Quick guide: spelling, capitals, links and dashes

Spelling and the dictionary

Your agency is likely to have a preferred Australian dictionary. Style Manual recommends the *Australian concise Oxford dictionary* or the *Macquarie dictionary*.

Check the meaning and spelling of words in your agency's preferred dictionary. Use the spelling of the first word in the entry (the 'headword'). The headword is the most common spelling. Using the headword helps to make spelling consistent across agency content.

Check the dictionary for guidance on hyphenation, capitalisation, plural forms and derogatory or offensive use.

> **Example**
>
> higgledy-piggledy *not* higgledy piggledy [Hyphenation]
>
> winter *not* Winter [Capitalisation]

Visit stylemanual.gov.au and search 'spelling'.

Capital letters

Minimise your use of capital letters. Overusing capital letters can disrupt the flow of reading.

Capitalise the first word in a sentence. Use lower case for all other words, except for proper nouns. Follow the same style for headings.

> **Write this**
>
> The information session is about Australian scholarships and grants.

> **Not this**
>
> The Information Session is about Australian Scholarships and Grants.

Use lower case for generic references to organisational names, titles and programs. Using lower case in this way isn't disrespectful. 'Australian Government' is capitalised: 'the government' is not.

> **Example**
>
> Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, then 'the department'
>
> Minister for the Public Service, then 'the minister'
>
> Advancing Renewables Program, then 'the program'

Visit stylemanual.gov.au and search 'punctuation and capitalisation'.

Links

Only use links when they support a user need. Use descriptive links (words that describe the link destination) not 'click here'.

Try to put links at the end of sentences. This:

- improves readability
- ensures users read the whole sentence before clicking the link.

> **Example**
>
> Before you go overseas, check advice on the <u>Smartraveller website</u>.

Link to the landing page that hosts a file (e.g. PDF or Word document), not to the file itself.

If you must link to a file, include the document title (not file name), file type and size.

> **Example**
>
> Find out more about Australia in *<u>Australia in brief</u>* <u>[PDF 13 MB]</u>.

Visit <u>stylemanual.gov.au</u> and search 'links'.

En dashes

Use 'from … to' or 'between … and' instead of an en dash for spans of years.

> **Example**
>
> from 57 to 65 years
>
> between 1970 and 1980

There are exceptions. Use an en dash in date spans for:

- financial years
- calendar years
- titles of publications and programs
- terms of office
- lifespans (birth and death)
- content in limited space.

Use an unspaced en dash in most instances.

> **Example**
>
> the 2024–25 financial year
>
> Nora Heysen AM (1911–2003)

Use a spaced en dash in sentences to set off non-essential information.

> **Example**
>
> They invited 3 employees – Walter, Yana and Aya – to the presentation.

Use the correct symbol. The table below shows 3 ways to code the en dash, minus symbol and hyphen.

	– en dash	**– minus symbol**	**- hyphen**
Unicode (type the character code, then press Alt x)	U+2013	U+2212	U+2010
HTML entity	–	−	‐
Word	Ctrl+minus symbol on the number pad	Unicode or HTML entity preferred	Press the hyphen key

Visit <u>stylemanual.gov.au</u> and search 'dashes'.