only the initialism/acronym. But if you're not going to use the initialism/acronym again, don't bother.
Example

The Rehabilitation Appliances Program (RAP) provides aids, equipment and modifications to help our clients to live safely and independently. You can apply for items through RAP by completing this form.

Acronyms you do not need to write out in full:
- DVA
- RSL
- GP
- RAAF

If you are writing to the veteran community (ex-service personnel, veteran families, advocates etc.) you don't have to write **Australian Defence Force (ADF)**, you can just write **ADF**. But if you are writing for providers or other non-veteran audiences, write Australian Defence Force (ADF) first, then use ADF.
In longer documents, such as the You and Your Pension booklet or the annual report, you may need to reintroduce the acronym in each chapter. Think about whether your readers will find this useful.
Although we use capital letters for the shortened form, we do not necessarily use capitals in the expanded form. For example, the full phrase is **general practitioner** not **General Practitioner**.
Examples
GP à general practitioner

ESO à ex-service organisation

POW à prisoner of war

When making an acronym plural, add a lowercase **s** and no apostrophe: ESO**s**, GP**s**.

When making a singular acronym possessive, add an apostrophe and a lowercase **s**: Your GP**'s** report explained …

When making a plural acronym possessive, add a lowercase **s** and an apostrophe: The ESO**s'** shared objective is …

Australian Government Style Manual: [Acronyms and initialisms](#)

See also:

- [shortened forms of state and territory names](#).

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Acts and legislation

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The first letter of the word **Act** is always capitalised.

The first time you name an Act, write it in italics with the year at the end. The main Acts we work with are listed as examples below.

If the Act is known by an abbreviation, include this in brackets after the title. Don't apply italics to the abbreviation.

After the first mention, use the abbreviation only. If there is no abbreviation, use the short title without italics or the year.

Include **the** in front of the name of the Act when it is used as a noun.

Examples

The _Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986_ (VEA) … The VEA covers service in wartime …

Your claim has been assessed under the _Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004_ (MRCA). Your MRCA conditions are: …

According to the _Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988_ (DRCA) …

Exceptions

We don't use italics on the website. This rule applies to Acts as well. Online, you would simply write Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA) without special formatting. You can hyperlink the text to the relevant overview page on dva.gov.au at the first mention:

Australian Government Style Manual: [Acts of parliament](#) and [Bills and explanatory material](#)

See also:

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Addresses

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Generally write out states, territories and streets in full.

Examples
The session will be held at 14 Dover Street. [not St]

There are 5 service providers in New South Wales.

Shortened state and territory names can be used in postal addresses. Use all caps for these.
If you are writing a postal address in the middle of a paragraph, write: Unit 1, 23 Fourth Street, City STA 4001
Example
You can write to us at GPO Box 9998, Brisbane QLD 4001, with your file number or UIN at the top of the letter.

If you are writing an address block for a letter, write:

Example
John Citizen
Merrywether House
96 Bucklebury Drive
Brooloo QLD 4570

States and territories

Australian Government Style Manual: [Australian place names](#)

The states and territories of Australia are:
If all need to be listed, give them in alphabetical order rather than by population.
If your user testing shows a clear order of preference (for example, 70% of claimants live in Queensland, 20% in New South Wales and diminishing numbers across the other states and territories), you can decide to use that order.
Make sure that you consistently apply the order you choose. For example, you risk frustrating and confusing your users if a form includes an alphabetical dropdown for the claimant's location and a population-order dropdown for the nominated representative's location.
Shortened forms
The shortened forms for states and territories are:
If you are using short forms in postal addresses, the states must be given in all caps (QLD, TAS, VIC). Otherwise, use the shortened forms above.
Don't use a full stop after or within the shortened form (NT not N.T.).
You can use the shortened forms if space is limited (for example, in a table).
You can use the initialisms (ACT, NSW, NT, SA, WA) as adjectives.
Examples
SA Premier

NSW Health Minister

NT residents

the WA office

However, do not use the abbreviations (Qld, Vic, Tas) in this way. Instead, use the full term.
Examples
Victorian Premier

Queensland Department of Education

the Tasmanian office

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Capitals

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Australian Government style is to use minimal capitals. Don't use capitals for emphasis or to make a word look important.
You should only capitalise proper nouns, which include the names of people, places, organisations and specific things, such as programs, brands, medals and awards.
Australian Government Style Manual: [Capital letters: less is more](#) and [Punctuation and capitalisation](#)

Veteran

Generally, write veteran with a lowercase 'v'.
We only capitalise veteran in special circumstances. For example, in condolence letters when writing about the death of a specific veteran, you may write 'the Veteran' in reference to that particular individual. Some members of the veteran community feel strongly about capitalising 'Veteran'. So if someone uses 'Veteran' in correspondence to us, there is no harm in using it in a reply.
We capitalise veteran in some benefit names where lowercase may be confusing. For example, Veteran Payment and Veterans' Supplement are capitalised to distinguish them as particular payment types rather than generic catch-all terms for payments veterans receive.
We also capitalise veteran when it appears in product or program names: Veteran Gold Card, Veteran White Card, Veterans' Recognition Program, Veterans' Vocational Rehabilitation Scheme.

Department divisions, branches and units

When it comes to parts of the Department:
 'Department of Veterans' Affairs' and 'DVA' or 'the Department' thereafter.
 'Client Benefits Group' and 'the Group' thereafter.
 'Client Benefits Division' and 'the Division' thereafter.
 'Communications Branch' and 'the Branch' thereafter.
 'Community Engagement Section' and 'the Section' thereafter.
 'Executive Communications, Editorial and Speechwriting' and 'the team' thereafter
(because 'team' isn't part of it's formal title).
Plurals should not be capitalised. For example, 'All 12 first assistant secretaries from across the Department met last Tuesday'.
Australian Government Style Manual: [Titles, honours, forms of address](#)

Form titles

When you reference a form by number, write **Form D1234**.
When you reference a form by name, put the name in single quotation marks and capitalise the first word.
Examples
If you agree with the 'Needs assessment', please sign and return it to me via email.

Thank you for submitting your 'Claim for permanent impairment compensation' form.

We have received your copy of Form 0800 and will let you know as soon as it has been processed.

Job titles

If the word is a contraction of a proper noun such as the full job title (particularly if there's only one such job, e.g. National Manager – Open Arms) or a specific part of the Department, then capitalise it. If it isn't, don't capitalise it. So when it comes to job titles:
'Secretary of DVA' and 'the Secretary' thereafter
'Deputy Secretary – Client Benefits Group' and 'the Deputy Secretary' thereafter
'First Assistant Secretary – Commemorations' and 'the First Assistant Secretary' thereafter
'Assistant Secretary – Communications' and 'the Assistant Secretary' thereafter
'Director – Newsroom' and 'the Director' thereafter
s 47F   is an assistant director in the Newsroom section (there's more than one assistant director).

Examples
National Manager s 47F   visited the Perth office today.

The National Manager visited the Perth office today.

A delegate will contact you about your claim.

First Assistant Secretary Natasha Cole attended the ceremony. Ms Cole was joined by assistant secretaries from the Clients' Benefits and Transformation divisions.

I have assigned the task to one of my senior policy officers.

Prime Minister is an interesting one. Only capitalise this if you are talking about the current PM. If you are talking about a former prime minister, use lowercase: 'Edmund Barton was the first prime minister of Australia'. If there were to be a gathering of prime ministers, including the current one, you would use lowercase.

Payment types

Payment types generally use lower case.
Examples
disability pension
energy supplement
incapacity payments

orphan's pension
permanent impairment compensation
rent assistance
service pension
war widow(er)'s pension

Exceptions include the Long Tan bursary, <u>Veteran Payment and Veterans' Supplement</u>.
Another exception is when you write about 'Age Pension age'. If you leave out the first 'age', then do not capitalise. For example, 'When you reach pension age ...'

Product names

Use title case for names of official items such as Veteran White Card or the Commemorative Medallion. <u>See more information about Veteran Cards.</u>
Generic items (such as mobility scooter, war medal, rehabilitation plan, superannuation and so on) are not capitalised.

Program, project and scheme names

Use title case (capitalise the first letter of each word) for program names.
Only capitalise the word 'program', 'project' or 'scheme' (etc.) if it is part of the official name. Don't capitalise these words when they are used alone.
Examples
Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme (VPRS) ... The scheme is designed to ...
Coordinated Client Support (CCS) program

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Contractions

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There are two types of contractions:
- single words
- grammatical.

Australian Government Style Guide: <u>Contractions</u> and <u>Voice and tone</u>
Single word contractions

These include 'no' for number and 'Cth' for Commonwealth. Don't end contractions with a full stop. Use the full term instead of single word contractions wherever you can.
You can use contractions for titles such as Mr and Dr, but remember that you don't need to add a full stop after the contraction.
If you must use 'no' for number, then only ever use it directly in front of a numeral. Never use it when talking about your position number.
Examples
✓ The material is stored in TRIM container no 18166342E.
✓ When you call, ask for Sam, position number 617345.
❌ There is an odd no of applicants in this round.
❌ When you call, ask for Sam, position no 617345.
Grammatical contractions

These combine two or more words into a single one. For example, **don't** is a contraction of **do not**.

User-centred writing invites readers in. Contractions, in combination with other style choices, humanise our content.

Plain English guidelines commonly encourage contractions. The Australian Government Style Manual states that contractions are acceptable in government content, including:

- emails and letters
- online government services
- corporate communications
- media releases
- articles.

Use contractions when you are:

- sharing good or neutral news ('I'm pleased to offer')
- encouraging or comforting readers ('You're welcome to apply' or 'It's okay to ask for help').

Don't use contractions when you are:

- acknowledging death and bereavement ('I am sorry for your loss')
- telling someone their claim/payment/benefit has been declined, reduced or cancelled ('I know it is not the outcome you were hoping for').

All contractions but the following are suitable. Don't use:

- ambiguous contractions – you'd (you would or you had?)
- multiple contractions – you'd've
- unpronounceable contractions – this's, there're.

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Currencies

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All figures should be given in Australian dollars. If a figure must be given in another currency, clearly mark it so your reader will understand.

Screen readers can struggle with international currency symbols, such as the pound (£). The symbols may also not give readers enough information (for example, the Japanese yen and Chinese renminbi yuan both use the same symbol, ¥).

To make your information accessible and clear, use the IBAN (International Bank Account Number) currency codes when you refer to foreign currencies: GBP for British pounds (Pound Sterling), AUD for Australian dollars, NZD for New Zealand dollars and so on.

Write the code and then the figure, with no space between. Give amounts up to 2 decimal places.

Examples

GBP36.50

NZD1,490.00

If you are referring to a mix of currencies within a single document, note the currency before each figure to avoid any confusion.

Australian Government Style Manual: [Currency](#)

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Dates

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Australian Government Style Manual: [Dates and time](#)

Use this format to write dates: DD Month YYYY. Don't use DD/MM/YY as this format can easily be misunderstood.

Examples

✓ Thank you for your time on the phone on 12 October 2020.
❌ Thank you for your time on the phone on 12/10/20.

Don't add a zero to single-digit days (3 not 03).
For partial dates (if you are leaving out the day or the year), write:
In July 2018, more than 1,000 claims were processed.
Applications close on 31 October.
The committee meets on the 15th of every month.

Note that the ordinal (15th) does not use superscript (15th).
Use these partial forms only if your meaning will be very clear to the reader. Be particularly careful about dates that do not specify the year.
If you choose to include the day of the week, don't put a comma after it. Write **Friday 13 October 2023**
Instead of using a dash, write spans of dates with 'from' and 'to'.
The exceptions are:
- financial years
- information in brackets, such as terms of office and years of birth and death.

Examples
✓ Thank you for your payslips from 1 December 2022 to 24 January 2023.
✓ The workshop will run from 3 to 6 December 2023.
✓ The program ran from 2018 to 2021.
✓ Veterans who left the ADF between one and 5 years ago can get support for employment.
❌ Veterans who left the ADF 1–5 years ago can get support for employment.
❌ We overpaid you during the period 1 August 2023 – 17 September 2023.
❌ Conference dates: 1–3 November 2023
✓ Please supply your ATO statement for the 2022–23 financial year.

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If you need to use a timeframe, give the reader the information they need. You may think a timeframe is clear, but other readers may find it confusing.

For example, if you say on 16 October that a form is due back 'within one month', does this mean on 16 November, within 28 days, within 31 days or by the end of October? Where possible, specify dates or use a number of days.

Avoid writing phrases such as 'the end of this calendar year'. Use the date (31 December) instead.

Examples

Please return your form within 28 days of the date of this letter.

You have until 31 December 2023 to respond.

Please contact me if you have not received your payment after 3 business days.

If we have not heard from you by 15 April 2024, you will need to reapply.

These words can confuse people:

- 'Bimonthly' can mean every 2 months or twice a month.
- 'Biannual' means twice a year.
- 'Biennial' means every 2 years.

Instead of using these words, say what you mean.

Examples

We meet every 2 months.

The committee submits a report every second year.

You will need to reapply in 2020 and again in 2022.

We send out a newsletter twice a month.

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Formatting

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Some formatting can be needlessly confronting, disruptive or aggressive, such as over-use of bold, capitals, boxes, coloured text and highlighting. Italics and underline can be difficult for people with disability to read.

Bold

We use bold 12 pt Calibri as the heading style in [letters](#). We also use bold in header and total rows of tables.

Don't use bold to draw attention to important information. Add a clear heading above the information (for example, 'What you need to do') and move the section to the first page or [above the fold](#) of your content.

Underline

Use underline for hyperlinks and URLs only.

Italics

Italics should be used sparingly, and only for specific purposes including:

- names of publications, such as *Vetaffairs* or the *Macquarie Dictionary*
- full titles of legislation, such as *Veterans' Entitlement Act 1986*

- names of ships and aircraft, such as HMAS *Tobruk* (note only the name is italicised, not HMAS).

Avoid italicising large tracts of text, for example when insetting quotes. It's very hard to read. If you are writing for the web, do not use italics at all.
Australian Government Style Manual: [Italics](#) and [Headings](#)

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Government terms

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Governments

Capitalise 'Government' when you:
- write about the national government of Australia (e.g. the Australian Government)
- name state governments (e.g. NSW Government)
- refer to a government by a prime minister or premier's name (e.g. the Morrison Government)
- use it in a formal name (e.g. Local Government Association).

Use lowercase 'government' for all other uses, including plurals.

Only write 'federal government' if you are discussing state or local governments in the same piece. Don't use Commonwealth Government.
Examples
She worked for the state government for 15 years.
The Victorian Government announced today ...
The Queensland and NSW governments will work together ...
Veterans' affairs are managed at state and federal levels.
Representatives from the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian governments are gathering ...

The Budget

Use a capital letter only when you are talking about a particular state or federal government budget. Use lower case when you use it in a general sense, as an adjective or as a plural.
Examples
The Budget Estimates process encourages transparency and accountability.
Successive budgets increased funding for the program until 2014.
This year's Budget includes support for a range of mental health programs.
The budget measure will be delivered by a third-party provider.
Thanks to your donations, we have a budget of $150 for the end-of-year party.

Cabinet

Use a capital letter when writing about the Cabinet or Cabinet ministers. (Note the <u>lowercase 'm' for ministers</u>!)

Departments and agencies

Capitalise the formal names of government departments and agencies. Always capitalise Treasury.

Capitalise the words 'agency', 'department', 'authority' and 'commission' when referring to those specific bodies. Not when you're talking about them as common nouns or plurals.

Examples

The Department of Veterans' Affairs welcomes submissions to our panel ...

When the Department is working on reducing the claims backlog ...

The departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs will work together to improve transition outcomes for ADF personnel.

We prefer to <u>use the pronouns 'we' and 'us'</u> when writing about DVA.

If you do need to use the department's name, note that DVA and Department of Veterans' Affairs are singular.

Examples

DVA **is** proud to announce ...

The Department of Veterans' Affairs **works** closely with other departments ...

Parliamentary office holders

Australian Government Style Manual: <u>Members of Australian parliaments and councils</u>

When writing about the current position holder, capitalise Prime Minister and Treasurer. Use lower case for former prime ministers and treasurers of Australia.

If referencing prime ministers or treasurers generically, use lower case.

Examples

The Prime Minister announced the initiative this morning.

The PM announced the initiative this morning. [Less formal]

Terms of office vary for prime ministers around the world. [Generic]

The Treasurer will present the mid-year report tomorrow.

Alfred Deakin served 3 terms as prime minister of Australia.

Peter Costello remains the longest-serving treasurer in Australian history.

Write these titles as follows:

- the President of the Senate
- the Speaker of the House of Representatives
- ministers
- assistant ministers
- senators
- members (House of Representatives).

People elected to the upper house take the title 'Senator' before their given name.

Members of the House of Representatives take the initialism 'MP' after their name. Write it after any other postnominals (e.g. SC or AO). Don't use commas before or between postnominals.

Capitalise 'minister' if you are including the person's portfolio or referring to a specific minister. Use lowercase for plural uses.

Examples

Senator Claire Chandler

Ms Zali Steggall OAM MP

The Hon Jane Smith MP will soon start as Minister for Veterans' Affairs.

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs will lay a wreath at the Dawn Service.

The Minister will visit DVA.

Both ministers will visit DVA.

On Tuesday, the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian veterans' affairs ministers will gather to discuss …

Members of state and territory parliaments use the postnominals:
- MLC (Member of the Legislative Council)
- MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly)
- MP (Member of the Legislative Assembly or Member of the House of Assembly).

Examples

The Hon Nicolas Pierre Goiran MLC

Ms Tara Cheyne MLA

Mr David Basham MP

Honourable

Use 'Honourable' when addressing:
- premiers and ministers in all states
- chief minister and ministers in NT
- former ministers in all states and NT
- President of the Senate
- Speaker of the House of Representatives
- members of all state legislative councils except in Victoria
- Leader of the Opposition in Tasmania
- presidents of all legislative councils
- speakers of all parliaments.

If the minister or parliamentary secretary is a member of the Senate, use the title 'Senator' before 'the Honourable'.

The abbreviation for 'Honourable' is 'Hon' without a full stop.

Examples

The Hon John Ajaka MLC, President of the Legislative Council

The Hon Jing Shyuan Lee MLC

The Hon Rebecca White MP, Leader of the Opposition

Senator the Hon Scott Ryan, President of the Senate

Emails and letters to the Prime Minister and ministers

The Parliament of Australia website has instructions for [how to address senators and members](#).
- Open with 'Dear Prime Minister' or 'Dear Minister'
- Conclude with 'Yours faithfully'

Emails and letters to members of a state or territory parliament
The Parliament of Australia website has instructions for [how to address senators and members](#).
In formal correspondence with a member of a state or territory parliament:
- open with 'Dear Ms' (or 'Mr', 'Mrs', 'Mx', 'Dr', etc.) or 'Dear Senator'
- conclude with 'Yours faithfully'.

In less formal correspondence:
- open with 'Dear Mr' (or 'Ms', 'Mrs', 'Mx', 'Dr', etc.)
- conclude with 'Yours sincerely'.

The Australian Government Style Manual also contains information about [how to address different office holders](#) (state premiers, territory chief ministers, mayors).
Australian Government Style Manual: [Government terms](#) and [Members of Australian parliaments and councils](#)

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Headings

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Australian Government Style Manual: [Headings](#)
Write headings in sentence case (capital letter at the start and for any proper nouns) and do not use a full stop at the end.
Examples
Apply for a disability pension
Reasons for our decision

Write headings that are fewer than 70 characters long (including spaces), or fewer than 50 characters if you are writing for the website.
Avoid 'catch-all' headings such as 'more information' and 'related information', as they don't tell the reader enough about the content that follows.
Headings should always be followed by text, never another heading. If you have stacked headings, then either add text under the first heading or revise your heading structure.
There are 3 main types of heading style: statement, topic and question. Most of our external content (letters, emails, website, chatbot) uses statement headings, because they give the reader lots of information about the content they're about to read.
Within a piece of content (a letter, a web page, an email, a booklet) the heading style you choose should be consistent. Blending heading styles can be confusing for your user: Are you telling me what to do, or am I asking you questions?
Statement headings

Statement headings give a short explanation or description of the text to follow.

Examples

✓	**Why we could not approve your application**
✓	Your income support payment has been reassessed
✓	Eligibility criteria for service pension

Avoid using gerunds (verbs in their -ing form) if they could be confusing. For example, would the content under the heading 'Changing benefits' be about changes to entitlements or instructions for switching from one pension to another?

Use instructional headings when your content tells readers how to complete a task (for example, 'Apply for service pension'). These headings are very effective for material that the user needs to act on.

Instruction headings begin with a verb in the imperative mood (which expresses a command or request) and state very clearly what the user must or can do.

Examples

✓	**Check your eligibility before you apply**
✓	Book a transport service
✓	Contact us for more information

Check if the 'How to' or 'Where to' in your heading is necessary. Often you can remove these words without affecting the meaning of the heading.

Examples

How to apply for Household Services **becomes** Apply for Household Services

Where to find a DVA office **becomes** Find a DVA office

Topic headings

Topic headings use simple phrases, usually nouns only, to label the content that follows. They are very brief and direct, so are useful in content where your space may be limited or you are describing a list of items. For example, a webpage describing pension types may use each pension name as a heading. This guide also uses them.

Topic headings are not particularly common in public-facing content, as usually we need to include at least one statement or instruction ('What you need to do' 'Send us your completed claim form') in any content we write. As we prefer not to mix heading styles, it is easier to use statement and instruction headings than find a topic noun to replace 'What you need to do'.

Question headings

We rarely use question headings for two reasons:

- They create a dialogue between the writer and the reader, which explicitly separates 'us' from 'them'.

- The structure of a question requires empty words that push the topic of the heading away from the beginning of the line.

If you must use question headings, make sure the subject of the questions is consistent: the question should always be asked by a user and answered by us.

Write the question with 'I' pronouns and the answers with 'you' pronouns. You can use 'we' in the answer if you are writing about what DVA will do.

Examples

✓	**How to claim** **First, you need to check if you are eligible. We can help you figure this out. …**
✗	**How do I submit a claim?** First, I need to check if I am eligible. DVA can help me figure this out …
✗	**How do you submit a claim?** First, you need to check if you are eligible. …

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Honours and postnominals

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Include honours and postnominals on envelopes and invitations. Don't use full stops in ranks or postnominals.

List postnominals in order of precedence, with the highest honour closest to the person's name. The order is:

- Victoria Cross for Australia (VC), George Cross (GC), Cross of Valour (CV)
- Order of Australia ranks – Knight or Dame (AK or AD); Companion (AC); Officer (AO); Member (AM); Medal of (OAM)
- King's Counsel (KC), Senior Counsel (SC), Justice of the Peace (JP)
- University degrees and diplomas
- Membership of associations and societies
- Membership of Parliament.

If you're unsure of the precedence find a reliable source online.

Australian Government Style Manual: [Awards and honours](#)

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Introductory text

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Always follow introductory phrases and clauses with a comma.

Examples
If you have any questions, please call 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372).
During the meeting, Chris presented our findings ...
On 14 July 2021, your Gold Card will expire.
When I receive your form, I will continue processing your claim.

If you move introductory phrases or clauses to the end of your sentence, then no comma is required.
Examples
Please call 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372) **if you have any questions.**
Chris presented our findings **during the meeting.**
Your Gold Card will expire **on 14 July 2021.**
I will continue processing your claim **when I receive your form.**

Include a comma after introductory words.
Examples
However, you are eligible for other support.
Unfortunately, I am unable to approve your application.
Incidentally, we discovered ...
First, we looked at the report.

The comma after 'However' is particularly important. Without it, the sentence takes on a new meaning.

Example	Meaning
However, you are eligible for other support	Despite not being eligible for [benefit], you are eligible for something else
However you are eligible for other support	In whatever way you are eligible for other support, then [more information needed]

If the introductory word is moved within the sentence, then you may need to use a comma before and/or after it.
Examples
You are eligible for other support**, however.**
You are**, however,** eligible for other support.
You are eligible**, however,** for other support.
You**,however,** are eligible for other support. [Unlike the sentences above, this implies that there are two or more claimants – one eligible and one not.]
We looked at the report **first.**
We discovered the error **incidentally.**
We discovered**, incidentally,** that there was an error.
I am**, unfortunately,** unable to approve your application.

If you're not sure if a comma applies in the new position, then rephrase the sentence so the introductory phrase is at the beginning. Add the comma and move on.
Australian Government Style Manual: [Commas](#)

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Links

Australian Government Style Manual: Links

Use links to point users to relevant content and trusted resources.

When adding a link to your content, you will either hyperlink text (an embedded link) or write out the URL (the full www.website.com address).

Hyperlinks should be used in digital content, such as web pages and emails. If a user is likely to experience your content in a print format, such as a form or letter, write out URLs instead but only if they're short (Web Services can create a short URL for you if they administer the website in question).

Hyperlinks

Hyperlink keywords in your sentence. Don't link words and phrases like 'Click here', 'more information' or 'read more'.

Don't include 'the', 'an' or 'a' at the start of your link.

Place your link as far left within the content area as possible. With varying screen sizes, the only way to guarantee this is to place the link within the first few words of the first sentence of a paragraph.

Examples

✓	**The RAP schedule provides item numbers for prescribing and ordering.**
✖	You can see the item numbers for prescribing and ordering in the RAP schedule.
✖	The RAP schedule provides item numbers for prescribing and ordering.
✖	To see the item numbers for prescribing and ordering, view the RAP schedule by clicking here: https://www.dva.gov.au/providers/rehabilitation-appliances-program-rap/rap-schedule
✖	Click here to see the RAP schedule.

There is a difference between 'action' links and 'informational' links.

Action links:

- The user is thinking about the task they want to complete: 'I want to **apply**', 'I want to **sign up**'.
- The verb should be hyperlinked.

Informational links:

- The user is thinking about the topic, not the act of 'viewing' or 'reading' that information.

- The topic should be hyperlinked.

Examples

✓	**Apply for <u>service pension</u>.**
❌	Apply for <u>service pension</u>.
✓	Read more about <u>household services</u>.
❌	<u>Read more about household services.</u>

Include informational links if you know that readers will be interested in the related content. You can also link to external sites and information, such as the [Repatriation Medical Authority's Statements of Principles](#) (SOPs).

Try not to overload your content with links. Readers subconsciously look for visual elements first and may be detoured by links if you put in too many. You don't want to accidentally turn your content into a [link surfing game](#).

URLs

Place URLs in the middle of sentences so that people do not mistake the punctuation (full stop, comma) as part of the link.

URLs on [www.dva.gov.au](#) are automatically generated from the title of the web page. If the title of the web page is changed, the URL will also change.

Once a URL reaches 100 characters, the URL is cut short and a number is applied.

We can create URL redirects (short links) to pages on the DVA website. For example, we use the short link [www.dva.gov.au/CSHC](#) in letters. When people type this into their browser, they are directed to [www.dva.gov.au/health-and-treatment/veteran-healthcare-cards/commonwealth-seniors-health-card](#) without having to manually type in that lengthy URL.

If you would like a URL redirect to one of the pages you own, please submit a [Web Services ticket](#) with the request. First, check if a short URL already exists though by trying a few possibilities.

Short links are generally used in printed material, as the user has to type the link into their browser. You may also need to use a short link in an email, SMS or social media post.

Make sure the short URL is easy to interpret.

- Only use capital O, numeral 0, capital I (i), lowercase L, numeral 1 and numeral 7 if the reader will be able to easily identify the correct letter or number from the context.
- Use words that are easy to spell (for example, use 'housing' instead of 'accommodation').
- Keep the overall link length under 30 characters (note that [www.dva.gov.au](#) alone is 14 characters).
- Make your short link descriptive so readers will understand what information they can access.
- Include 'www.' in your links, but don't include 'https://' or 'http://'. One exception: if you are using Notify you must include https:// in front of all your links.
- Don't use bit.ly or other third-party link shortening services. (Some exceptions apply for staff managing DVA's social media platforms.)

Examples

Write this: Visit www.dva.gov.au/POI for a list of documents we accept as proof of identity.
Not this: Visit www.dva.gov.au/1iz0-O for details.

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Lists

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Australian Government Style Manual: [Lists](#)

Bullet lists are the most common type of list. Only use numbered lists if the order of the items is important for the user to understand, such as a list of steps in a process.
Don't use semicolons at the end of your list items.
Don't write 'and' or 'or' before your final point. If the items are compulsory or optional, then specify this in your lead-in sentence.

Examples

Please send us at least one of the following:

- X
- Y
- Z.

Please send us all of the following:

- X
- Y
- Z.

Use regular bullets (•) for lists and ballot box marks (☐) for checklists. Functional checklists can also be built using [Word's check box content controls](#).
Avoid making lists with more than one level. If you must have a second level, use line bullets (–) for these points.

Example

Here is a list of items:

- Level 1 bullet
  - Level 2 bullet

- Level 1 bullet again.

Fragment lists

The most common bullet lists are fragment (or 'phrase') lists.
These lists begin with a lead-in that ends with a colon (:) and the items in the list complete the lead-in sentence. Use a lowercase letter to start each line (unless it starts with a proper noun). Add a full stop to the last item only.

Example

Before I can process your application, you will need to:

- attend a medical appointment
- send me a certified copy of your report

- visit a DVA office for an interview.

In the example above, you can see that each item would sensibly complete the lead-in sentence:

Before I can process your application, you will need to attend a medical appointment.
Before I can process your application, you will need to send me a certified copy of your report.
Before I can process your application, you will need to visit a DVA office for an interview.

Each item in the list begins with the same type of word – in this case a verb. This is called 'parallelism'; it means that your list items match each other.
An 'unparallel' list would look something like:
Before I can process your application, you will need to:

- attend a medical appointment
- a copy of your report will need to be certified and returned to me
- visiting a DVA office is the last step.

This doesn't read well.
If you are not sure if your items are parallel, test them in the full sentence. You will notice that the items in this example no longer sensibly complete the lead-in sentence ('... you will need to visiting a DVA office...').

Sentence lists

Another type of list you might use is a sentence list. This also starts with a lead-in phrase or sentence followed by a colon. Each list item is a complete sentence. Again, you should make the items parallel, so they have the same structure.

Example
Application requirements for green pension:

- Complete Form D4567 'Application for green pension' or submit your claim through MyService.
- Include certified copies of any medical reports and scans related to the conditions in your claim.
- Attend a medical assessment with your GP.

The items do not complete the lead-in sentence; each point is an instruction that stands alone as a complete sentence. The items each start with a capital letter, include regular sentence punctuation, and end with a full stop.

Standalone lists

The final type of bullet list you might use is a standalone list. These are generally lists of items and documents. For example, you might include a list of documents enclosed with a letter.

Example
Enclosed:

- Form D1234, 'Title of form'
- 'Needs assessment'
- Reply paid envelope

Each item in this list is an object. Each line starts with a capital and there are no full stops.

In-sentence lists

If you are listing 3 or more items, consider using a bullet or numbered list instead.
If you do need to use a list in a sentence, separate the items with commas. If the items themselves contain commas, use semi-colons (;) to separate the items instead.

Examples

You will need to send me certified copies of your passport, driver's licence and Medicare card.
We need each of these documents: a response from your GP; a completed, signed and certified copy of Form 1369; and a written recommendation from your specialist.

The last example would be better as a bullet list:
We are currently waiting on a:

- response from your GP
- completed, signed and certified copies of Form 1369
- written recommendation from your specialist.

Don't use letters or numbers to label items within a sentence.

Examples

✓	You can either call or email us.
✖	You can either (a) call or (b) email us.

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Medical terms

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If you're not sure about the spelling or capitalisation of a medical condition, the easiest thing to do is google the term or go to www.rma.gov.au/sops/ to check the Repatriation Medical Authority's Statements of Principles (SOPs).
Rules:

- Capitalise medical terms only if the term is a proper noun or acronym.
- Don't capitalise body parts or generic words like 'syndrome', 'disease', 'virus' and 'disorder'.
- If a condition is commonly known by an acronym, include this in brackets.

Examples
coronavirus
COVID-19
hepatitis B
posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
Alzheimer disease
lumbar spondylosis
foot-and-mouth disease
acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS)

Note that the diagnosis is PTSD, not PTS. We follow Phoenix Australia's lead and spell posttraumatic with no hyphen.

If a disease is named after someone who lived with the condition, use the possessive case (add **'s** after the name).

If a disease or body part is named after a person who discovered, studied or described it, then do not use the possessive.

Examples

s 47F   disease s 47F   had this disease]

Alzheimer disease [Dr Alois Alzheimer first described this disease]

Medicines

Where possible, use the generic names for pharmaceuticals and write them in lowercase. If you need to, you can include capitalised brand names in brackets after the common name.

Examples

paracetamol (Panadol)

mefloquine (Lariam)

tafenoquine

aspirin

Although it was originally a brand name, aspirin no longer needs to be capitalised in Australia.

Australian Government Style Manual: [Medical terms](#)

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Military terms and address

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Australian Government Style Manual: [Australian Defence Force](#)

Our audience is highly sensitive to the correct use of military terms. Be absolutely certain that the term or rank you are using is correct.

Avoid using colloquial expressions such as 'It's like a war zone in here', 'in the trenches' and so on. You can read more about this in our [writing advice](#).

If you need to write prisoner of war, note that we do not hyphenate or capitalise this phrase. The acronym POW takes all caps. We prefer to write **former prisoner of war** instead of ex-prisoner of war, but if you are talking to someone who has a strong preference for 'ex-', you can follow their lead. Likewise, if they much prefer seeing 'Prisoner of War' capitalised, do so.

Ranks and abbreviations

Generally, we no longer include ranks (full or abbreviated) in letters or emails to veterans. This is for two main reasons:

- The automated systems we use to produce letters are not all capable of including a person's title.
- The data we have about the rank of an individual may be incorrect or out of date.

If you need to include a person's rank in your writing, you must get it right.

If in doubt, leave it out. Getting someone's rank wrong can be deeply offensive.

A list of ranks for the Royal Australian Navy, Australian Army and Royal Australian Air Force can be viewed on the [Department of Defence's website](#) and the [Australian War Memorial's website](#).

Ranks are always capitalised, though the word 'officer' is not.

(When you are listing the three services, always do so in the order above).

(And don't use 'wounded' and 'injured' interchangeably. 'Wounded' relates specifically to combat.)

Examples

s 47F

Do not hyphenate military ranks consisting of more than one word. The only exception is Air Vice-Marshal.

Examples

Lieutenant Commander
Major General
Group Captain
Air Vice-Marshal

Military address

In the first instance, spell out the rank in full, including postnominals.

Examples

s 47F

In each instance after that, only the surname and rank are necessary.

Examples

s 47F

Veterans of the following ranks and above can apply to retain their rank in retirement:

- Navy – Lieutenant Commander
- Army – Major
- RAAF – Wing Commander

If the person you are writing to has retained their rank, you would write s 47F

s 47F   in the first instance and s 47F   after that.

Naval officers are entitled to continue to use RAN in retirement as a postnominal.

'Thank you for your service'

If you judge that it is appropriate, you can thank a veteran for their service in direct correspondence.

Try to avoid saying simply 'Thank you for your service' because this may sound empty and formulaic. Be very careful not to thank people who are or were not serving members of the ADF (e.g. non-serving children or partners of veterans, nominated representatives, providers) for service.

If you can, personalise the message by relating it to your reader's particular service. Veterans have close ties to the branch of the military they served with. If you have the information, it is appropriate to acknowledge a person's service with the Australian Army, Royal Australian Air Force or the Royal Australian Navy, rather than with 'the ADF'.

Example

I note that you served in the Australian Army for 22 years, and fought in the Vietnam War. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your service.

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Numbers

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Use numerals for '2' and above.

Example

You are eligible for one half-price service and 2 free services per year.

Write the numbers 'zero' and 'one' in words.

Exceptions

Use words for numbers when:

- starting a sentence
- writing a fraction
- writing a proper noun that includes a number written as a word
- writing a publication title that includes a number written as a word
- quoting a figure of speech.

Examples

Two-hundred guests gathered at the Dawn Service on 25 April 2020.
Of the families surveyed, two-thirds had received support from the department.
Recipients were invited to join TwoHearts' special health program.
The figures were reported in *Working towards wellbeing: a ten-year study*.
We know two heads are better than one.

Use words for numbers below 10 for government content that follows journalistic conventions (for example, media releases).

Phone numbers

DVA's phone number is **1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372)**. You must write it this way, with the full number in brackets, every time you use it.

The format for other phone numbers is:

- 1800 000 000
- 13 00 00 or 130 000
- 0400 000 000

- 02 0000 0000
- +61 400 000 000 (if the recipient is overseas)
- +61 2 0000 0000 (if the recipient is overseas)

See also:
- [Currencies](#)
- [Dates](#)
- [Time](#)

Australian Government Style Manual: [Numbers](#)

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Open Arms

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Use **Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling** at the first reference, then **Open Arms** after that.
Do not use VVCS anymore.
We have [standard wording about Open Arms](#).

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Pronouns

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Australian Government Style Manual: [Plain language and word choice](#), [Voice and tone](#), [Pronouns](#)

We use pronouns to create a conversational tone in our external content. Writing from 'we' is more engaging and less authoritative than writing from 'the department'.
Rules:
- 'We' are the Department of Veterans' Affairs.
- 'I' am a staff member.
- 'You' are a client.

Use the terms 'we' and 'us' to refer to the Department of Veterans' Affairs and any part of it. Only use 'the department', 'DVA' or an intradepartmental name (a division, branch, team, etc.) if the reader needs the information. These special circumstances include when:
- a person needs to know where to direct their query
- several departments or agencies are named
- it is required by law.

Examples
We will pay $150.63 to your bank account on 15 March 2021.
The Household Services team will review your application.
We have data-matching agreements with other government agencies. This means DVA may receive information about your income and assets from Centrelink and the ATO.

Use 'I' and 'me' if the action, decision or opinion you are describing is yours.

Examples

I made this decision based on the information available to me.

Thank you for your feedback. I have passed your message on to the relevant team leader.

I know this is not the news you were hoping for.

Through our conversational tone, we talk to our readers. This means we address our writing to 'you'. Don't use the words 'client', 'applicant', 'claimant' or 'pensioner' in external content.

Examples

You can go to www.dva.gov.au/myservice to submit and track your claims.

You will receive a one-off back payment of $36.50 on 21 June 2022.

They

It is completely acceptable to use 'they' as a gender-neutral singular pronoun. Use the forms:
- 'they' instead of 'he' or 'she'
- 'them' instead of 'him' or 'her'
- 'their' instead of 'his' or 'hers'
- 'themself' or 'themselves' instead of 'himself' or 'herself'.

Use the plural form of the verb.

Examples

Thank you for your feedback. I have forwarded it to **a claims delegate** for consideration. **They** will contact you within 3 business days.

They can decide for **themself**. They can decide for **themselves**.

Please tell **your partner** that **they are** eligible for a benefit through the scheme.

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Punctuation

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Australian Government Style Manual: Punctuation and capitalisation and Punctuation marks

Punctuation exists to serve you and the reader. Correct punctuation makes our meanings clearer. The trick is figuring out what to use and where to use it.

Australian Government style favours minimal punctuation. This means we use the marks we must to make a meaning clear, but no more.

People use complex punctuation to write complex sentences, and we need to keep our sentences simple. Remember, we write in plain English. That means short, clear sentences.

Some punctuation issues are matters of style. For example, the ampersand (&) is a completely valid punctuation mark that means 'and'. However, Australian Government style says we shouldn't use this in our content unless we absolutely must.

Other punctuation issues can seriously affect your meaning. Check your apostrophes and hyphens are helping your reader and not sending misleading messages.

This section covers:
- [Ampersands (&)](#)
- [Apostrophes](#)
- [Brackets](#)
- [Colons](#)
- [Commas](#)
- [Dashes](#)
- [Full stops](#)
- [Hyphens](#)
- [Quotation marks](#)
- [Semicolons](#)

Ampersands (&)

Australian Government Style Manual: [Organisation names](#)

Use 'and' instead of an ampersand unless it's part of an organisation's name.

Use an ampersand in DVA division, branch, section and team names.

Examples

Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling

The new division will be called Commemorations & Transformation.

Apostrophes

Australian Government Style Manual: [Apostrophes](#)

Note that the possessive pronouns **its**, **hers**, **yours** and **theirs** don't take an apostrophe.

Don't use apostrophes to create plurals. For example, many ex-service organisations are many ESOs, not many ESO's.

Figuring out where to put your apostrophe can be a headache. Use the AGSM's guide below to help you make the right choice.

Type	Rule	Example
Singular noun	Add an apostrophe and **s**	the committee**'s** report ASIO**'s** files
Plural nouns that end in letter 's'	Add an apostrophe only	both committees**'** reports the Joneses**'** submission
Plural nouns that don't end in letter 's'	Add an apostrophe and **s**	children**'s** education the sheep**'s** wool
Proper names ending in letter 's'	Add an apostrophe and another **s**, even if you don't pronounce the final **s** in the noun	Burns**'s** report James**'s** application
More than one noun: individual possession (each person owns the item separately)	Add an apostrophe and **s** after each noun	Smith**'s** and Miller**'s** submissions We assess your and your partner**'s** assets separately.

More than one noun: joint possession (the people own the item together)	Add an apostrophe and **s** after the last noun only	Smith and Miller**'s** report The combined value of you and your partner**'s** income is $3,210.98 per fortnight.
Singular compound noun	Add an apostrophe and **s** after the compound	The Attorney-General**'s** office
Plural compound noun	Add an apostrophe and **s** after the compound	The Attorney**s**-General**'s** meeting (or findg a way to rephrase it).

Brackets

Australian Government Style Manual: [Brackets and parentheses](#)

Curved brackets (parentheses) enclose parts of the sentence that aren't essential to its meaning. If you delete the bracketed text, your sentence should still make sense.

Use brackets sparingly to offset:
- definitions: Medicare (Australia's universal health insurance scheme)
- extra details: We produced the program within the budget ($135,000).
- asides: The researchers received 140 requests to join the study. (They received 35 requests to be removed from the contact list.)
- shortened forms: The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA)
- cross-references: The results (Table 1) reflected the most recent trends.

You can use [these] square brackets to show that you have inserted, replaced or deleted text in quoted material. Where you have deleted material, add square brackets with an ellipsis inside.

Examples

Original	Adjusted
Dr ^{s 47F} wrote in his report that your condition was 'likely to improve **for Mr s 47F** given proper treatment'.	Dr ^{s 47F} wrote in his report that your condition was 'likely to improve **[...]** given proper treatment'.
The eligibility criteria state that you 'must return the form within 28 days'.	The eligibility criteria state that you 'must return the form **[D0320]** within 28 days'.
'The Covenant is a way we show respect and recognise **your** military service.'	'The Covenant is a way we show respect and recognise **[veterans']** military service.'

Colons

Australian Government Style Manual: [Colons](#)

Use a colon to introduce:
- lists
- questions
- subheadings

- examples.

Don't capitalise the first letter after a colon, unless you are asking a question. The capital letter at the start of the question shows that the question mark only applies to the phrase after the colon, rather than the full sentence.

Examples

We look after 3 main client groups: veterans, families and providers.

Then the question is: Why should the program continue?

Please see our remarks in *Report: summary of veteran research 2010-2020*.

Don't include a colon when the list flows on as part of a full sentence.

Examples

✓	**You can present your passport, your driver's licence or your ADF card.**
✖	You can present: your passport, your driver's licence or your ADF card.
✓	Eligible documents: your passport, your driver's licence or your ADF card.
✖	Eligible documents your passport, your driver's licence or your ADF card.

In the first 2 examples, you can see that the colon interrupts an otherwise grammatical sentence. In the last 2, you can see that leaving the colon out turns the sentence into nonsense.

Commas

Australian Government Style Manual: [Commas](#)

Use commas to separate [introductory text](#) from the rest of your sentence.

TThe serial (Oxford) comma is the comma before the conjunction (e.g. and, but) in a list.

Only use the serial (Oxford) comma in lists if it will improve the clarity of your sentence.

Example

We look after 3 main client groups: veterans, families and providers. [This is perfectly clear and a serial comma is unnecessary here.]

Use commas in numbers with four digits or more.

Example

You will receive $1,234.56 per fortnight.

Dashes

Australian Government Style Manual: [Dashes](#)

We no longer use em dashes (—). We only use en dashes (–) and hyphens (-). Note that they are not interchangeable.

Here's how they can be used instead of parentheses:

Example

We are working with s 47F_____ – an Australian-owned organisation founded by veteran families for veteran families – to help businesses understand the unique nature of military service.

And if the above sentence was a lot shorter, the dash could be used as a way of indicating an explanatory clause:

Example

We are working with s 47F – an Australian-owned organisation founded by veteran families for veteran families – to help businesses understand the unique nature of military service.

Even though you can use these dashes, use them sparingly. As they create such a striking gap in the text, dashes emphasise the text that you offset.

Consider rewriting your sentence if you find yourself writing nested clauses. We write in plain English, so we prefer short, simple sentences. Could you turn the clause into its own sentence?

Example

s 47F is an Australian-owned organisation that was founded by veteran families for veteran families. We are working with s 47F to help businesses understand the unique nature of military service.

En dashes are also used for date spans:

> 2018–19

Note that you should write out each year in full for date spans for someone's birth and death:

> 1908–1944
> 1958–2023

Full stops

Australian Government Style Manual: [Full stops](#)

Use only one space after a full stop. This has always been Australian Government style. In 1966, the first edition of the manual stated 'No extra space should follow a full stop or other punctuation'. This was made more explicit in the second edition in 1972: 'No extra space is put after punctuation marks or between sentences: one space is enough.'

Don't use full stops:

- in shortened forms such as contractions, abbreviations, acronyms and postnominals
- after email or web addresses
- in hyperlinks
- in headings
- in [standalone lists](#).

Examples

Dr

Mr

Vic (Victoria)

Qld (Queensland)

Tas (Tasmania)

DVA

ESO

Major General Neville Snerks VC AO DSC

Exceptions that do take full stops:
- e.g.
- i.e.
- etc.

If a link is followed by a punctuation mark, the reader may mistake it as part of the link. Move links to the middle of sentences to avoid the issue. Don't hyperlink punctuation marks.

Examples

✓	**View item numbers in the [RAP schedule](#).**
✖	View item numbers in the [RAP schedule.](#)
✓	The [RAP schedule](#) lists item numbers.
✖	You can read more at [www.dva.gov.au](#).
✓	Go to [www.dva.gov.au](#) for more information.
✖	If you have any questions, please email [team@dva.gov.au](#).
✓	Please email [team@dva.gov.au](#) if you have any questions.

If you can't break the habit of using two spaces after a full stop, hunt them down by using Word's 'find and replace' feature once you've completed the document.

Hyphens

Australian Government Style Manual: [Hyphens](#), [Personal names](#), [Australian place names](#) and [Compass points](#)

Australian style is moving away from hyphen use. Words that once had hyphens no longer do, such as 'multifaceted'. But other words we commonly use, such as 'ex-serving' and 'ex-service', do still have hyphens.

If you're not sure if you should include a hyphen in a word, look it up in the [Macquarie Dictionary](#). Click the **Did you mean?** toggle next to the search box before you search.

Some entries include a list of variations at the end. Use the main entry.

Example

The [main entry for 'coordinate'](#) is spelled without the hyphen.

The version with a hyphen ('co-ordinate') is listed at the end of the page.

So we write 'coordinate' in our content.

Hyphens are useful for making it immediately clear that two words are a compound adjective or noun.

Examples

The aged-care home is not run by DVA [compound adjective]

The 82-year-old needs support [compound noun]

Prefixes

Some prefixes are followed by hyphens if removing them would give the word a different meaning.

Examples

re-cover (cover again), recover (get back)

re-creation (create anew), recreation (leisure activity)

re-signed (signed again), resigned (quit)

We also use hyphens if they make words easier to read or pronounce.

Examples

anti-inflammatory (easier to read than antiinflammatory)

re-enter ('reenter' could be mispronounced, autocorrected to 'renter' or not recognised as a word)

Exceptions to this last rule include 'coordinate' and 'cooperate'. Check the [dictionary](#) and the [Australian Government Style Manual](#). There are lots of quirks.

Adverbs

Don't add a hyphen between an adverb (ending in -ly) and a verb.

Examples

Ms **s 47F** is a highly regarded veteran.

The rapidly increasing application levels are causing delays.

Compounds

When 2 or more words work together to describe a noun, you have a compound adjective.

Example

We need **more experienced** staff.

Here, 'more' and 'experienced' work together to give extra meaning to the noun 'staff'.

Add a hyphen to a compound if it clarifies the meaning.

Example	Meaning
There is much-needed equipment on the list.	The list includes equipment we really need.
There is much needed equipment on the list.	There is a lot of equipment on the list.
We need more experienced staff.	We need more staff who are experienced.
We need more-experienced staff.	We need staff with more experience.

When a compound adjective comes after the noun, you don't need the hyphen.

Examples

It is a full-time position.

The position is full time.

We have up-to-date information.

The information is up to date.

Note that 'update' has no hyphen.

Quotation marks

Australian Government Style Manual: [Quotation marks](#)

Use single quotation marks for quotes and double quotation marks for quotes within quotes.

Example

In the report, Dr ^{s 47F} wrote, **s 47F**

s 47F

Note that the single quote mark at the end of the above is inside the full stop. That's because the quote is within the sentence. If the whole sentence was a quote, the quote marks would be outside the full stop.

Example

'I think DVA is a worthwhile Government agency.'

Use single quotation marks around the [Form titles](#).

Examples

If you agree with the 'Needs assessment', please sign and return it to me via email.

Thank you for submitting your 'Claim for permanent impairment compensation' form.

Semicolons

Australian Government Style Manual: [Semicolons](#)

Use semicolons sparingly. If you are using a semicolon, make sure that the clauses on both sides of the semicolon are full sentences.

Rather than use a semicolon, try to:

- separate the clauses into two sentences
- replace the semicolon with a comma followed by a conjunction.

Examples

Ask someone for help if you need it; you can call us on 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372).

à Ask someone for help if you need it. You can call us on 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372).

Form A was for one group; Form B was for the other group.

à Form A was for one group, and Form B was for the other group.

Don't use semicolons at the end of [list](#) items.

If you have written an [in-sentence list](#), you can use semicolons to separate items that contain commas.

Example

Your claim will be considered under one or more of the following Acts: the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* (MRCA); the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988* (DRCA); or the *Veterans Entitlements Act 1986* (VEA).

However, note that lists like this may be easier to read as bullet lists, in which case no semicolons are needed.

Example

Your claim will be considered under one or more of the following Acts:

- the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA)
- the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988 (DRCA)
- the Veterans Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA).

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Tables

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Make sure your tables are self-explanatory. Some people will look at the table before or instead of reading the surrounding text.

Give your table a descriptive title (sometimes called a caption).

Capitalise the first letter of the first word in a cell.

We don't usually add closing punctuation such as full stops in table cells. You can use closing punctuation if you are writing full sentences in your table, but this should be rare. It should also be consistent. If only a few cells in your table include full sentences, then the text in those cells should be revised to match the style of the rest of the table. Keep a parallel structure between similar cells.

Left-align text and right-align numbers. Use a consistent number of decimal places in each cell.

Put units of measurement in the header cell so you don't have to repeat them in each cell.

Organise data in a sequential order. For example, order a list of names alphabetically by family name.

Example

Table 1: Veterans' Children Education Scheme (VCES) fortnightly rate for secondary and tertiary students

Age	Living at home ($)	Living away from home ($)	Homeless ($)
Under 16	58.10	394.20	469.50
16 to 17	257.10	469.50	469.50
18 and over	309.20	469.50	469.50

Table placement

Refer to the table in your text first, and place the table as close as possible to this reference. In print, unless the table is in an appendix, the table and its reference should be on the same or facing page.

When referring to the table in your text, don't repeat the whole title of the table. Don't refer to 'the table below' or 'the table above'; use the table number.

Make sure that:

- the tables are numbered in sequential order
- the title uses a consistent label and number style throughout (Table 1: Title, Table 2: Title; not Table 1: Title, Table 02 – Title)
- the number referenced in the text matches the number in the table title.

Table design

Don't make tables with other tables inside them (known as 'nested' tables).

Don't rely on colour or shading to highlight findings or show relationships. Screen readers won't recognise or read out the formatting. Make sure the most important ideas are also described in your text.

You can use bold in header and total rows of tables.

Use lines inside the table where they will help people read more easily.

Short tables need only a line above and below the header row and at the bottom of the table.

Longer tables need lines, or shading of alternate rows (zebra shading), to help people follow the alignment across the table.

You only need to include vertical lines when your table is very cramped and there is a possibility that readers may accidentally read two cells as one. If this is the case, you may need to reconsider your design, cell margins or table content.

See also:

- [Channel Guide: Web](#)

Australian Government Style Manual: [Tables](#)

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Time

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Write the time on the hour with a numeral, a space and then am or pm (no full stops).

For times within the hour, add a colon and the minutes.

Avoid writing 12 am or 12 pm; write midnight, midday or noon.

Examples

6 am

11:30 am

2 pm

7:30 pm

18:00

24-hour time

Always use at least 4 digits separated by a colon (HH:MM); use 6 if you are including seconds (HH:MM:SS).

Don't include am or pm if you are using 24-hour time.

Examples

00:00 (midnight)

00:45 (12:45 am)

07:00 (7 am)

12:00 (midday)

13:15 (1:15 pm)

23:59:37 (11:59 pm and 37 seconds)

Time zones

Write the time zone after the time:

2 pm CST

14:30 EDT

If you are using time zones, be careful especially in daylight saving time. Queensland remains on EST when New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania move to EDT.

Australian time zones:

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

You can add 'A' to the front to specify 'Australian' if you are working with people or organisations overseas.

Australian Government Style Manual: [Dates and time](#)

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Veteran Cards

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The three main card types are Veteran Gold Card, Veteran White Card and Veteran Orange Card.

If you are referring to the same type of card multiple times, write the full name of the card first (Veteran Gold Card), then use its short name after that (Gold Card).

If you are making a statement that could apply to any card, write Veteran Card.

The owner of one of these cards is called a Veteran Card holder. You can also specify the type: Veteran Gold Card holder. Note that we use a capital 'C' and do not use hyphens.

Don't use the following terms: VGC, Gold Veteran Card, gold Veteran Card, Veteran cardholder.

Examples

If you are a Veteran Gold Card holder, you can request an appointment through ...

People with a Veteran Gold Card (Dependant) are not eligible for this service.

If you are a Veteran Gold Card (TPI) holder, you can request an appointment through ...

Other Veteran Gold Card holders are not eligible for this service.

Even though you are not eligible for this benefit, you may continue to use your Veteran Card.

You will shortly receive a Veteran White Card in the mail. Your White Card entitles you to ...

The special Veteran Gold Card categories marked on the cards are:

- Veteran Gold Card (TPI)
- Veteran Gold Card (War Widow/er)
- Veteran Gold Card (POW)
- Veteran Gold Card (EDA)
- Veteran Gold Card (Dependant)
- Veteran Gold Card (Civilian)
- Veteran Gold Card (Blind)

External stakeholders may be familiar with the following old names for cards. You can use these old names in correspondence alongside the new card names so stakeholders become familiar with the correct terms.

- Repatriation Health Card for all conditions
- DVA Health Care Card
- Veteran Gold Card (Blind) for all medical conditions
- Veteran White Card for specific medical conditions
- Veteran Orange Card for pharmaceuticals

News stories

Always talk to the editor of the publication in question if you have doubts about how to approach a news story. For instance, information on submitting material for _Vetaffairs_ and _e-news_[EC2] is on the intranet or you can email vetaffairs@dva.gov.au. It is also worth talking to Strategic Communications via communications@dva.gov.au.

As a guiding rule, ask yourself what the story is really about; what message you're trying to communicate. Articulate that in a sentence, and make that the sentence you open with.

Put the most important information at the top, and expand on that in subsequent paragraphs. Come up with a headline that succinctly conveys the message. Try to make sure it has a verb, so rather than 'Veterans' Health Week 2024', say 'Get involved with Veterans' Health Week 2024'.

In the case of _Vetaffairs_ and _e-news_, get it director-cleared and send to the editor for editing.

Style Manual

The standard for Australian Government writing and editing

The Style Manual is for everyone who writes, edits or approves Australian Government content. Use it to create clear and consistent content that meets the needs of users.

About the Style Manual (/about-style-manual)

Use the Style Manual when creating Australian Government content.

Foreword by the Hon Patrick Gorman MP (/about-style-manual/foreword-hon-patrick-gorman-mp)

How to use the Style Manual (/about-style-manual/how-use-style-manual)

How to cite the Style Manual (/about-style-manual/how-cite-style-manual)

Government writing handbook (/about-style-manual/government-writing-handbook)

Training and professional development (/about-style-manual/training-and-professional-development)

Blog (/about-style-manual/blog)

Changelog (/about-style-manual/changelog)

Acknowledgements (/about-style-manual/acknowledgements)

Accessibility statement for the Style Manual (/about-style-manual/accessibility-statement-style-manual)

Disclaimer and copyright (/about-style-manual/disclaimer-and-copyright)

Accessible and inclusive content (/accessible-and-inclusive-content)

Design content for equal access.

Make content accessible (/accessible-and-inclusive-content/make-content-accessible)

Agency responsibilities and commitments (/accessible-and-inclusive-content/agency-responsibilities-and-commitments)

Apply accessibility principles (/accessible-and-inclusive-content/apply-accessibility-principles)

Design for accessibility and inclusion (/accessible-and-inclusive-content/design-accessibility-and-inclusion)

Literacy and access (/accessible-and-inclusive-content/literacy-and-access)

How people read (/accessible-and-inclusive-content/how-people-read)

Inclusive language (/accessible-and-inclusive-content/inclusive-language)

Writing and designing content (/writing-and-designing-content)

Use this guidance to create content that's clear and findable.

User research and content (/writing-and-designing-content/user-research-and-content)

Clear language and writing style (/writing-and-designing-content/clear-language-and-writing-style)

Findable content (/writing-and-designing-content/findable-content)

Editing and proofreading (/writing-and-designing-content/editing-and-proofreading)

Security classifications and protective markings (/writing-and-designing-content/security-classifications-and-protective-markings)

Grammar, punctuation and conventions (/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions)

Reference this section for definitive rules and examples of Australian Government style.

Types of words (/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/types-words)

Parts of sentences (/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/parts-sentences)

Punctuation (/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/punctuation)

Spelling (/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/spelling)

Shortened words and phrases (/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/shortened-words-and-phrases)

Numbers and measurements (/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/numbers-and-measurements)

Italics (/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/italics)

Names and terms (/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/names-and-terms)

Titles, honours, forms of address (/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/titles-honours-forms-address)

Content types (/content-types)

Use the format that helps meet the user's need. This could be a form, a blog, an image or another format.

Blogs (/content-types/blogs)

Easy Read (/content-types/easy-read)

Emails and letters (/content-types/emails-and-letters)

Forms (/content-types/forms)

Images (/content-types/images)

Journals, magazines and newspapers (/content-types/journals-magazines-and-newspapers)

PDF (Portable Document Format) (/content-types/pdf-portable-document-format)

Reports (/content-types/reports)

Social media (/content-types/social-media)

Video and audio (/content-types/video-and-audio)

Structuring content (/structuring-content)

Design content with a structure that helps the user navigate and understand.

Types of structure (/structuring-content/types-structure)

Headings (/structuring-content/headings)

Links (/structuring-content/links)

Lists (/structuring-content/lists)

Paragraphs (/structuring-content/paragraphs)

Tables (/structuring-content/tables)

Text boxes and callouts (/structuring-content/text-boxes-and-callouts)

Referencing and attribution (/referencing-and-attribution)

Reference correctly so users can identify the sources you use.

Author–date (/referencing-and-attribution/author-date)

Documentary–note (/referencing-and-attribution/documentary-note)

Legal material (/referencing-and-attribution/legal-material)

Shortened forms used in referencing (/referencing-and-attribution/shortened-forms-used-referencing)

Blog

(/blog/launch-government-writing-handbook)
Launch of the Government writing handbook

On Monday 25 November 2024, The Hon Patrick Gorman MP, Assistant Minister for the Public Service released the Government writing handbook.

25 November 2024

(/blog/style-manual-user-types)
Style Manual user types

The Style Manual has 4 main user types. We think about these users when we write and update content.

16 September 2024

(/blog/dictionaries-indispensable-guide-writing-and-style)
Dictionaries: an indispensable guide for writing and style

Dictionaries are about so much more than spelling and definitions. They also provide guidance on pronunciation, hyphenation, capitalisation and Australian language usage.

15 February 2024

See more blogs (/about-style-manual/blog) **>**

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Given name

Family name

Email address

☐   I am interested in participating in Style Manual user research.

Submit