



DFES  
Department of Fire &  
Emergency Services

# WRITING STYLE GUIDE

VERSION 2026.1

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# INTRODUCTION

# 01



The Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) produces a wide range of written materials to communicate, interact and connect with both internal and external stakeholders.

It is important that everything we publish is professionally presented, consistent, appropriate for its audience, free from error and grammatically correct.

All communications should have a clear purpose and be easy to read and navigate.

This writing style guide is a reference tool for all DFES staff and volunteers. It provides guidance for all types of communication — from official documents through to everyday content.

It is not just about what is correct and what is not. Where there are different ways for a word to be spelt or a sentence to be punctuated, this guide provides the preferred option. It's all about consistency.

**Kent Acott**  
Director

Strategic and Emergency  
Communications

## HINT

Give your copy the once over to ensure the audience has the information they need to know, not the information you want to tell them.

# WRITING STYLE

# 02

## MINISTERIAL WRITING STYLE

Be aware that written materials for the Minister for Emergency Services may vary depending on the Minister's specific requirements. These requirements may not be covered in this guide. The Ministerial Services business unit can provide advice and templates are available on the Intranet.

For further assistance, please email [ministerial.services@dfes.wa.gov.au](mailto:ministerial.services@dfes.wa.gov.au)

## PLAIN ENGLISH

DFES encourages the use of plain English so that more people understand what you are saying.

### Writing in plain English means

- Using basic, commonly used words
- Choosing short words over long words where possible
- Avoiding industry jargon or slang terms

- Avoiding the use of a lot of acronyms; and using short, simple sentences

### TIP

To choose between "you and me" and "you and I," remove "you" from the sentence to see which sounds correct.

### For example

"The Minister met with you and me."  
Does "The Minister met with me" or "The Minister met with I" sound right?

### ✓ Correct

The Commissioner thanked you and me for coordinating the exercise.

The Commissioner thanked me for coordinating the exercise.

### ✗ Incorrect

The Commissioner thanked you and I for coordinating the exercise.

The Commissioner thanked I for coordinating the exercise.

## USE

## INSTEAD OF

Although

Despite the fact that

Use

Utilise

About

In regards to

While

Whilst

Try

Endeavour

Clear, obvious

Apparent

Change

Amendment

So

Consequently

Because

As a consequence of

To

In order to

Help

Facilitate, Assist

But

Nevertheless, Whereas

Show, tell

Disclose

Allow

Enable

With

Accompanying

Despite, even if

Irrespective of

Many

Numerous

Will

Intend to

And, with

In conjunction with

Give

Allocate

Now

Currently

## TIP

This section is organised alphabetically.

## ABBREVIATIONS

All words should be spelt out in full, particularly measurements and months. It is preferable to use "for example" rather than "e.g."

In most cases, per cent should be written as two words. The symbol % is acceptable in tables and research documents that contain a large amount of figures.

## ACRONYMS

Acronyms should be written in full in the first instance and followed by the acronym in brackets.

### For example

- Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES)
- Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) project

The acronym may then be used instead of the full name throughout the remainder of the document. It is also acceptable and often preferred, to refer to "the department" or "the project" in subsequent mentions.

If a commonly abbreviated word or term appears only once in a document, then simply write the word in full and do not include the acronym in brackets.

In informal communications, commonly abbreviated words and terms do not need to be written out in full.

### For example

- WA
- HAZMAT
- SES



## AMPERSAND SYMBOL

Do not use the ampersand symbol unless it is a part of an official name.



## APOSTROPHES

Apostrophes have two uses:

### TO SHOW MISSING LETTERS

Use an apostrophe when joining two words together, such as "don't" instead of "do not".

### TO SHOW OWNERSHIP

Use an apostrophe to indicate that something belongs to a person or group, such as "Joe's pen".

If a name or acronym ends in "s", add the apostrophe after the "s" without adding an extra "s".

#### ✓ **Correct**

DFES' position is clear.

#### ✗ **Incorrect**

DFES's position is clear.

Terms such as "1990s" or "DVDs" are plurals, not possessives, and do not require an apostrophe.

Avoid using apostrophes to shorten words in formal reports or ministerial correspondence. Using "it is" instead of "it's" provides a more professional tone.

### ITS VS IT'S

These two words are often confused. Use these rules to ensure accuracy.

#### **Rule One:** It's (with an apostrophe)

Use it's only when you mean "it is".

The apostrophe replaces the missing letter.

#### **For example**

It's important that crews report through the correct chain of command.

#### **Rule Two:** Its (no apostrophe)

Use its to show possession or that something belongs to "it". Pronouns like its, yours and theirs never take an apostrophe.

#### **For example**

DFES updated its social media guidelines.

#### **TIP**

If you cannot replace the word with "it is", write "its".



## CAPITALISATION

Capitals are used at the start of sentences and for proper nouns, such as a person's name, position title, organisation and specific places. Titles of official or formal documents such as reports or policies should also be capitalised.

### For example

- There are many fire stations (noun) in the Perth metropolitan region.
- Cardup Fire Station (proper noun) was officially opened in 2025.

Cardinal and ordinal directions should not be capitalised unless they refer to a specific region.

### For example

- The fire is burning in bushland east of Wanneroo.
- A number of fires burning throughout the South West Region have stretched firefighting resources.

Capitals should not be used for emphasis, to give an air of importance or to turn simple phrases into technical expressions. If they are overused in a document it interrupts the reading flow and can confuse the reader.

## COLLECTIVE NOUNS

A collective noun is a single thing that's made up of a collection or a number of people or things.

Because a collective noun is singular in form it requires a singular verb.

### For example

- the committee is
- DFES is





## COMMAS

Try to write in a way that requires the use of as few commas as possible.

If you can, keep the length of your sentences under 25 words.

Commas are almost never necessary before the following words:

- Because
- As
- And
- Or
- Then

“However” should always only be used at the start of a sentence. When it does, it is appropriate for a comma to follow.

### For example

However, the dog jumped over the cat.

“But” should never be used to start a sentence.

## CONTRACTIONS

### Formal communications

Contractions such as the ones listed below should not be used in official documents unless it is a direct quote:

- Can't
- Don't
- Won't
- You're

### Less formal communications

In other communication material, the audience and subject matter will determine whether or not you should use contractions.

When in doubt, always write the words out in full.

## THE EN DASH (–)

The en dash is about the same width as the letter “n”. The most common use of the en dash is to indicate a span. For more official documents it may be better to use the word “to” rather than the en dash.

### For example

- 25–28 January 2026
- pages 16–17
- 20–30 kilometres
- June–December
- Perth–Adelaide

## THE EM DASH (—)

An em dash is the width of the letter “m”. Em dashes can be used in place of commas or brackets.

But there must be a space on either side of an em dash.

### For example

Upon discovering the errors — all 124 of them — the publisher immediately recalled the books.

## DATES

The following formats should be used for dates.

- Where only the date and year are included: 19 August 2026.
- Where the day, date and year are included: Wednesday 19 August 2026.
- Where reference is made to a period of days: 19–25 August 2026.
- When reference is made to a period of years: 2026–29 not 2026/29.
- When referencing a financial year: 2026/27.

## HYPHENS (-)

Hyphens should be used to aid comprehension. They should be used when two words are used together as adjectives or adverbs.

### For example

The high-powered boat.

They should not be used if the first of the two words ends in “ly.”

### For example

The highly powered boat.

Refer to common words list below.

- Coordinate, not co-ordinate
- Interagency, not inter-agency
- Relocate, not re-locate
- Wellbeing, not well-being
- Standby, not stand-by
- Firefighter, not fire-fighter
- Statewide, not State-wide



## HINT

This page contains entries for both I and N.

## ITALICS

Italics should never be used.

## NUMBERS

### Formal communications

Write numerical values up to and including nine as words.

### For example

The child was five years old.

Once you go past nine, use numerals from 10 onwards.

### For example

He provided 35 years of service.

If a large and small number appear in the same sentence, follow rules listed above.

### For example

There were eight volunteers and 31 career personnel on site.

Five-digit numbers and above have a comma between the thousands, as in 2031 or 20,031 or 2,358,739.

Avoid starting sentences with numbers as a general rule. If it is absolutely necessary, write the number at the start of a sentence as a word regardless of whether it is below or above 10.

### For example

Eleven recruits applied.

## POSTNOMINAL TITLES AND RANKS

Where an individual has attained a postnominal title the postnominal abbreviation should appear at the end of the recipient's name in the first instance.

Where an individual has a rank, it should be used. For individuals without a rank, Mr, Ms, Dr or another appropriate salutation should be used.

### For example

- Commissioner Darren Klemm AFSM
- Mr Daniel Greene ESM
- Ms Laura Nguyen OAM
- Dr Samuel Bennett JP

### TIP

For full list of postnominals used in fire and emergency services see the [Australian Honours Postnominals](#).



## PUNCTUATION AND QUOTATION MARKS

When using quotation marks in DFES documents, whether punctuation sits inside or outside depends on:

- Whether the punctuation mark belongs to the quote
- Where the quote appears in the sentence.

If the punctuation mark belongs to the quote, it goes inside the closing quotation mark.

A phrase like the Incident Controller said, she explained or they replied is called the attribution. When a quote is followed by an attribution, replace the quote's full stop with a comma.

### ✓ Correct

"The crews have been stood down for the night," the Incident Controller said.

### ✗ Incorrect

"The crews have been stood down for the night", the Incident Controller said.

If the quote finishes the sentence, keep the full stop inside the closing quotation mark.

### ✓ Correct

"We will continue monitoring the area overnight," the spokesperson said.

The Commissioner said: "Community safety remains our priority."

### ✗ Incorrect

"We will continue monitoring the area overnight." the spokesperson said.

The Commissioner said: "Community safety remains our priority".

The punctuation mark goes outside the closing quotation mark when it belongs to the sentence, not the quote.

### ✓ Correct

Did you hear the firefighter say, "The road is clear"?

### ✗ Incorrect

Did you hear the firefighter say, "The road is clear?"

When there are two punctuation marks, one for the quote and one for the sentence, decide which is stronger and use it. Do not use both.

### ✓ Correct

The Fire Warden called: "Evacuate!"

### ✗ Incorrect

The Fire Warden called: "Evacuate!".

# CONVENTIONS

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## QUOTES

Double quotation marks should be used in almost all circumstances, including when attributing speech, when quoting exact words or when referring to the title of a document.

Single quotes should only be used when quoting inside a quote.

### **For example**

“Emergency WA is the primary source of truth for current warnings and incidents,” the DFES spokesperson said.

As in the example above, when using direct quotes open the quote using quotation marks, insert speech and then close with a comma and attribute the quote to the speaker.

## INDIRECT QUOTES

You do not need to include single or double quotation marks when attributing indirect speech.

### **For example**

Department of Fire and Emergency Services District Officer Sarah Mitchell said the fires were well managed by responders at the scene.

## SPELLING

Use Australian English spelling, except where a word is part of a proper name or title.

### For example

- -ise (not -ize): minimise not minimize
- -our (not -or): colour not color
- -re (not -er): centre not center

Please be careful when using AI tools like ChatGPT or Copilot because they often Americanise words like the above examples.

## TELEPHONE NUMBERS

In correspondence to people who reside in Western Australia, there is no need to use the (08) prefix.

For people who reside nationally it is important to use the (08) prefix. Leave a space between the area code and the following numbers.

### For example

(08) 9395 9300

## TIMES

Exact hours are written without full stops, have no zeros at the end and have no space between the figure and "am" or "pm".

### For example

- 7am
- 10pm
- Noon/midday is 12pm

If the time shows minutes, use a full stop to differentiate hours and minutes.

### For example

7.25am and 10.25pm

Referring to a 24-hour clock (e.g. 1700 hours) is only acceptable in DFES internal or operational communications.

## MEASUREMENTS

All measurements should be written in full when referring to numbers between one and nine:

- 9 centimeters
- 11cm
- 12ml
- 13km/h

These abbreviated numbers do not require an "s" to indicate plural.

## TITLES

The DFES convention is to write titles without commas.

### For example

- Deputy Commissioner Joe Bloggs AFSM
- Kimberley Superintendent Joe Bloggs

The first time a title is referenced, include their organisation, title and full name. When referencing it subsequently, use the person's salutation followed by their last name, as below.

- First reference: Department of Fire and Emergency Services Chief Superintendent Country North Jane Smith.
- Subsequent references: Chief Superintendent Smith

## Governor of Western Australia

When referring to the Governor, place “His/Her Excellency the Honourable” immediately before the person’s name. On first mention, use the full style with all current post-nominals.

### Full title (first mention):

His Excellency the Honourable Christopher John Dawson AC APM, Governor of Western Australia.

Government House Western Australia.

### SHORT TITLE (subsequent mentions):

His Excellency the Honourable Chris Dawson AC APM, Governor of Western Australia — or, where context is clear, the Governor of Western Australia.

### COUPLE (written introductions/ invitations):

His Excellency the Honourable Christopher John Dawson AC APM, Governor of Western Australia, and Mrs Darrilyn Dawson.

## NOTE

For forms of address for the Governor-General of Australia, refer to the official Governor-General [website’s protocol and contacts pages](#).

## Honourable

The title applies to the person not the office.

### ✓ Correct

the Hon Paul Papalia CSC MLA.

### ✗ Incorrect

the Hon Minister; the Honourable Minister.

Some former office-holders may be permitted to retain “The Honourable” after leaving office, subject to eligibility and approval (refer to current WA Government guidance if needed).

Where a Minister has multiple portfolios, it is not necessary to include all portfolios in their title unless relevant. For example, Minister Papalia may attend an event involving both DFES and Corrective Services, such as a prison emergency management exercise with firefighters and custodial officers. In this case, use “Minister for Emergency Services and Corrective Services Paul Papalia”. CSC MLA.

## **Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner**

In correspondence to external stakeholders, reference should be made to the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner.

## **Other titles**

When referring to a specific person their title is capitalised.

### **For example**

District Officer Joe Bloggs.

When referring to a group do not capitalise the title.

### **For example**

The district officers underwent significant training.

## **WEBSITES AND EMAIL ADDRESSES**

If you are including a web address in a document then it is preferable not to include “www” at the beginning of the address.

### **✓ Correct**

visit [dfes.wa.gov.au](https://dfes.wa.gov.au) for more information; not

### **✗ Incorrect**

visit [www.dfes.wa.gov.au](http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au) for more information.

In formal communications, we always include a full stop after an email or website when it is at the end of a sentence:

### **For example**

Please visit the website at [dfes.wa.gov.au](https://dfes.wa.gov.au).

In informal communications, never include a full stop after an email or website as it can hinder comprehension:

### **For example**

Please visit the website at: [dfes.wa.gov.au](https://dfes.wa.gov.au)

If you think the audience may be confused you can restructure the sentence so that the address is not at the end.

Ensure hyperlinks do not include the full stops at the end of the link.

# COMMONLY USED TERMS 16

## BUSHFIRE

The term bushfire should be written as one word when used to refer to incidents.

It is written as two words where it is a proper name, such as Bush Fires Act 1954 or Bush Fire Service or Boyup Brook Bush Fire Brigade.

## DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

The first reference to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services should be written in full, followed by the acronym "DFES" in brackets. Each subsequent reference should be DFES, as is shown below.

- First reference: The Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) is urging residents to stay safe and take precautions to avoid house fires.

- Subsequent references: DFES Fire Investigation and Analysis Unit District Officer Lachlan Miller said catastrophic house fires are a real risk.

If there is only one reference to 'Department of Fire and Emergency Services' in a document, there is no need to include the acronym in brackets.

## INCLUSIVE AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LANGUAGE

DFES is committed to communicating in a way that is inclusive, respectful and representative of the diverse communities we serve. Inclusive and culturally responsive language acknowledges and values people of all backgrounds, cultures, abilities, genders, sexualities, ages and beliefs.

## General principles

- Use language that is person-centred, respectful and free from bias or stereotypes.
- Avoid assumptions about a person's gender, sexuality, background, faith, ability or life circumstances.
- Choose terminology that reflects how people describe themselves. When in doubt, ask or refer to reputable guidance.
- Avoid terms that are exclusionary, outdated or patronising (for example, the elderly, handicapped, sexual preference).
- Use gender-neutral language where possible (for example, firefighter instead of fireman).
- Reflect diversity accurately and positively in examples, imagery and case studies.

## REFERENCING ABORIGINAL, ISLANDER AND FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES

- DFES uses Aboriginal peoples when referring to Traditional Owners in WA.
- Use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples when referring to both groups together.
- Terms like First Nations Australians or First Peoples of Australia can be used in national or international contexts.
- For individuals, use:
  - Aboriginal person
  - Torres Strait Islander person

# COMMONLY USED TERMS 17

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) acknowledges First Nations Australians as the Traditional Custodians throughout Australia and their continuing connection to lands, waters, sky and community.

We acknowledge the wisdom, cultures, languages and communities of First Nations Australians and pay respect to Elders past and present.

## RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE

- Recognise the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and cultures.
- Language may vary depending on community preference.
- Use plural forms (peoples, cultures, histories).
- Use present tense — Aboriginal culture is living.
- Use correct names for language

- groups, Native Title groups and Aboriginal corporations.
- Avoid paternalistic or possessive language (say Indigenous Australians not Australia's Indigenous people).
- Avoid objectifying language (say Aboriginal peoples, not the Aboriginal people).

## CAPITALISATION

Always capitalise:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- Elder/s
- Traditional Owner/s
- Traditional Custodian/s
- Country (when referring to Aboriginal Country)
- Acknowledgement of Country
- Welcome to Country
- Language group names
- Aboriginal corporation names

- Indigenous (when referring to people)
- The Dreaming
- Native Title

## TERMS TO AVOID

- disadvantaged (in this context)
- lost or past (language, culture)
- tribe
- artefacts
- mob (unless self-referenced)
- "us and them" language
- Dreamtime

## ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE WORDS

- Provide English meaning in brackets.
- Use phonetics in speeches if helpful.
- Do not italicise Aboriginal language words.

## DUAL NAMING

- Use dual names where formally adopted.
- Aboriginal name appears first.
- Example: Wunaamin Miliwundi Ranges (formerly King Leopold Ranges.)

# COMMONLY USED TERMS 18

## AGE DIVERSITY

- Only mention age when relevant.
- Use neutral terms: young people, youth, older people, retirees, older Australians, seniors.
- Avoid: junior/s, old people, elderly.
- Children, adolescents, babies or kids may be suitable depending on context.
- If including age:
  - Aboriginal person
  - Torres Strait Islander person

## GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY

DFES uses inclusive, gender-neutral language to reflect the diversity of our workforce, volunteers and communities. Discrimination is unlawful under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984.

## LANGUAGE USE

- Use inclusive terms for all genders.
- Avoid gendered expressions (“you guys”, “ladies and gentlemen”).
- Use gender-neutral job titles
- Avoid gendered role titles (hostess, waitress).
- Only include gender when relevant.

## PRONOUNS AND TITLES

- Use the pronouns and titles a person identifies with.
- If unsure, ask politely or check their signature.
- If not possible, use gender-neutral language or the person’s full name.
- Ms is preferred over Mrs or Miss.
- Mx is used by some non-binary people.

## GENDER-NEUTRAL PRONOUNS

Use they/them when gender is unknown or irrelevant. Where possible, rewrite the sentence to avoid using a pronoun entirely for better conciseness.

### For example

- Each applicant must provide their referee details.
- Applicants must provide referee details.
- You must provide your referee details.

## PREFERRED LANGUAGE

### ✓ Correct

- firefighter
- team leader
- volunteer
- community member
- supervisor

### ✗ Incorrect

- fireman
- foreman
- chairman
- policeman

## INCLUSIVE GROUP REFERENCES

### ✓ Correct

- team members
- crew
- colleagues
- staff
- volunteers

### ✗ Incorrect

- brothers and sisters
- firefighting brothers

# COMMONLY USED TERMS 19

## FURTHER GUIDANCE

For more on pronouns, see the Australian [Government Style Manual](#). Inclusive language evolves — use terms that reflect current best practice and individual preference.

## DFES REGIONS

When referring to the name of an official DFES region or other recognised regions of Western Australia, the name of the region should be capitalised. There should also be spacing between the words and no hyphenation.

### For example

#### ✓ Correct

- South West Region
- South West of WA

#### ✗ Incorrect

- southwest WA
- south-west WA

When referring to a part of a region the descriptive does not need to be capitalised.

### For example

#### ✓ Correct

- Gusty winds are expected in northern parts of the Kimberley.

#### ✗ Incorrect

- Gusty winds are expected in Northern parts of the Kimberley.

## EVENT TITLES

The first reference to an event should be written in full followed in brackets by the way it is going to be referred to in the remainder of the document, as below.

- First reference: Western Australian Fire and Emergency Services Conference.
- Subsequent references: the conference.

## GOVERNMENT

### STATE GOVERNMENT

- Use State Government when referring to the current Premier and ministers.
- Use Cook Government when referring to election commitments, Ministerial speeches or when specifically required.
- Government of Western Australia is correct, but State Government is preferred in DFES communications.

### GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

- Use lower case for non specific references to local, state or Commonwealth government agencies. For example:
  - DFES works closely with local government agencies, such as the City of Swan.
  - The role of government is to coordinate recovery efforts.

### NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

- Use Commonwealth Government or Federal Government.
- Use Australian Government when writing to international stakeholders.

### LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

- Capitalise specific local governments.

### For example

- The Shire of Mundaring is responsible for the area.
- Use lower case when referring to local governments in general.

### For example

- Representatives from many local governments attended the session.

# COMMONLY USED TERMS 20

## **MULTIPLE GOVERNMENTS**

- Use lower case when referring to more than one government.

### **For example**

- The State and Commonwealth governments today announced additional disaster recovery funding.

## **LEGISLATION**

When referencing legislation the full name, including the year, needs to be written and it must be capitalised. This is the case for both Acts and Regulations. For example:

- Fire Brigades Act 1942
- Bush Fires Act 1954
- Fire and Emergency Services Act 1998
- Fire and Emergency Services Regulations 1998

If one Act only is referred to frequently throughout a document, after the first reference it can be referred to as “the Act” throughout the remainder of the document.

Likewise, if referring only to one specific set of Regulations throughout a document, it can be referred to as “the Regulations” after the first reference.

Never use “the Regs”.

## **SERVICES**

Check the DFES website for the exact names of DFES services.

## **SERVICE AWARDS**

The term “service awards” is lower case unless referring to a specific award name. For example:

- Nominations for the service awards are now open. Submissions for the State Emergency Service Awards must be made by the end of the month.

## **VOLUNTEER ASSOCIATIONS**

The term “volunteer associations” should be lower case when collectively referring to all or multiple volunteer associations.

If you are referring to a specific association it should be capitalised as it is an official name.

## **VOLUNTEER BRIGADES, GROUPS AND UNITS**

When referring to a specific volunteer brigade, group or unit (BGU), specific reference should be made according to the prescribed name of that BGU. For example:

- Cockburn State Emergency Service Unit or Marine Rescue Busselton.

Individual Volunteer Marine Rescue Groups have varied names so always check the group name on the DFES website before including it in communications.

# COMMONLY USED TERMS 21

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

When referring to Western Australia, write the name in full the first time, followed by the acronym WA in brackets. After this, it can be referred to simply as WA.

In informal communications, the acronym WA may be used from the outset.

It is correct to use West Australian (singular) and West Australians (plural) when referring to people. Do not use Western Australian or Western Australians.

When referring to Western Australia in all its instances it is the “State” (capitalised). For example:

- Firefighters were kept busy responding to bushfires across the State.
- Representatives from all over the State attended the conference.

Statewide should be written as one word.

Generalisations like the eastern states and other states are lower case as are nationwide and worldwide.

### FURTHER GUIDANCE

For references to State Government, see Commonly Used Terms on page 19.



## BULLET POINTS

Bullet points can simplify a complicated document. When possible limit the points to about six as too many can interrupt the flow.

It is important that your lists are structured in the same way. Items should be parallel in their wording, a consistent style should be maintained throughout and all items in the list should all be words, phrases or complete sentences, not mixed.

### For example

- If you begin your list with a verb, all other bullet points should begin with verbs; or
- If one item ends with a semicolon, they should all end with semicolons.

Consider whether point form is necessary or whether plain English will get the message across just as well.



# FORMATTING

Guidelines for bullet points are indicated below.

## SHORTER ITEMS

Single words or short phrases.

If the bullet points form a simple list with each point only containing a few words, no punctuation is required. Each bullet point must start with a capital letter.

### For example

DFES develops and delivers a range of training opportunities for Volunteer Marine Rescue Services (VMRS) volunteers:

- Marine radio operation
- Coastal navigation and radar
- Work team communications
- First aid

## LONGER ITEMS

Complete sentences.

If each bullet point contains a complete sentence they must start with a capital letter and end with a full stop.

### For example

Some fire alarms and detectors are extremely sensitive. However, some very simple steps can be taken to assist in reducing the number of false fire alarms occurring:

- Check toaster settings prior to use and do not walk away from a toaster while cooking.
- Do not smoke near or direct aerosol spray at smoke detectors.
- Understand your fire alarm system and manage work activities that may produce dust, heat, steam or smoke.
- Ensure sufficient ventilation for steam and fumes, particularly in bathrooms and kitchens.
- Switch on fans and open vents and windows before showering and cooking.
- Know where all detectors are installed and take reasonable measures to avoid false fire alarm activations.

## LONGER ITEMS

Clauses or fragments forming a single long sentence.

If the list items are not complete sentences in themselves but flow on from the introductory sentence fragment to form one complete sentence, you should separate them with semicolons. Each point should begin with a lower case letter unless it is a proper noun. You must end each dot point with a semicolon, the second last point should finish with and/or, and a full stop should be added after the last item.

### For example

To be considered for this award it would be expected that the nominee has:

- demonstrated achievement at a high level;
- made a contribution over and above what might be reasonably expected through paid employment; and

- whose voluntary contribution to the community stands out from the others who have also made a valuable contribution.

In all forms, use a small size of bullet to avoid overpowering the text. Do not use bigger dot points or swap between asterisks, circles and arrows.

### TIP

Limit the number of sentences in a paragraph.

The ideal number of sentences in a paragraph depends on what you're writing for. In DFES communication, shorter paragraphs make information easier to read on different platforms.

### For example

- Media releases usually have one or two sentences per paragraph.
- Web or social media content works best with two or three sentences per paragraph.

# FORMATTING

## CAPITALISATION

### MINIMAL CAPITALISATION

Use minimal capitalisation, including sentence case for headings and publication titles. Sentence case means only capitalising the first word and proper nouns.

### PROPER NAMES/PLACE NAMES

Proper names of people, places and organisations should begin with a capital letter.

When shortening proper nouns, such as facility names or program titles, use lower case.

#### For example

- “The Bushfire Centre of Excellence is located in Nambeelup. DFES staff regularly visit the centre to deliver training.”
- “The Department of Fire and Emergency Services works with the City of Albany to improve bushfire preparedness across the region.”

- “The State Operations Centre is located at the Emergency Services Complex in Cockburn Central.”

When referring to these in general terms, use lower case:

- “The centre provides training for emergency management personnel.”
- “Staff met at the complex to review the incident response.”

## FORMATTING AND FONT

DFES’ corporate font style is Arial Regular, size 12 point. Headings and subheadings should be Arial Bold, in size 12 to 14 point. A range of document templates can be found on the intranet under the Templates heading.

Single spacing is the preferred way to format material for all DFES documents.

## BOLD AND UNDERLINE

Bolding and underlining can only be used throughout a document to identify headings, subheadings and URLs.

## ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS

### ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility means making content understandable and usable for as many people as possible.

DFES online content may be viewed by the public, volunteers, staff and external stakeholders. It must work for:

- People of different ages and education levels.
- People with disabilities or learning difficulties.
- People using assistive technology such as screen readers or magnifiers.

To support accessibility:

- Use plain language so your message is clear to a wide audience.
- Add meaningful alternative (alt) text to images so they can be understood without being seen.

- Include captions or transcripts for videos to support people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

- Choose colours with enough contrast so text is easy to read.

Accessibility is a mandatory requirement for government agencies.

DFES follows the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2, meeting Level AA as a minimum. This helps us deliver inclusive services and meet legal obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Digital Service Standard.

### USABILITY

Usability is about how easily people can find, read and use your content. When content is usable, people can get what they need without confusion or delay.

## CAPITALISATION

To improve usability:

- Keep content short and focused
- Use headings and short paragraphs to break up text
- Put the most important information at the top of the page
- Use bullet lists, numbered steps or FAQs to organise complex information
- Link to relevant pages to save users time
- Avoid long or technical web addresses — use descriptive link text instead
- Consider using infographics or short videos to explain detailed topics

### ✓ Correct

- "The 2025-26 Annual Report is available online."

### ✗ Incorrect

- "Click here for the annual report."
- "https://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/subsite/subpage/pagename.aspx"

## FORMATTING

Well formatted content helps people scan and absorb content quickly. It also supports readability for people using assistive technology.

Mandatory formatting guidelines:

- Align all text to the left (titles, subheadings and body copy)
- Do not centre or right-align text
- Do not indent paragraphs — use blank lines between them
- Keep line length between 50 and 70 characters for readability
- Use sentence case for titles and subheadings (capitalise only the first word and any proper nouns)
- Use sentence case for body text

### ✓ Correct

- Welcome to the Online Services Branch page about web standards

### ✗ Incorrect

- Welcome To The Online Services Branch Page About Web Standards

## FURTHER GUIDANCE

For detailed guidance on accessibility and inclusive design, refer to the Australian Government Style Manual – Accessible and inclusive content.  
<https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content>

This appendix provides a list of common words and phrases that have been inconsistently or incorrectly applied in recent DFES documents.

## a

### ABBREVIATIONS

General rule is to omit the full point after a contraction. For example, Mr, St, Ltd.

### ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS OR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Capitalise the 'A' for Aboriginal peoples and communities. 'Aboriginal' is preferred over 'Indigenous'. If using 'Indigenous' to refer to people, capitalise the 'I'. If a plant or animal is indigenous to an area, 'indigenous' is written in lower case.

### ABORIGINAL

Always capitalised. (Aboriginal)

### ACT

Capitalise (Act) when referring to a specific piece of legislation. Italicise the full title of an Act only when written in full with the year at the end, for example Emergency Management Act 2005 or Fire and Emergency Services Act 1998 (FES Act). Thereafter, refer to "the Act." Subsidiary legislation, such as regulations, is capitalised but not italicised (for example, Emergency Management Regulations 2006). Refer to sections of an Act using a lower case 's', for example "under section 36 of the FES Act."

### ADDED

Don't use as a variant of "said."

### ADVISER

Not advisor.

### ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Not advisery committee.

### AFFECT/EFFECT

The verb affect means to influence something ("rainfall affects the environment"). The verb effect means to bring about a result ("training will effect a change"). Effect can also be a noun ("household effects").

### ALL RIGHT

Two words.

### AMONG

Not amongst.

### AMPERSAND (&)

Avoid.

### ANZAC

Use "Anzac" for Anzac Day, the Anzac spirit, and the Anzac Centenary. When referring to the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, use ANZAC.

### ANTENNA

Antennas (TV), antennae (insects).

### ANYWAY

Do not use "anyways".

### APPEALS

Use "appeals against", not "appeals the decision".

### APOSTROPHES

Use an apostrophe to denote ownership or contraction. Do not use apostrophes in place names (for example, St Georges Terrace or Martins Tank Campground). Do not add the second "s" for possessives (for example, boss' car, Charles' arm). "It's" means "it is"; "its" signifies possession.

# APPENDIX

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## APPROXIMATELY

Prefer “about”.

## AROUND

Use for physical location (“run around the oval”), not approximate time. Say “about 4pm”, not “around 4pm”.

## AS

Do not use for “because.”

Write “Because he had an injured leg...” not “As he had an injured leg...”

## AUSSIE

Not to be used.

## ARMY

Lower case in general reference but capitalised for the specific service (for example, Australian Regular Army).

# b

## BACK BENCH, BACKBENCHER

Two words and one word respectively.

## BARBECUE

Not barbeque or BBQ.

## BARBED

Barbed-wire fence, not barb wire.

## BEFORE

Not “prior to” or “previous to”.

## BEGIN

Or “start”, but not “commence”.

## BENEFIT

Benefited, benefiting (one “t”).

## BI-

Avoid as a prefix to time periods (for example, “bi-weekly”); use “fortnightly” or “two-monthly”.

Exception: Bicentenary.

## BIG

Not “large” or “huge” when describing severity or scale. Avoid exaggeration.

## BILL

Capitalised in a legislative sense.

## BILLION

One thousand million.

## BOAT, SHIP

Refer to as “it”, not “she”.

## BOTH

Reconsider using; often unnecessary.

## BUDGET

Capitalised for the specific government budget, lower case for general use.

# C

## CABINET

Capitalised for government; lower case for furniture.

## CAMPGROUND

One word; refers to a group of individual campsites at one location.

## CAMPSITE

One word; refers to an individual tent or caravan space.

## CAPITAL LETTERS

Use minimal capitalisation. Write headings and sentences in sentence case, capitalising only the first word and proper nouns.

## CARPARK

One word.

## CHILDREN

Preferred over “kids” or “juveniles”.

## CLEAN-UP/CLEAN UP

Hyphenated when noun/adjective; two words as verb (“Staff took part in a clean-up”)

## CLICHÉS

Avoid phrases like “mountainous seas” or “rushed to hospital”.

## COLLECTIVE NOUNS

Use singular verbs when referring to one entity (“DFES has...” not “DFES have...”).

## COLON (:)

Capitalise after a colon only if starting a quote.

## COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT

Preferred over “Federal Government” or “Australian Government”.

## CONTROLLED (FIRE)

When the complete perimeter of a bushfire is secured and no breakaway fire is expected.

## COORDINATE/ COOPERATION

Not hyphenated.

## COUNTRY

Capitalised when referring to Aboriginal peoples’ relationship with land and waters.

## COVID-19

Capitalised and hyphenated. Avoid dramatic language.

## CROWN

Upper case when in reference to government.

## d

### DATES

Use “dd month yyyy” (for example, 4 March 2025). Use 2024–25, not 2024/25.

### DEPARTMENT

Lower case except in annual report or Ministerial correspondence.

### DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL

No hyphen; capitalise when followed by a name.

### DIRECT QUOTES

After the first direct quote, insert “Mr/Ms [Name] said”.

## e

### E.G

Avoid. Use “for example”.

### ELDER

Capitalised.

### ETC

Avoid, especially after “for example” or “including”.

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Capitalised if followed by a name.

## f

### FACT

Avoid “the fact that”; simplify (“because he owed money,” not “because of the fact that he owed money”).

### FIREFIGHTER / FIREFIGHTING

One word.

### FIRE CREW

Two words.

### FIRE FRONT

The most intense part of a fire mass, driven by wind speed and direction.

### FLOODWATER

One word.

### FOCUS / FOCUSING / FOCUSED

One "s".

### FORWARD SLASH(/)

Avoid; use “to” or an en dash (–) for ranges.

### FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE

Hyphenated; use 4WD only where space is limited.

## g

### GOVERNMENT

Lower case unless part of a proper noun (for example, State Government).

### GOVERNOR

His Excellency the Honourable Chris Dawson AC APM, Governor of Western Australia.

### GROUNDBREAKING / GROUNDWATER

One word.

## h

### HEAD FIRE

The part of the fire where the rate of spread and intensity are greatest.

### HECTARES

Spell out in full unless space is limited.

### HIKE/HIKE TRAIL

Preferred over “walk/walk trail”.

### HON

No full stop when abbreviating Honourable.

### HORSERIDING

One word.

### HOTSPOT

One word.

### HOUSE

Capitalised when referring to Houses of Parliament.

### HYPHENS

Use for compound adjectives (for example, “four-wheel drive”, “whole-of-government”) but not for coordinate/cooperate/statewide.

# APPENDIX

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## i

### I.E.

Avoid. Rewrite instead.

### INDIGENOUS

Capital “I” when referring to people; lower case for flora/fauna. “Aboriginal” is preferred.

### INITIALS

No punctuation (for example, CJM Smith).

### INTERSTATE / INTERAGENCY

One word.

### ITS VS IT’S

“It’s” means “it is”.  
“Its” signifies possession.

## j

### JOB TITLES

Capitalise when immediately preceding a person’s name (“District Officer Peter Lawson”), lower case otherwise.

## k

### KIMBERLEY

Not “Kimberly” or “the Kimberleys”.

### KINGS PARK

Lower case “p” for “the park”.

### KM/KILOMETRES

Abbreviate when used with numerals.

## L

### LANDLINE

One word.

### LEGISLATION

See “Act”.

### LICENCE/LICENSE

Licence (noun) / License (verb)

### LICENSEE

Not licencee.

### LIFE CYCLE

Two words.

### LIGHTNING

Not lightening.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SHIRES

Capitalise full names at first mention. Lower case thereafter.

## m

### MINISTERIAL TITLE

Write as “Emergency Services Minister” or “Minister for Emergency Services”. Where a Minister has multiple portfolios, list only relevant ones.

### MORE THAN

Use “more than” instead of “over” (except for height: “The helicopter flew over 1,500 metres”).

### MOUNTAINOUS

Avoid clichés.

## n

### NATIVE TITLE

Capitalised.

### NOONGAR

Preferred spelling per South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council.

### NUMBERS

Spell out to nine; use numerals for 10 and above.

### NATIONWIDE

One word.

## O

### ON CALL / ON-CALL

Use “on call” when it stands alone (e.g. “The officer is on call tonight”).

Use “on-call” when it functions as an adjective before a noun (e.g. “She is the on-call officer”).

## p

### PARLIAMENT

Capitalised.

### PART-TIME / FULL-TIME

Hyphenated.

### PER CENT

Two words.

Use the symbol (%) only in tables.

### PILBARA

Capitalised.

### PLACE NAMES

Watch for dropped apostrophes (for example, Kings Park, St Georges Terrace).

### PRACTICE/PRACTISE

Practice is the noun; practise is the verb.

### PREVENTIVE

Not preventative.

### PROGRAM

Not programme.

## q

### QUANTITIES

Weights and measures are singular (“10mm of rain was recorded”).

### QUOTATION MARKS

Comma or full stop inside closing quote.

## r

### RECORDKEEPING

One word.

### REPORTED SPEECH

Use past tense (“the Commissioner said he would...”).

### ROADSIDE

One word.

## S

### SCHOOL TERMS

Term One, Term Two, Term Three,  
Term Four.

### SCHOOL YEARS

Year 1; Years 3 and 4.

### SEASONS

Lower case generally; capitalise  
Noongar seasons (for example, Birak).

### SENTENCES

Avoid starting with “And,” “But,”  
or “Though”.

### STATE

Upper case when referring to  
Western Australia.

### STATE OF EMERGENCY

Capitalised in sentence case.  
(State of Emergency).

### STATEWIDE

One word.

### STORMWATER

One word.

## t

### TARGETED

One “t”.

### TEMPERATURE

Use “25C” for degrees Celsius.

### THANK YOU

Two words.

### TIMES

8am, 8:45am, 12 noon, 1pm.

### TONNE

Metric tonne.

### TOWN SITE

Two words.

### TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS / TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Capitalised.

### TREASURY

Upper case “T”.

## U

### UNDERLINING

Avoid except for URLs.

### UNTIL

Not “till” or “up until.”

### URLS

Omit www. and https://.

## V

### VERY

Usually unnecessary.

## W

### WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Write in full with acronym in brackets on first mention. For example, Western Australia (WA). WA acceptable later.

### WHEN

Use carefully; not as a substitute for “after”.

### WHICH / THAT

Prefer “that” except when adding extra information.

### WHILE

Not whilst.

### WIFI

Lower case.

### WUNAAMIN MILIWUNDI RANGES

(Formerly King Leopold Ranges).  
One word.

### WORTH

For damage, prefer “valued at ...”.

### ACRONYMS

The [DFES Acronym List](#) provides a comprehensive list of acronyms currently used within the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

#### FURTHER GUIDANCE

Can't find the acronym you're looking for, or spotted an error?

Email [style@dfes.wa.gov.au](mailto:style@dfes.wa.gov.au)



## WRITING CHECKLIST

When preparing written material use the following checklist to make sure it meets the guidelines set out in this Guide.

- Have you identified the audience and tailored the content?
- Is the purpose of the document clear and accurate?
- Is the content concise?
- Can the audience find what they are looking for easily?
- Does the content flow in a logical order?
- Have you used plain English and short, simple sentences?
- Have you used the conventions stated in the Writing Style Guide?
- Have you used the correct spelling?
- Have you used the correct formatting and font so the content is easily read?
- Have you used the correct style for bullet points?
- Have you proofread the content and corrected any grammatical errors?
- Have you checked that any hyperlinks work correctly?
- If the content is for an online platform have you used the tips for online communications stated in this guide?

# CONCLUSION

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## FEEDBACK AND FURTHER INFORMATION

### FURTHER GUIDANCE

If you need assistance or if this style guide does not cover a particular topic, please contact [style@dfes.wa.gov.au](mailto:style@dfes.wa.gov.au).

The [Australian Government Style Manual](#) also provides handy tips and advice on writing, editing and publishing. While DFES follows its own internal style conventions, the Style Manual can be a useful reference for general principles of clear, consistent and accessible communication.

