



# THE GREEN BOOK

of  
punctuation + style

June 2018

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## What's in this guide?

This guide explains how to use commas, semicolons and other types of punctuation correctly. It also includes VicHealth's preferred style for capitalisation, italics, hyphenation, dates and much more.

## How will this guide help me?

If you live in a world where hyphens are free to roam around a document as they please or where commas are picked up by the handful and thrown at a page, this guide will be invaluable.

Written style often reflects our personal preferences or bad habits. The easiest way to achieve consistency is for staff and external suppliers to follow this style guide. It will also save time on editing and amendments. From the start of your project, your entire team can follow the same guidelines.

## In this series

- *The red book of preferred spellings + terminology*
- *The green book of punctuation + style*
- *The blue book of plain language*
- *The orange book of referencing*

All guides draw on the *Style manual* for authors, editors and printers (6th edition), Commonwealth of Australia, 2002 (also called the *Australian Style Manual*). Additional sources are indicated throughout the text. © VicHealth 2016.

## Why is style so important?

Consistency is a reflection of our professionalism, competence and effectiveness. A consistent document helps ensure that your reader concentrates on the content rather than being distracted by inconsistencies or errors.

When VicHealth presents information in print, online or in any other format, it is vital that the style is consistent – not just in the single document but across our full range of materials.

## What if it's not in this style guide?

Contact the Publishing team:  
[publishing@vichealth.vic.gov.au](mailto:publishing@vichealth.vic.gov.au)

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# Punctuation

## Apostrophe

The apostrophe is one of the most used and misused English punctuation marks. Many people aren't quite sure where to put it. You can use it when things are left out (contractions), but it's the *possessiveness* and *plurals* that cause the most trouble.

Correct	Tip
the minister's portfolio	The portfolio belongs to one minister.
the ministers' challenge	The challenge of two or more ministers.
the women's health program; the children's sport	Not womens', childrens.
farmers market, workers compensation, writers strike	Don't use an apostrophe here because these words are used as plural adjectives. Although some people believe an apostrophe is required on these and similar phrases, VicHealth publications omit them.
Bakers Choice, Diners Club, Mrs. Fields Cookies	Many businesses decide that apostrophes are confusing or distracting and opt to omit them. Use their preferred punctuation.
Charles' computer	Do not add an 's' if the name ends in 's'.
MPs 1000s of CDs	Plurals do not need an apostrophe. There are exceptions...
Except: mind your p's and q's dot the i's and cross the t's  but note: dos and don'ts	The plural of single letters do take on an apostrophe.
It's a wise dog that scratches its own fleas.	A common error is to write <i>it's</i> for <i>its</i> or vice versa. Use <i>it's</i> only if you mean 'it is'.
They came of age in the 1990s.	Not every word that ends with 's' needs an apostrophe. '1990s' is another way of writing 'nineteen-nineties', which does not take an apostrophe.
Check out this list of 2014's biggest hits.	Use the apostrophe to show possession.
don't, won't, can't, I'm	Correct, but contractions like these should be used sparingly in formal writing.
Three months wages [no apostrophe]	The apostrophe is not required for expressions of time involving a <b>plural</b> reference.
<b>BUT</b> A day's journey. [Apostrophe required, before the 's']	However, when the time reference is <i>singular</i> , the apostrophe should be used.

## Brackets (parentheses)

Brackets are used to enclose an aside or an afterthought, or to add information or ideas which are not essential. Parentheses are also used to provide a brief definition or expansion, and to enclose reference details in some referencing systems.

There is some evidence that the use of brackets has become more common in modern writing. Brackets do have their uses in simplifying sentences, but like every other stylistic device, they can be overdone.

Use them sparingly, and remember that they are often the tool of the lazy writer – a writer who can't be bothered to make a decision about whether that extra bit of information is important to the reader.

### Examples and punctuation tips:

- She gave me a nice bonus (\$500).
- Please read the analysis. (You'll be amazed.)

Full stops go inside brackets only if an entire sentence is inside the brackets.

Commas are more likely to follow brackets than precede them.

- **Wrong:** When he got home, (it was already dark outside) he fixed dinner.
- **Right:** When he got home (it was already dark outside), he fixed dinner.

## Colon

A colon is used to introduce a word, phrase or clause that amplifies, summarises or contrasts what comes before it.

- A range of health issues are under review: smoking, alcohol consumption and sedentary behaviour.
- The question is this: who will take responsibility?

A capital letter is needed after the colon if two or more complete questions follow.

- We ask you: Can you persuade others to vote for him?  
Can you support him?

Use a colon to introduce a subtitle of a book, article, or the like. No capital is necessary in general text.

- The dynamic society: exploring the sources of global change.

## Comma

Commas enhance clarity in a number of important ways:

- Before eating the members held the business portion of the meeting.
- Until the morning fishing is out of the question.

The absence of a comma in the sentences above will create reader double-take. You need a comma to set off the introductory phrase.

- Before eating, the members held the business portion of the meeting.
- Until the morning, fishing is out of the question.

There are general principles associated with the use of commas. There are also a number of situations where their use becomes a matter of judgement and personal preference.

Commas are useful:

- to separate a few adjectives, one after another – *It was completely, incredibly, undeniably important.*
- around phrases or clauses – *It seemed to her, on reflection, that the point was valid.*
- when you put two sentences together with a conjunction – *I knew that the price of the stock would increase after it entered the home computer market, but I had no idea that the price would skyrocket.*
- to separate a short list – *She bought bread, milk, eggs and cheese.* [Please note there is no comma before 'and' in this list]. Only use the serial or Oxford comma when it's necessary to avoid ambiguity.

## WRONG WAYS TO USE COMMAS



- **Wrong:** This has been a very dry summer, therefore, the supply of water in the reservoirs is low.
- **Why:** The comma after *summer* (before the transitional word *therefore*) is too weak. We don't know whether *therefore* belongs to the clause before it or the one after it. (Comma splice.)
- **Right:** This has been a very dry summer; therefore, the supply of water in the reservoirs is low.
- **Also right:** Because this has been a very dry summer, the supply of water in the reservoirs is low.
- **Also right:** This has been a very dry summer, so the supply of water in the reservoirs is low.

*[Make the first sentence a subordinate clause]*

- **Wrong:** Many men want to be the spy, James Bond.
- **Why:** There's a comma between a noun and its restrictive form of identification.
- **Right:** Many men want to be the spy James Bond.

- **Wrong:** The conference was held in Carlton, Victoria in July.
- **Why:** There should be a pair of commas.
- **Right:** The conference was held in Carlton, Victoria, in July.

- **Wrong:** He bought his car in January, 1990 for \$4,000.
- **Why:** There's a comma between the month and the year, and before the 0.
- **Right:** He bought his car in January 1990 for \$4000.

- **Wrong:** We arrived at the gallery mid-morning, and because it had not yet opened, spent the next hour in the nearby bookshop.
- **Why:** If the text inside the parenthetical commas (acting like brackets) is removed, the sentence doesn't make sense.
- **Right:** We arrived at the gallery mid-morning and, *because it had not yet opened*, spent the next hour in the nearby bookshop.

## Dash

A dash looks similar to a hyphen but differs in length and function. The most common versions of the dash are the en dash (–) and the em dash (—), named for the length of a typeface's lower-case n and upper-case M respectively.

VicHealth uses a spaced en dash, not an em dash. For example:

- A flock of sparrows – some of them juveniles – alighted and sang.

An unspaced en dash is also used to indicate spans or differentiation, where it may replace 'and' or 'to' (but not 'to' in the phrase 'from ... to ...').

- The French and Indian War (1754–1763) was fought in western Pennsylvania and along the present US–Canadian border (Edwards, pp. 81–101).

If one of the items is two or more words, the en dash should be spaced, e.g. September 2015 – February 2016. Here are some more examples where it is used to show spans of figures, time and distance, and an association between words that retain their separate identities:

- 2012–15
- March–June
- pp. 12–17
- cost–benefit ratios
- a Commonwealth – New South Wales agreement

*[use a spaced dash because there is more than one word to be linked on one or both sides]*

See also [Hyphens](#)

## Ellipsis

The ellipsis – or ‘dot dot dot’ as it’s colloquially called – shows the omission of a word or words from quoted material.

- The article stated several points ... concluding that it was all reliant on the initial hypothesis.

The ellipsis can also be used to signify indecision and incompleteness, although only some types of writing lend themselves to this:

- I felt so isolated. Standing in the yard, watching the other kids play ...

Place a space on either side of an ellipsis. If an ellipsis ends a sentence, no full stop is required.

## Forward slash

A forward slash is used in a number of ways: to show alternatives; in mathematical expressions; and web addresses. Do not put a space either side of forward slash unless the items being separated are more than one word long:

- yes/no; male/female
- 60 km/hr (in a table); but 60 kilometres per hour (in text)
- graphic designer / folk singer
- www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/funding

## Full stop

A full stop signifies the end of a sentence. Full stops are **not** used after:

- headings
- dates
- signatures
- person’s initials – J Rechter
- contractions – Ms, Mr, Dr, Dept, St [Saint/Street]
- acronyms/initialisms – MP, NCAS
- am/pm

Full stops are required for ‘e.g.’ and ‘i.e.’ and after a website address only if it ends a sentence. Avoid ending a sentence with a hyperlink where possible. An alternative might be to enclose a web address in parentheses to set it off from its surrounding punctuation. They are also used for abbreviations that consist of the first few letters of a word, rather than the first and last (e.g. Prof. but Dr). See page 9 and 10 for more on abbreviations.

Text in infographics should not take a full stop at the end, even if the text is a complete sentence.

*See also: [Bulleted lists](#)*

### SINGLE SPACE AFTER FULL STOP



We follow the modern convention and use one space after full stops, not two.

## Quotation marks

Single quotation marks are recommended for Australian government publications – in keeping with the trend towards minimal punctuation. Double quotation marks are then used for quotes within quotes. In design, pull-quotes may include the use of double quotation marks as a design style.

### Direct speech is enclosed in single quotation marks:

- The ambassador declared, ‘Not all that we say can have prior approval’.
- The committee expressed ‘grave concern’ at the ‘discriminatory approach of the policy’. [*Single quote marks can also be used for sentence fragments*]

### Quotation marks can also be used in a number of other situations:

- for a technical term on its first mention in a non-technical document
- for a word or phrase that has been coined or that is being used in a specific sense
- for ironic emphasis
- for colloquial works, nicknames, slang, or humorous words and phrases in formal writing
- to enclose matter introduced by such expressions as *entitled*, *marked*, *endorsed*, *the term* and *defined*.

Do not use quotation marks with indirect/paraphrased speech or to enclose familiar expressions.

### Indent quotations that are more than about 30 words long.

Long quotations are usually indented from the text margin and set in smaller type. They are called block quotations. Because they are already differentiated from the text, they do not need quotation marks.

Note that block quotations should be used sparingly. Block quotations tend to take over the voice of the paper, often overshadowing the voice of the author with that source’s voice. Instead, if at all possible, try to quote smaller portions of the piece of text and incorporate these into your own voice. This practice will not only allow you to establish your voice as the author but also show the way you are engaging with the information, not just reporting it. (Walden 1982, p. 19)

## Semicolon

The break provided by a semicolon is stronger than that provided by a comma but weaker than that created by a full stop. It can be used to link two clauses that could be treated as separate sentences but that have a closer logical link than such separation would imply. If the two clauses cannot stand alone as separate sentences, you can’t use a semicolon.

Semicolons are also useful for separating a series of phrases or clauses that also contain commas. For example:

- Participants came from Benalla, Victoria; Wellington, NSW; and Longford, Tasmania.
- The results were surprising: adult males, 35 per cent; adult females, 25 per cent; and children, 13 per cent.

### USE *SIC* WISELY



When you are quoting something that has a spelling or grammar mistake or presents material in a confusing way, you can insert the term *sic* in italics and enclose it in square brackets. *Sic* means, ‘This is the way the original material was’.

- She wrote, ‘I would rather die than [*sic*] be seen wearing the same outfit as my sister’.

It can usefully clarify that a speaker said or wrote just as they are quoted to have done. But it can also serve as a sneer or an unseemly tool to mock a trivial error. Use it wisely.



# Style

## Abbreviations & contractions

**Abbreviations** consist of the *first letter* of a word and usually some other letters, but *not the last letter*. Full stops are required.

- cont.
- Dec.
- fig.
- para.
- Prof. (professor)

**Contractions** consist of the *first and last letters* of a word and sometimes other letters in between. No full stops are required.

- Cwlth
- dept
- Dr
- Pty Ltd
- Qld
- St

*See also [Acronyms & initialisms](#)*

*See also [e.g. and i.e.](#)*

## Accents

Accents on foreign words accepted in English should only be used if they make a critical difference to pronunciation.

- It is not necessary to include accents for well-assimilated words, e.g. elite, naive, premiere.
- Use the accent to avoid ambiguity (e.g., café), for people's names and other proper nouns (e.g. Médecins Sans Frontières).

### CONTEMPORARY STYLE RULES



Research on how people read websites shows that most people (79%) scan pages, trying to pick out a few sentences or even parts of sentences to get the information they want. Only 16% read word-by-word. In addition, users read email newsletters even more abruptly than they read websites.

Creating scannable text for the web often means using half the word count (or less) than conventional writing, and applying common-sense style variations, such as using '%' instead of 'per cent' and closing up the space within times (5pm).

## Acronyms & initialisms

**Acronyms** are strings of initial letters (and sometimes other letters) *pronounced* as a word.

**Initialisms** are strings of initial letters (and sometimes other letters) *not pronounced* as a word.

**Well-known acronyms and initialisms *do not* need to be written in full:**

- GST, USA, UK, Anzac, Qantas, TV, PC, NSW, CPI (consumer price index), IQ (intelligence quotient)

**Give careful thought to which *unfamiliar* shortened forms should be used in your writing.**

Shortened forms that might be unfamiliar to readers should be spelt out the first time they are used, with the shortened form in brackets immediately after the first mention.

- National Disability Advisory Council (NDAC)

### MISSING IN ACTION?

Be mindful of whether the shortened form could be **misinterpreted** by casual readers. A report about the Meat Industry Authority, for example, would probably be better using *the authority* as opposed to the *MIA*, which someone scanning the article might more readily recognise as the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, the Metal Industry Association, or even 'missing in action'.



## Acts of Parliament

Modern legislation is usually drafted to include a short title by which an Act may be cited. The first reference to an Act should always cite the short formal title, in italics, exactly and in full. In subsequent references this title can be shown in roman type and with the date omitted. For example:

- Victoria's *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* prohibits... the Equal Opportunity Act...
- *Tobacco Act 1987* (Vic) – This should be spelt in full when using for the first time and should be used with italics as indicated; subsequently, it can be referred to as 'Tobacco Act' without italics
- *Tobacco Amendment (Protection of Children) Act 2009*; then Tobacco Amendment Act...
- The *Copyright Act 1968* (Cwlth) makes provision for... [the jurisdiction can be placed inside brackets and in non-italicised type]

## Ampersand

The ampersand (&) is an often overused abbreviation for the word 'and'. Its use should be limited to a few situations:

- in certain company names, e.g. Smith & Jones Consulting
- if space is very limited, e.g. in a table with a lot of text
- when artistic considerations dictate, e.g. a logo
- in some academic references, e.g. (Grant & Smith 1998).

Do not use an ampersand in general writing simply to abbreviate the word 'and'.

## BOLDED TEXT

Bold can be used sparingly to highlight key points in a document. Because readers may scan and just read these bolded sentences, they must be able to stand alone.

e.g. **Obesity has increased by 7 per cent over the last 3 years.**

*not*

**Obesity has increased by 7 per cent over the same time period.**

If you decide to use this technique, do it consistently throughout the document – not just in some sections – and do not overuse, as it can quickly start to look messy and confusing. It is far better to use too little bolding than too much.

To add emphasis, use italics, not bold.

## Bulleted lists (dot-point series)

For bulleted lists (dot-point series), VicHealth follows the recommended format in the *Australian style manual*. This approach is designed for clarity while also reflecting the trend to less punctuation.

Capitalisation for dot-point series follows normal sentence rules. If all the dot points are full sentences, each should start with a capital letter. If each dot point consists of, or begins with, a sentence fragment, no initial capital is used.

Full-sentence dot points should have full stops at the end of *each* sentence, but sentence-fragment dot points have a full stop only after the final dot point.

### Full sentences – example

The committee came to two important conclusions:

- Officers from the department should investigate the policy guidelines.
- Research should be funded in three priority areas.

### Sentence fragments – example

Assistance is available in several forms:

- monetary assistance
- equipment or environmental modifications
- advisory services.

Within each bulleted list, use all sentences or all fragments, not a mixture.

Do not use semicolons to separate dot points.

## Capital letters

Like punctuation, capitalisation is being influenced by minimalist trends. Over-Capitalisation Can Make Your Work Look Old-Fashioned and A Bit Messy.

Use a capital letter at the start of a sentence, and for proper nouns and names of specific people, places and organisations.

Words that don't take capital letters include: a, an, the, and, or, to, with. The exception is when it is part of an organisation's formal name, e.g. the word *The* is capitalised in *The University of Melbourne*, but not for the *University of Canberra*.

**The names of VicHealth programs, plans and job titles follow the generally recommended capitalisation approach above.**

For example:

- VicHealth Action Agenda for Health Promotion (then, 'our Action Agenda')
- Kirstan Corben, Executive Manager, Programs Group
- The Melbourne Charter for Promoting Mental Health and Preventing Mental and Behavioural Disorders
- Creating Healthy Workplaces program

**Some proper nouns are deliberately presented in lower case and should remain that way, e.g. beyondblue.**

Generally, terms associated with government should be capitalised for official names and lower case when generic.

Term	Rule	Examples
<b>Government</b>	The word <i>government</i> should be capitalised as part of a formal title or abbreviated specific title, but lower case is generally appropriate elsewhere.	<i>The Australian Government is responsible for...</i> <i>This government policy will...</i> <i>The Australian and New Zealand governments...</i>
<b>Government programs and agreements</b>	Follow the generally recommended capitalisation approach.	<i>Healthy Together Victoria initiative</i>
<b>Commonwealth</b>	An uncapitalised <i>commonwealth</i> has several meanings, reinforcing the need for capitalisation in the Australian context.  The word <i>Commonwealth</i> is much more readily associated with the Commonwealth of Nations (formerly the British Empire). If misunderstanding is likely to occur, use <i>Australian</i> instead of <i>Commonwealth</i> . For example: The Australian Government, The Australian Parliament.	<i>Defence is a Commonwealth responsibility.</i>  <i>Under the Commonwealth Government's external affairs powers...</i>
<b>Federal</b>	The adjective 'federal' requires a capital only if it forms part of an <i>official</i> title.  The <i>federal government</i> , which is a broad descriptive term for the Commonwealth (or Australian) Government, does not need to be capitalised.	<i>The Federal Court of Australia...</i>  <i>A federal government initiative</i>
<b>Parliament</b>	<i>Parliament</i> should be capitalised only in full formal titles.	<i>Parliament House</i>  <i>The problem was raised in the Victorian Parliament.</i>  <i>The debate in parliament continued for hours.</i>
<b>State government</b>	The word <i>State</i> should be capitalised if part of an official title, but lower case if referring to the generic.	<i>State Government of Victoria</i>  <i>It is the responsibility of the state government...</i>
<b>Council</b>	<i>Council</i> should be capitalised when referring to a specific council and lower case when used in a generic sense.	<i>Moreland City Council</i>  <i>The minutes of the council's most recent meeting...</i>

Term	Rule	Examples
<b>Other nouns</b>	Some nouns used in connection to government are capitalised to distinguish them from their generic meaning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>the Cabinet</i></li> <li>• <i>the Treasury</i></li> <li>• <i>the Crown</i></li> <li>• <i>the House</i> (meaning either parliamentary chamber)</li> <li>• <i>the Budget</i> (but not as an adjective or when plural – <i>budget provisions, successive federal budgets</i>)</li> <li>• <i>the Senate</i></li> <li>• <i>the Legislative Assembly</i></li> </ul>
<b>Legislation</b>	In the legislative context, some words are always capitalised, whether single or plural.	<p><i>Act(s)</i>  <i>Regulation(s)</i>  <i>Bill(s)</i>  <i>Ordinance(s)</i></p>
<b>Titles</b>	<p>The official titles of the principals or chief executives of many Australian institutions are capitalised.</p> <p>When abbreviated to their generic element, however, most of these titles can be presented in lower case without any loss of clarity.</p> <p>Exceptions are the titles of the current incumbents of the positions of Australian monarch, Prime Minister and Treasurer and of foreign heads of state. All these are capitalised in official publications, even when the titles are truncated or used generically.</p>	<p><i>the Governor-General</i>  <i>the Leader of the Opposition</i>  <i>the Premier of Victoria</i></p> <p><i>... according to the Minister for Health.</i>  <i>The minister's view is shared by...</i></p> <p><i>Next week, the Queen will be opening parliament.</i></p> <p><i>The Treasurer will be presenting the Budget on...</i></p>
<b>The Australian Prime Minister</b>	References to the current Australian Prime Minister are always capitalised. References to former Australian prime ministers are not.	<p><i>The Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, has today announced...</i></p> <p><i>When John Howard became prime minister...</i></p>
<b>Members of Parliament</b>	Formal titles are capitalised, but generic references can be presented in lower case.	<p><i>... the Member for Scullin, Mr Andrew Giles, MP</i></p> <p><i>Thirty places were set aside for members of parliament.</i></p>
<b>Who can use the title 'The Honourable'?</b>	Ministers may use the title 'The Honourable'. This title is granted for life and therefore former ministers may also use the title. Some members choose not to use 'The Honourable' in their title, so you should check their entry on the website: <a href="http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/members">www.parliament.vic.gov.au/members</a>	<i>The Hon. Jill Hennessy MP, Minister for Health</i>

**Source:** *Style manual for authors, editors and printers* (6th edition), Commonwealth of Australia 2002.

## Copyright line

The copyright line is usually placed on the reverse of the title page of printed publications and on the home page (or a linked page) of electronic documents.

© State of Victoria (VicHealth) [add year]

Note that the © symbol is sufficient to establish a statement of copyright – it is not necessary to use the word ‘copyright’ as well.

## Dates

Do not use ordinal numbers and ‘of’ when writing dates:

**Right:** 3 March 2019

**Wrong:** the 3rd of March, 2018

No punctuation is necessary in dates, even when including the name of the day.

- 25 March 2014
- June 2010
- Monday 1 April 2015

This structure is unambiguous, requires no punctuation and progresses logically from day to month to year. It is typographically preferable to such forms as ‘November 21, 2011’ because it avoids the potential confusion of adjacent numbers.

Decades should be written using four digits, without an apostrophe, i.e. 1990s, *not* 1990’s, ‘90s or nineties.

Centuries should be referred to as a mix of words and numerals: the 18th Century.

## Date/number spans

An unspaced en dash is used in spans of figures when expressing time or distance. If the figures include a mix of words and numbers, use a spaced en dash:

- 2015–16
- 15–31 Pelham Street
- 15 October – 12 December
- September 2014 – February 2015.

## Decimal points

The target audience of your writing and the type of report/subject matter will determine how many decimals you need – one, two or zero decimal places. In most cases you can round up/down to whole numbers or use one decimal place. Only specialist cases require two decimal places.

- A full stop represents a decimal point. When decimal numbers are less than zero, use a zero before the decimal point, i.e. 0.33 (not .33).

## e.g. and i.e.

Abbreviations such as e.g. and i.e. are fine to use. The word following e.g. or i.e. should always be in lower case. Avoid starting sentences with e.g. or i.e.

e.g. = for example (*exempli gratia*). Use e.g. when presenting examples or more possibilities for the term in question:

- Integrating sport into community programs for children (e.g. leadership camps)...

i.e. = that is (*id est*). Use i.e. to define something in greater detail. Think of it as a way of saying ‘in other words’:

- The goal of psychosocial risk assessment for the employer is to fulfil its mandated responsibility to identify, assess and control those aspects of work that pose risks to psychosocial health (i.e. to control those things that employers can reasonably control).

# Hyphens

Hyphens are an important device for avoiding ambiguity, but the various rules surrounding their use are poorly understood, and errors frequently arise from the misplacement or misuse of hyphens.

The decision about whether to use a hyphen must often be based on the context in which the word appears. Remember that hyphens often appear in words that have been newly joined. Over time, the hyphen may disappear and the two words become one. Email, wellbeing and today are all examples of this process. When in doubt, look it up – check the *Macquarie Dictionary* and the VicHealth preferred spelling list in *The red book of preferred spellings + terminology*.

## Here are some broad principles:

Use a hyphen...

to clarify meaning and avoid ambiguity	re-cover / recover re-creation / recreation thirty-odd people / thirty odd people
to separate double vowels or consonants	pre-existing condition cross-section of the community part-time job
in fractions and compass points	one-third are at risk north-east Victoria
with a prefix plus a capital letter or date <i>but</i> not for compound adjectives containing capital letters or quotation marks	un-Australian post-1990s a High Court decision a 'do or die' attitude
in nouns and adjectives made up of two or more words that together operate as a single unit of meaning	Attorney-General ( <i>plural: Attorneys-General</i> )
to connect two words to a base word or number that they share	pre- or post-1945 full- and part-time positions
for some pairs of nouns – these will need to be checked in a style guide or dictionary	owner-driver hocus-pocus city-state
for compound adjectives that consist of short adverbial phrases	a 40-year-old male
for two-syllable prefixes ending in a vowel other than 'o' followed by another vowel <i>but</i> not for two-syllable prefixes ending in 'o' or a consonant, or ending in a vowel followed by a consonant	semi-official  macroeconomic; interactive; antisocial

Here are some more examples, but without the technical explanations:

Hyphen required	No hyphen required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a government-owned facility</li><li>• a well-known book</li><li>• a third-storey office</li><li>• accident-prone</li><li>• up-to-date</li><li>• back-to-back</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a finely honed argument</li><li>• a brightly coloured shirt</li><li>• an equal opportunity employer</li><li>• a tax office ruling</li><li>• red tape</li><li>• free will</li><li>• head to toe</li><li>• ice cream cone</li><li>• income tax records</li></ul>

### WHY CAN'T I PUT A HYPHEN IN 'ICE CREAM CONE' OR 'BRIGHTLY COLOURED SHIRT'?



- Words that have been bonded together to form perpetual concepts like 'income tax' or 'ice cream' don't take a hyphen, even in phrases like 'income tax records' and 'ice cream cone'. How do you know which compounds have bonded and which remain free agents? If an open compound is listed in the dictionary, it's permanent.
- Adverbs ending in '-ly' aren't hyphenated to the words they modify. But most other adverbs are. For example: 'little-known fact', 'best-kept secret'. (By the way, many adverbs are just adjectives with the -ly suffix: 'accidental' becomes 'accidentally,' 'perfect' becomes 'perfectly'.)



## Internet (URL) addresses

### Should I include the protocol prefix (http)?

It's fine to delete the `http://` or `https://` at the beginning of a URL as most browsers will be able to locate the website without it, and your text will look neater (especially in printed form).

When copying URLs directly from your browser, they often include unnecessary suffixes that can also be cut for neatness. For example, `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqyn47jBVsQ&app=desktop` can be cut to `www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqyn47jBVsQ`

Always test the new URL if you've made any cuts to it.

### Should I add a full stop if the sentence ends with a URL?

Avoid using end punctuation, such as a full stop, after a link. Some people might think the full stop is part of the URL and typing this in will return an error. Even for those who know how URLs work, it's easy to accidentally grab the end punctuation along with the URL when copying and pasting the URL into a browser.

Instead, set off URLs with a colon and a line break, or include URLs within the sentence – not at the end. Depending on the context, this may require the use of parentheses.

- Registrations are now open for Walk to School 2016: [www.walktoschool.vic.gov.au](http://www.walktoschool.vic.gov.au)
- Visit [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au) for more information.
- VicHealth's new Alcohol Strategy ([www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/alcoholstrategy](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/alcoholstrategy)) outlines its plan to prevent harm from alcohol over the next three years.

### How to remove a hyperlink

Most software programs including Microsoft Outlook tend to automatically convert a URL to a hyperlink. To remove the link, press Backspace after you finish typing. If that doesn't work, place your mouse over the link and right click, select *Remove Hyperlink*.

## Don't hyphenate long URLs

For long URLs that seem to go on forever, don't use a hyphen at the line break. It will confuse people because it's common for URLs to have internal hyphens. If there is a hyphen in the address, don't make the line break right after that. Instead, if you have to wrap the URL to a new line, find a natural break like a slash, dot, number sign or other symbol. If you break at a full stop, make the break before the full stop so that the full stop starts a new line. Alternatively, contact the Publishing team to see if you can arrange for a shortened URL to be created.

## Italics

There are a number of well-established conventions for the use of italics. They are primarily used for:

- titles of books, periodicals, films, videos, television and radio programs, works of art, legislation and legal cases (e.g. titles of VicHealth publications, *The Age* newspaper)
- words used in a special sense or to which a particular tone or emphasis is being applied
- foreign words and phrases that are not yet regarded as having been absorbed into English
- scientific names of animals and plants but not for medical terms or diseases.

# Numbers

**Spell out numbers *under 10* when used in discursive/narrative text.**

- VicHealth has five strategic imperatives.
- Three in five people have experienced mental health issues.

**Always use words for numbers that start a sentence.**

- Six hundred complaints were received.
- **OR** rearrange the sentence: We received 600 complaints.
- Twenty-two per cent of respondents ...
- **OR** More than one-fifth of respondents ...

**Always use numerals (even for numbers less than 10) with:**

- any units of measurement (cm, m, km, g, kg)
- ages
- time (hours, days, weeks, months, years)
- dates
- percentages
- currency

## Decimal numbers

When decimal numbers are less than one, a zero should always be placed before the decimal point:

- 0.25 not .25

## Ordinal numbers

When using ordinal numbers, words are preferred to numerals in text for numbers up to 10.

- first, third
- The 10th report; the 15th-century painting (Ensure that ordinal markers such as -st, -rd, -th are not shown in superscript. Microsoft Word often creates superscript ordinals via autocorrect – backspace or select Undo to remove these.)
- BUT 3 June 2014 *not* 3rd June 2014.

**Do not use a comma until 10,000.**

- There were 2300 premature deaths.
- The cost was \$9500.

**Spell out million and billion in text (abbreviate in tables)**

In Australia, a billion equals a thousand million. This is the same in the USA and France. Historically, in the UK, a billion referred to a million million, however they have now standardised their usage to match Australia and the US.

## Spans of numerals

Use an en dash, not a hyphen, to link spans of numerals, and limit the number of digits in the second part of the span to those essential for clarity. For example:

- 9–12, 45–50, 402–5, 421–39, 440–553

**Maintain enough digits in the second part of the span to avoid ambiguity. For example:**

- 115–17 *not* 115–7
- 40–41 *not* 40–1
- 1998–99 *not* 1998–9
- 135–139 Davey Street *not* 135–9 Davey Street

**Use a full span for the dates of a person's birth and death.**

- Sir Henry Parkes (1815–1896)...

## Superscript numbering (placement)

Place superscript numbers (e.g. for footnotes) at the end of the sentence or clause, rather than immediately after the words to which they relate, and before all punctuation marks, save the end-of-sentence ones.

## PRESENTING NUMBERS TO THE BEST EFFECT IN TEXT

Numbers have a vital role in conveying ideas or facts – in essence, about whether something is large or small, important or not, changing or different. However, readers tend to grasp ideas more easily when they are expressed in words.

Complicated numbers are difficult to remember.

- Why say ‘23.6 per cent’ when you can say ‘almost 25 per cent’ or ‘1 in 4’?
- ‘17%’ is more understandable when it is written as ‘one in six’
- ‘68% can become ‘just over two-thirds (68%)...’

Our level of precision doesn’t need to approach 20 digits of pi to prove that the research is valid. There are some contexts where simplifying is preferred, e.g. press releases vs technical reports on the results of surveys. See *The blue book of plain writing* for more on this topic.

## Numbering examples

	Text example	Table example	Tip
Narrative text combined with other rules	<p>VicHealth has five strategic imperatives.</p> <p>Almost four million Australians experience hearing loss.</p> <p>One in three people has mental health issues.</p> <p>Many households – about one in six – are struggling to afford basic necessities.</p> <p>An analysis of 28 games during the 2013–14 cricket season...</p> <p>During a 2-week period it was shown that viewers had 4.5 times more exposure to alcohol branding...</p> <p>More than one-half of the women we surveyed...</p> <p><i>You could also say ‘a half’ but avoid showing fractions in numerals (<math>\frac{1}{2}</math>)</i></p>		
Measurement	<p>10 metres</p> <p>4 kilometres</p> <p>50 g</p>	<p>10 m</p> <p>4 km</p> <p>50 g</p>	Insert a space between the numeral and the unit of measurement.
Ages	<p>a woman in her 30s</p> <p>children aged 5 years</p> <p>20–29 age group</p>		

	Text example	Table example	Tip
Time	<p>The seminar starts at 7 pm. [OR 7.00 pm]</p> <p>The policy will take 3–6 months to develop.</p> <p>The program began 2 years ago.</p> <p>Our framework is built on 3-year priorities and 10-year goals.</p> <p>In this financial year (2015–16) we met our budget projections.</p>		
Dates	Tuesday 3 June 2014		
Decimals	0.25	0.25	
Percentages	Obesity rates increased by 5.7 per cent.	5.7%	In formal text, 'per cent' is written as two words.
Millions	<p>five million people</p> <p>12 million refugees</p>	<p>5m</p> <p>12m</p>	Lower case 'm' with no space after the number. This avoids confusion with metres.
Currency	<p>It costs the health system \$13.8 billion each year.</p> <p>We spent \$4300 on that project.</p>	<p>\$13.8b</p> <p>\$4300</p>	<p>Lower case 'b' with no space after the number.</p> <p>No comma required for amounts using 4 digits, i.e. less than \$10,000.</p>

## Page/figure references

When referring to pages within a document, use ‘page 14’ *not* ‘p.14’.

When referring to figures, tables, maps or plates within a document, place the reference in parentheses at the end of a sentence, before the full stop. Do not use ‘see’.

For example: The number of women holding professional degrees has been steadily increasing (Table 3).

## Subject – Verb agreement

Choosing the correct form of a verb can be confusing when the subject of the sentence is singular, but refers to groups, collectives or proportions.

For example:

A range of measures *were* adopted. (Indefinite expression – plural verb OK)

The number of incidents *was* lower than expected. (definite expression – singular verb required)

In many cases, either singular or plural forms of the verb are acceptable, however please apply this rule consistently.

For example:

Her family *is/are* not well known.

Penguin *has/have* published the whole series.

But note:

**Right:** One in ten Victorians has experienced homelessness.

**Wrong:** One in ten Victorians have experienced homelessness.

**Why:** The subject of the sentence is the singular ‘One in ten Victorians’, not the plural ‘Victorians’.

**Right:** VicHealth has commissioned research in this area.

**Wrong:** VicHealth have commissioned research in this area.

**Why:** Give VicHealth a unified, corporate entity.

## Time

Write ‘am’ and ‘pm’ in lower case with a space following the numeral. Only use a full stop to separate hours and minutes. Two zeros may be used to indicate even hours but are not essential. Use ‘noon’ and ‘midnight’ for ‘12’ to avoid confusion:

- 9 am or 9.00 am
- 12 midnight
- 12 noon.

## URLs

See Internet (URL) addresses on page 17 of this document.

# Formatting your documents and letters in Word

## Font and text rules

All designed VicHealth publications use the font Battersea. In *Word*, the nearest equivalent to this font is Calibri. There is no need to introduce other fonts.

Two basic but important rules:

1. **Use 11 or 12 point for body text.** Body text is easily read at these sizes.
2. **Align text to the left.** Do not fully justify your text: aligning text to both the left and right sides of the page makes it harder to read and uses more space.

## Heading styles

- main headings (**Heading1**): bold, 16 point (12 pt before; 6 pt after)
- headings (**Heading2**): bold, 13 point (18 pt before, 0 pt after)
- subheadings (**Heading3**): bold, 11 point (6 pt before, 6 pt after). This subheading should be green (R-5, G-148, B-74)
- sub-subheadings (**Heading4**): italicised, bold, 11 point (6 pt before, 6 pt after)

## Line spacing

To ensure text is easy to read, select line spacing of 1.15 and 6 pt at the beginning and end of paragraph marks.

To do this:

- highlight all your text
- open the Paragraph dialogue box (on the main Home tab)
- under 'Spacing' select 6 pt for 'Before' and 6 pt for 'After'
- under Line Spacing, select '1.15'.
- click OK.

## Numbering

- 1.
2.
  - (a)
  - (b)

## Page numbers

Bottom right in footer.

## Footer

- Bottom right = page number
- Bottom left = *Title* [Sentence case]
- Font 9 pt

## Single space after full stop

At VicHealth we follow the modern convention and use one space after full stops and other punctuation marks, not two.

### BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE



For letters from the CEO or Executive Manager, please see their Executive Assistant for guidance on format and style.

Templates for a range of different letters and document types can be found on the VicHealth intranet portal: <http://portal.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Resources/Pages/Home.aspx>