



Drop The Anchor

Policies and Editorial Guidelines

MEAA Code of Ethics

Respect for truth and the public's right to information are fundamental principles of journalism. Journalists search, disclose, record, question, entertain, comment and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They scrutinise power, but also exercise it, and should be responsible and accountable.

Journalists will educate themselves about ethics and apply the following standards:

1. Report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress relevant available facts, or give distorting emphasis. Do your utmost to give a fair opportunity for reply.
2. Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability.
3. Aim to attribute information to its source. Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source's motives and any alternative attributable source. Where confidences are accepted, respect them in all circumstances.
4. Do not allow personal interest, or any belief, commitment, payment, gift or benefit, to undermine your accuracy, fairness or independence.
5. Disclose conflicts of interest that affect, or could be seen to affect, the accuracy, fairness or independence of your journalism. Do not improperly use a journalistic position for personal gain.
6. Do not allow advertising or other commercial considerations to undermine accuracy, fairness or independence.
7. Do your utmost to ensure disclosure of any direct or indirect payment made for interviews, pictures, information or stories.
8. Use fair, responsible and honest means to obtain material. Identify yourself and your employer before obtaining any interview for publication or broadcast. Never exploit a person's vulnerability or ignorance of media practice.
9. Present pictures and sound which are true and accurate. Any manipulation likely to mislead should be disclosed.
10. Do not plagiarise.
11. Respect private grief and personal privacy. Journalists have the right to resist compulsion to intrude.
12. Do your utmost to achieve fair correction of errors.

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To maintain a high standard of reporting and trust from the public, Drop the Anchor follows the Advisory Guidelines published by the Australian Press Council (APC).

- Family and Domestic Violence Reporting:
[Advisory Guideline on Family and Domestic Violence Reporting 09072021_CURRENT.pdf](#)
- Reporting on Persons with Diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Sex Characteristics: [Advisory-Guideline-Reporting-on-persons-with-diverse CURRENT.pdf](#)
- Reporting Elections:
[Advisory-Guideline-on-Reporting-Elections-22-April-2022_CURRENT.pdf](#)
- Reporting on Opinion Polls: [Reporting on Opinion Polls - Australian Press Council](#)
- Digital alteration of images: [Final_for_website_at_12-01-18_Alteration_of_Images.pdf](#)
- 'Asylum seekers', 'illegal immigrants' and entry without a visa: ['Asylum seekers', 'illegal immigrants' and entry without a visa - Australian Press Council](#)
- References to Religion and Ethnicity: [Guideline: References to Religion and Ethnicity - Australian Press Council](#)
- Reporting of 'race': [Guideline: Reporting of 'race' - Australian Press Council](#)
- Reporting on drugs and drug addiction: [Guideline: Drugs and drug addiction - Australian Press Council](#)
- Guidelines on health and medical matters: [Guideline: Health and medical matters - Australian Press Council](#)

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Style Guide

To ensure our reporting is carried out with accuracy and appropriate sensitivity, we follow the publicly available [Australian Broadcasting Corporation's guidance for the preparation and editing of digital news](#).

A

4chan, 8chan

Note the lower case for these imageboards.

A-list

Cap the initial letter: *A-list*, *D-grade*.

a lot

Two words.

abdicate, abrogate

Both verbs refer to renouncing or relinquishing a right or power.

Aboriginal, aboriginal

Upper case in all references to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, or to First Nations people of the US or Canada.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander references

Always upper case *Aboriginal* and *Indigenous* in reference to First Nations people or cultures. Avoid using *Aboriginal* as a noun. Avoid *Aborigine* outside of quotes. Where possible, describe people the way they wish to be described. This could be a specific community or language group: *a Yuin woman*, *a Bundjalung elder*. It could be also more general: *the Torres Strait Islander woman*, *an Aboriginal man*. Avoid regional descriptors (e.g. *Murri*, *Koori*) unless it's a stated preference.

In collective reference: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups*, *First Nations communities*, *Indigenous people*, etc. See entry **First Nations, Indigenous, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander**. Torres Strait Islanders are a distinct group and should not be described as *Aboriginal* or *TsIs*.

abortion

When referring to pro- or anti-abortion campaigners or protests, avoid the terms *pro-life* and *pro-choice*. These labels are emotive. Instead of phrases like *pro-life supporter*, use *anti-abortion campaigner*. Instead of *pro-choice*, use *abortion rights*.

abortion clinics

Abortion is generally not the only service provided by these clinics. In stories where the focus is not on abortion itself, consider a less emotive descriptor: *women's health centres* or *reproductive health centres*.

academic departments

Our style: *department of history*, *department of economics* (no capitals).

accent marks, diacritical marks, non-English characters

Use accent or other diacritical marks in names where requested, or where such marks are in wide use: *Barça*, *Charlotte Brontë*, *La Niña*. Do not use accents for long-established loanwords in English: *cafe*, *facade*. If unsure, check a dictionary.

acres

Use hectares. One hectare is 10,000 square metres or 2.47 acres.

acronym, initialisms

Limit the use of unfamiliar acronyms. If you need to use them, though, spell out in first reference and, from second reference, use the abbreviated form: *A report was sent to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) on 5 June 2014. The ACMA responded in late July.* Some acronyms are acceptable without explanation, in headlines and elsewhere. Use your judgement. Occasionally, a descriptive sentence is preferable to spelling out: *football's governing body FIFA*, *UN children's agency UNICEF*. Purists maintain abbreviations pronounced as a word (*radar*, *NATO*) are *acronyms*, and abbreviations pronounced by letter (*DPRK*, *CIA*) are *initialisms*. Usage has long been indifferent to this distinction, and some abbreviations (*RAAF*) are both.

actor

Default term for male and female members of the acting professions. Retain the gendered term for awards: *best actress*, *best supporting actress*.

acts, bills, white papers

None of these need capitals, unless you're using the official name of an act. *Native Title Act 1993*, but *the act was passed in 1993*.

active voice, passive voice

In grammar, voice refers to the relationship between the verb, the subject, and the object of a sentence. In active constructions, the subject of the sentence carries out the action of the verb: *Australia beat England at Lords*. In passive constructions, the subject of the sentence receives the action of the verb: *England was beaten by Australia*. The passive voice is sometimes condemned on the grounds its use can mask the agent of an action or come across as bureaucratic or impersonal: *the sign was later removed*, *it is felt the school should take action*. This criticism misses the point — the passive voice has its uses, especially in news copy. Recounting events is a common one, as is emphasising the effect of an action on the subject: *the hospital was bombed by Islamic State militants*.

AD, BC

Our style: *AD 1100*, *45 BC*, *the first century AD*, *second century BC*. Note the space. *AD* and *BC* remain the more familiar terms and are generally preferred over *CE* and *BCE*.

admit, admits, admitted

Use sparingly, as it implies a hint of guilt or acknowledgement of wrongdoing.

adoption, surrogacy

Mention a person's donor status only when relevant. Avoid terms such as *real mother* or *real father* outside of quotations. In donor contexts avoid use of the verb fathered: *Labor MP revealed as sperm donor for five children as surrogacy debate continues.*

AEDT, AEST

AEDT stands for Australian Eastern Daylight Time, and is used when daylight saving is in force. AEST stands for Australian Eastern Standard Time, and is used when daylight saving is over. It is easy to get confused and think the S stands for *summer*. It doesn't. It stands for *standard*. Avoid using *Australian Eastern Time*. For nearly six months of the year, east coast states do not share a uniform time zone.

affect, effect

Affect, as a verb, means to influence something or someone: *the man was clearly affected by alcohol*. Effect, as a verb, means to bring about: *alcohol effected a change in his behaviour*. Effect, as a noun, means something produced by a cause or agent: *alcohol can have a surprising effect*.

affidavit

A written statement on oath, sworn to before an authorised official, often used as evidence in court proceedings. Avoid *sworn affidavit*.

afforestation, reforestation

Not reafforestation.

Afghan, Afghani

The people: *Afghan*. The currency: *Afghani*.

AFL

Though used to describe the sport as a whole, some prefer to limit this word's meaning to the sport's governing body and attendant national league: *the AFL today announced... Cockatoo hasn't played AFL football since April*, but not *the game of AFL*.

African American

Do not hyphenate. Refers to Americans of African descent. Not always interchangeable with *black*: the latter term encompasses a range of backgrounds (e.g. African-born American citizens, Americans of mixed heritage, Caribbean diasporas). Be specific where possible, and follow a person's preference. If specific reference to a person's background in an American context is required but you cannot determine a preference, prefer *black* to *African American*.

African Australian

Do not hyphenate. This is an umbrella term. Be specific where possible when describing individuals: *Ghanaian Australian*, *Sudanese Australian*, etc.

Afrikaans, Afrikaners

For the language: *Afrikaans*. For the people: *Afrikaners*.

after

The preposition *after* can be ambiguous. Take the following sentence: *A teenager was killed after a boating accident.* Was the boating accident the cause of death? Or a subsequent drowning? Often better to use *when* or *by*.

age, ages

In Australia, anyone 18 or older is regarded as an adult by law. A person 18 or older should be called a *man* or *woman*. When describing people younger than 18: *boy, girl, teenager, children*. When reporting on 18- and 19-year-olds suspected or convicted of criminal activity, do not refer to them as teenagers, but rather as men, women, or other labels appropriate to their legal status. In generic reference to older Australians: *older people, older Australians*. Be aware that generic descriptors relating to age can cause offence or be perceived as containing bias: *the geriatric man, the young senator*.

aged care facility

Though this term is in standard usage, there's nothing wrong with using *aged care home*. These compounds are generally not hyphenated.

agender

People who choose not to be defined by their gender. Many who identify this way prefer to use gender-neutral pronouns.

agreement of person

Subjects and verbs should agree in person and number. It's not unusual to see some copy start in the third person only to switch to the first person: *Many Australians plant native trees in our gardens.* This is incorrect, and should be: *Many Australians plant native trees in their gardens.*

aid, aide

Study aid, aid and abet, a hearing aid, but an assistant is an *aide*. The latter survives in terms borrowed from French: *aide-de-camp, aide-memoire*, etc.

AIDS

No need to spell out as it has become common usage. People who carry the virus which can cause AIDS are *HIV-positive* but do not necessarily *have AIDS*. They can be described as *having the AIDS virus*. People do not *die of AIDS*, but *from AIDS-related illnesses*. Avoid: *HIV virus, AIDS victims*.

aircraft, aircraft carrier, airline, airport

But *aerodrome, aeroplane, aeronautics, air strikes*. Aircraft can normally be referred to as *planes*, and certainly not in the official jargon of *fixed-wing aircraft*. *Plane* is short for *aeroplane*. Don't say *airplane*. When an aircraft is forced to land we say that it (or the pilot) made an *emergency landing*. When an aircraft crashes do not try to soften the impact by saying it *crash-landed*.

Air Force One

Note the capitals.

aka, a.k.a., AKA

All are in use, though our preference is *aka*.

al-, el-, Arabic definite article

The article in Arabic personal and place names can be romanised a variety of ways: where possible, check with your source. In situations where you cannot, a good option is generally to hyphenate and lower case: *Bashar al-Assad*, *Nouri al-Maliki*.

Al Qaeda

alibi

Often used colloquially to refer to any kind of general excuse or explanation. Avoid this colloquialism in formal news contexts.

all right, alright

Both are acceptable.

all together, altogether

Not interchangeable. The latter, an adverb, means wholly or entirely: *the laws should be scrapped altogether*. The former refers to parts achieving unison: *to it was a relief to see him put it all together on race day*.

allude to

Means to refer to indirectly. Not to be confused with *elude*, which means to escape or avoid.

alt-right

Avoid this term outside of direct quotes. For stories where its use is integral, clarify what is meant with a definition or examples.

alternate, alternative

In adjectival senses, broadly interchangeable: *an alternate solution*, *alternate source of revenue*.

Alzheimer's disease

Note the apostrophe and initial capital (named after Alois Alzheimer).

ambition

You *realise* or *fulfil* a dream or an ambition; you *reach* or *achieve* a goal — you can't *achieve* an ambition, even if you climb every mountain.

American

Inhabitants of both North and South America can theoretically be referred to as *Americans*, although the term is most often used in reference to citizens of the United States. Canadians should be referred to as *Canadians*. If you are referring just to the United States of America make sure, specify that in first reference.

American Indians, Native Americans

Both terms are in use to describe Americans of Indigenous background. Prefer *Native Americans* for generic or collective reference; where possible, be specific for individuals.

American spellings

Use American spellings for organisation or place names that contain them: *World Health Organization*, *World Trade Center*, *Pearl Harbor*.

among, between

Usage depends on the number of people or things you are referring to. For example, an argument is “between” two people, but “among” three or more; a competition is “between” two teams, but “among” three or more. But it is appropriate to “choose between six kinds of jam”.

amount, number

The rule often stated is that amount refers to volume, and number to quantities: *a number of cows produced an amount of gas*. Like many such rules, it has no basis in usage or English grammar; its origin is likely personal preference. There is substantial evidence over time, from spontaneous speech to edited prose, that *amount* can be used with plural count nouns when the count noun is being conceived of as an aggregate: *the amount of resources*, *a large amount of drugs*.

ampersand, &

Avoid unless part of company name, trademark, or financial market.

analyst

As a job description, it can be ambiguous. The audience is usually better off knowing who is saying something, and where they’re saying it from. If you’re reporting what a generally held view: *some financial market economists*, *some political analysts*.

ancestors, descendants

Ancestors are the people who came before you. Descendants will come after you.

animals

Generally, animals take the pronoun *it* over *she* or *he*. Exceptions include named animals such as race horses, or stories where an animal’s sex is relevant. Generic animal names only take a capital when they contain proper nouns: *Tasmanian devils*, *yellow-footed rock wallaby*.

anniversary

Anniversaries relate to yearly occurrences (a clue, *annus*, is in the word’s etymology). Two tendencies infuriate pedants and are best avoided. The first is the use of *anniversary* to mark spans of weeks or months: *six month anniversary*, *twelve month anniversary*. The second is using the word with *year*, as in *one year anniversary*. This is tautological. Use *first anniversary* instead.

Antarctica, the Antarctic

Antarctica is the name of the continent within the Antarctic region.

antenatal

Means before birth. Take care not to confuse with anti-natal, a different thing entirely.

anticipate, expect

Many language critics hold that *anticipate* should not be used where *expect* is intended: *COAG leaders anticipate long day*. This is assuredly the etymological fallacy at work. Words can have more than one meaning at a time, and can shed (or grow) meanings with the passage of time. Probably the most that can be said here is that *anticipate* should not be used for *expect* in the rare case where the difference would be material. Take the following headline: *Police anticipate bikie violence*. Does that mean police think violence is likely, or that they've allocated resources to prepare for an imminent gang war? If, in such an instance, it's the *expect* sense you mean, just say *expect*.

antisemite, antisemitic, antisemitism

anti-vaccination, anti-vax, anti-vaxxer

Take care with such descriptors: community attitudes to vaccination are varied, outright rejection is generally a minority view. Focus on an individual's actions, rather than labels: *Cartwright has refused to take the flu vaccine ahead of the NRL season... The NRL said its players could be exempted in exceptional circumstances such as on religious, medical or conscientious grounds*.

antiviral

Do not hyphenate.

Anzac, Anzac Day

For general use: *Anzac Day celebrations, Anzac biscuits, the Anzac spirit*.

Apostles Creed

No apostrophe.

Arab, Arabic

When *Arab* modifies nouns, it generally refers to social or political constructs: *Arab governments, Arab women, Arab leaders*. *Arabic*, as a modifier, refers to specifically to the language: *Arabic speakers, Arabic script, Arabic schools*. A final point: *Arab poetry* would most likely be read as referring to poetic works written by Arab people (that is, not necessarily in Arabic).

Arab-Israeli

While a common descriptor for Israeli citizens of Arab ethnicity, it is not universally adopted. Many object to this term, preferring alternatives: *Palestinian citizen of Israel, Palestinian-Israeli, Israeli*, etc. Where possible, confirm with your talent.

ARIAs

No need to spell out the acronym, but say *ARIA Awards* in the first reference in the story (note: you need to cap *Awards*).

armed forces

Upper case the full names of military organisations: *the Australian Army, the US Navy, the Royal Air Force, the French Armée de l'Air*. Downcap in generic, plural and all other instances: *Scott Morrison will send in the army as Victoria's bushfire crisis worsens, the US and Chinese navies are facing off in the Pacific, a German air force pilot was killed during a training mission*.

arson, arsonist

Take care applying these terms to bushfires. In Australian law, *arson* often has a specific legal meaning implying intention, recklessness, or property damage. Most jurisdictions have a separate crime for bushfire offences, which include unintentional lighting of fires. Avoid the salacious *firebug*, *pyro*.

artistic works

No italics or quotes for book titles, film titles, play titles, poem titles, etc. But they do take capitals: *A Clockwork Orange*, *A Doll's House*. Articles (the, a) and shorter conjunctions or prepositions (on, and) are usually not capped: *Lord of the Rings*. An exception is if they begin the title: *And Then There Were None*.

Asian Australian

Do not hyphenate. This is an umbrella term. Be specific where possible when describing individuals: *Tawainese Australian*, *Filipino Australian*, *Vietnamese Australian*, etc.

Asia-Pacific

Takes the hyphen in use such as 'Asia-Pacific region'.

aspirin

Generic term, so no capital.

asteroid, meteor, meteorite

Not interchangeable. An *asteroid* is any rocky body, usually orbiting the Sun. *Meteors* are matter from outer space that become incandescent after entering the earth's atmosphere. *Meteorites* are rocks or other matter that have survived the bumpy trip to the earth's surface.

assassin

Political and religious leaders, or the similarly conspicuous, are *assassinated*. The rest of us, sadly, are *murdered*.

asylum seekers

Use *asylum seeker* to describe people who arrive in Australia (including Australian waters) without travel documents, claiming (or apparently claiming) refugee status. If authorities recognise a valid claim for protection, such people could be referred to as *refugees*. Avoid inaccurate modifiers with the term *asylum seeker*, e.g. *unlawful asylum seeker*, *illegal asylum seeker*. Under international law, anyone can apply for asylum.

at about

Avoid.

attain

Not just a fancy synonym for *obtain*, this word implies the reach or achievement of something by continued effort. (The object is normally something immaterial, such as goals, ambitions or a position.) *Obtain* means to get or acquire something — usually something tangible, often as a result of effort or a request. Usually it's something tangible.

Attorney-General

Hyphenated. We use capitals since it is effectively a ministerial title.

auditor-general

lower case

augur, auger

An *auger* is a hole-boring tool. *Augurs* are portents, omens, etc.

autism

A variety of terms exist to describe people on the autism spectrum. These include, but are not limited to: *being autistic*, *being a person with autism*, *having an autism spectrum disorder*, or *being on the autism spectrum*. Most autistic people prefer identity-first forms such as *autistic person*. Your safest bet is to check with the person or people you're describing.

average

Not interchangeable with *normal*, as in: *the average of a four-year-old is 106 centimetres*.

averse to

Not to be confused with *adverse*.

ayatollah

Upper case when using as a title: *Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei*. Lower case elsewhere: *as supreme leader, the ayatollah is Iran's head of state and commander-in-chief*.

B

baby boomers, boomers

While well established, note that the term *boomers* can have derogatory connotations.

bachelor

A bit old-school. Better to use *unmarried man*, or *single*.

backburning, burn-off, burning-off

Not interchangeable in emergency situations. Burning off (sometimes referred to as controlled burning) is the clearing of land before fire season by the use of fire. Backburning is a method of fire control, where an area in the path of an approaching fire is burned into or against the wind.

backflip

Some commentators rail against the use of *backflip* to mean a political reversal. Despite their chagrin, this sense is established in Australian English dictionaries and attested in edited newspaper sources as far back as the 1940s.

backup

Police call for *backup* (noun) but you *back up* (verb) to a door, or *back up* (verb) your files.

bacteria

Bacteria is plural of bacterium. Never write *the bacteria is*. While we're here: *bacillus* is singular. *Bacilli* is plural.

bad rap

Give someone a *bad rap*, but *wrap up* the day's news.

BAFTAs

No need to spell out the acronym, but say *BAFTA Awards* in the first reference in the story. *Cap Awards*.

bailout, bail out

The former is the noun form: *a \$700 million bailout*. The latter is the verb: *somehow we are always ready to bail out farmers when they strike drought*.

band names

Cap the definite article if part of the name: *The Beatles*, *The Who*. Lower case if not: *the Rolling Stones*. Not all bands take the definite article: *Arctic Monkeys*, *Talking Heads*. Always check. Generally, bands are plural entities. So, *Talking Heads were rubbish last night*, not *Talking Heads was rubbish*.

bandaid

No capitals and no hyphen in generic reference. In reference to the specific product: *Band-Aid*. In reference to the 1984 musical fundraising event, two separate words, capitalised: *Band Aid*.

Bank of Queensland, BOQ

The shortened form is *BOQ*, not *BoQ*.

barbecue

Not *BBQ* or *barbeque*.

barometer

Figurative use is fine: *search histories can be used as a barometer of social awareness*. But avoid using in place of a word like *indicator*, as in: *historical dramas are a barometer of how an audience perceives the past*.

base jump

A parachute jump from a structure such as a tall building, bridge, etc, as opposed to a jump from an aeroplane.

basically

Often a superfluous word in news writing.

bated breath

Not *baited*.

bazaar

A market, but *bizarre* is odd. The OMC smash hit is *How Bizarre*.

bee's knees

Just the one bee.

beg the question, begs the question

This phrase comes to English from a (reportedly quite bad) translation of the Latin term *petitio principii*, referring to a specific type of circular reasoning, where the premise of an argument assumes its conclusion. Nowadays, *beg the question* is commonly used in a more literal sense: *The closure of [the Hazelwood power plant] begs the question: what will replace it?* Both meanings are now considered acceptable, so take care not to confuse when using the term.

beggars description, beggars belief

Indescribable.

behead

In some contexts, *behead* can be more appropriate than a word than *decapitate*. It refers to a deliberate action; *decapitation* can be accidental or have a non-human agent.

bellwether

Not *bellweather*. Means a leader of opinion (literally a castrated ram with a bell around its neck, used to lead a flock of sheep). You asked!

Berlin Wall

Cap the W.

bete noire

Doesn't need a circumflex.

better, best

Better is the comparative of *good*, and *best* is the superlative. So it's *the better* of two choices, but *the best* of three or more. Never double the comparative — e.g. *more better* — unless aiming for laughs.

betting odds

100-1, 10-1, etc. En rule, don't hyphen, for spans of numbers.

between you and me

Not *between you and I*.

biannual

Twice a year ([biennial](#) is every two years).

Bible

Capitalised when referring to one with the Old and New Testaments. Lower case for adjective or generic forms: *biblical proportions*, *the cricketer's bible*.

Bible references

Written like this: *Mark 6:3*, *John 3:2–4*, *Psalms 12:1–2*. Note the use of the en rule (not a hyphen).

bicentenary, bicentennial

200th anniversary.

biennial

Every two years (biannual is twice a year).

Big Apple

Needs caps when used as a nickname referring exclusively to New York.

billion

Means one thousand million, not one million million. When reading for broadcast, make sure to emphasise the b to distinguish *billion* from *million*.

bite

A sound bite (a byte is a number of binary digits, or bits, usually 8).

BitTorrent

One word, capital B and T. It is a trademark.

black, Black

Do not use as a noun. In the Australian context, *black* is primarily an in-group term; be wary of its use outside quotes. The term can refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or to diaspora groups. In international use it often, though not exclusively, refers to African Americans. See further at **African American**.

Capitalised and respelled variants are in increasing in-group use: *Black*, *blak*. These variants are tied to specific ideas of empowerment and reclamation, and should be respected where appropriate (e.g. direct quotes, feature writing). Umbrella acronyms (e.g. *BAME*, *BIPOC*, *POC*) are often not preferred in individual reference and may be unfamiliar to audiences.

BlackBerry

Note the mid-word capital letter. Plural is *BlackBerrys*.

Black Hawk helicopter

Not Blackhawk.

blaze the trail

Means showing the way for others who come after you. So *blazing a new trail* is a tautology.

bloc

political group

blonde, blond

If used as a noun form — *a blonde*, say — then *blonde* is generally used in English to describe women, and *blond* to describe men. But *blond* (adjective) for generic or inanimate use.

blue-ribbon, blue riband, blue ribbon

Hyphenated form is standard as an attributive for a safe political seat, or a mark of excellence: *the blue-ribbon Liberal electorate of Warringah, Dangerfield and Selwood are blue-ribbon midfielders*. An alternative spelling, *blue riband*, is something of an archaism.

boat, ship

The words are not easily defined, but generally ships are large and ocean-going, and anything that is not ocean-going and has an outboard motor or oars is a boat. It's commonly explained that you can put a boat on a ship but not a ship on a boat. Never use *vessel* in broadcast language.

boat people

Avoid outside of quotes. See entries at **asylum seeker**, **illegal immigrant**.

Booker Prize

Often referred to as *the Booker*. Capitalise and use the full name in the first reference. In subsequent reference, *the Booker Prize* or *the prize*.

born, borne

Both are forms of the verb to bear. Use the former for passive past tense descriptions of birth: *I was born in Queensland*. Otherwise, use the latter form: *she had borne a child to him, the plan was was borne out of desperation*.

both

Use to refer to two things, not three or more: *Last year the leaders of both Germany and Britain declared their multicultural policies had been a failure*.

botox

Originally a trademark, this has now moved into common usage and doesn't need a capital letter. Adjectival form: *botoxed*.

breach, breech

A breach of protocol, the flood levee has been breached, but the baby is in breech position, and the doctor was wearing breeches.

breakdown (noun) break down (verb)

A family breakdown might give us a nervous breakdown, but we might say a relationship is likely to break down, or 'Let's break those figures down.'

breakthrough

Use sparingly — and never pair with its cliched-partner *dramatic*.

bring, buy

Take care to distinguish between the past tense of bring (*brought*), and the past tense of buy (*bought*): *the astronauts were brought back from space, I bought some apples at the shop*.

Britain, Great Britain, the United Kingdom, the UK

Not interchangeable, strictly speaking. The constituent countries of *Great Britain* are England, Wales, and Scotland. *The United Kingdom* includes Northern Ireland. It is commonplace, even in UK sources, to see *Britain* used as shorthand for the United Kingdom as a whole, but there may be times where distinctions should be made clear.

broadband

Download speed is generally measured in bits per second, not bytes. Abbreviate *megabits per second* or *gigabits per second* as follows: *Mbps*, *Gbps*. Avoid *megabytes* and *gigabytes* in discussion of download speeds: the difference can be material, as there are eight bits in a byte.

brotherboy, sistergirl

Used in a range of contexts by Indigenous people. In general, the terms refer to transgender Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.

Brownies

Upper case when referring to girls' organisation (step before Girl Guides). Lower case in generic culinary or other reference: *choc-chip brownies*, *brownie points*.

brunette, brunet

In a noun sense, generally refers to a woman with brown hair: *the brunette in the corner*. A related noun form for men, *brunet*, is rarely used. Both are fairly reductive and best avoided outside facetious prose. Why not an adjectival form? *Brown-haired woman*, *brown-haired man*.

budget, Budget

Upper case only when writing the full title, or titles of specific documents: *Budget 2021-22*, *Budget Paper 2*. Lower case all other usages, whether generic, plural, or adjectival: *the federal budget*, *successive federal budgets*, *budgetary measures*.

bug

When reporting on medical ailments, be wary of referring to viruses and the like as *bugs*. The term is imprecise and implies a low-level risk, which may be inappropriate.

buoy, buoyed, buoyant, buoyancy

Spelling these correctly will buoy the spirits of our audience.

bureau, bureaux

Not *bureaux*, unless you're going for a hypercorrect affectation.

burka

Often inaccurately used to describe other types of head coverings, such as the niqab. See [this ABC explainer](#) for more.

burned, burnt

A rule of thumb: *burned* is the more regular past tense verb form, and *burnt* more regularly appears in phrases *burnt out* or *burnt up*. No hyphen for predicative use of the latter: *the bush was burnt out*. But hyphenate for adjectival use: *a third victim died in a burnt-out home*.

bus, buses, bussed, bussing

bushfire

Though *wildfire* has a long history of use in Australian sources, the more common usage is *bushfire*. For overseas events, use appropriate local terminology: *forest fire*, *wildfire*, *wildland fire*, etc.

bushfire refugee

Use this term with caution: even in its modified forms (e.g. *climate refugee*, *student refugee*) the word *refugee* is most often associated with its sense in international law — people fleeing conflict or disaster, usually across borders.

businesslike, businessman, businesswoman, business people

Not, for instance, *business man*.

BOM, Bureau of Meteorology

Spell out in first reference, abbreviate thereafter: *the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) is the first port of call*. *BOM* is fine in headlines. Note it's *BOM*, not *BoM*. On air: *Bureau of Meteorology* in first reference, *BOM* or *the bureau* acceptable thereafter.

buy back, buyback

Two words when used as compound verb: *the government plans to buy back irrigation licences*. One word for adjective and noun senses: *the buyback plan is part of the National Water Plan*

byte

A number of binary digits, or bits — usually eight (but it's a sound bite).

C

cabinet, national cabinet

Lower case in reference to informal group of executive leaders, in Australia or elsewhere.

cache, cachet

Is a type of hidden store: *a cache of weapons*. Don't confuse it with a similar word that refers to prestige: *being married to a Newsweek photographer, he had a certain cachet*. In computer terminology, cache is used as a verb and a modifier in noun phrases: *Let's talk about cache memory*. *Caching is the process of storing data*.

caddie

Golf caddie. But a *tea caddy*.

cafe

No need for diacritics.

callous

An adjective meaning "unfeeling". By some coincidence, a *callus* is bit of hardened skin.

camaraderie

This word is a direct borrowing from the French and refers to the familiarity felt among *camarades*. Not to be confused with or pronounced like *comrade*. Most dictionaries list a pronunciation similar to /kæmə're:dəri:/.

camera operator, cinematographer

Use in preference of *cameraman*.

canon

Cleric, decree, principle, body of writings, type of music. A *cannon* is something you fire.

canvas

Tent, painting. A distantly related verb, meaning "to solicit votes", is *canvass*.

capital letters

political titles.

Upper case political titles only when they precede a person's name: *Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Foreign Minister Penny Wong*. Apply the same principle to local government: *Mayor Goran Kesic today announced... Cr Kesic said... the mayor said*. Lower case political titles when used as a general descriptor: *Greens senator Lidia Thorpe today announced, Trudeau's father also served as Canada's prime minister*.

By itself, *leader* doesn't take a cap: *Greens leader di Natale, Labor leader Bill Shorten*. Do not cap personal (non-elected) titles: *manager, director, chief executive, chairman, secretary* etc. Capitalise foreign heads of state and ministers.

royalty

Always capitalise the title of the current Australian monarch. Upper case the full titles of members of the royal family and members of the peerage: *the Prince of Wales, the Duchess of Cornwall*, etc. Upper case these titles when they precede a name: *Princess Anne visited the village of Hanuabada*. Lower case these titles when used as a general descriptor: *the princess visited Port Moresby's famous boardwalks, "It is very nice to be back in the UK," the duchess said*.

organisations or government

The full names of organisations take upper case on first reference and lower case in subsequent reference: *the University of New South Wales*, but later *the university*. *Department of Immigration and Border Protection*, but later *the department*. Lower case for administrations past, present, and generic: *the federal government, former Queensland government minister, government policy*. Cap government departments on first reference: *Treasury officials, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*. In subsequent reference: *the department*.

state and territory

Use upper case for proper names, but not in generic or plural references: *the State of Victoria; state government policies, state land, an independent state*.

geographical and political designations

Names that designate a group of nations geographically or politically always take a capital: *South-East Asia, Central America, the Balkans*. Sometimes, when descriptive names of this type become semi-official, they then take a capital: *Central Australia, Far North Queensland, the Gulf (of Carpentaria), the Red Centre*.

commonwealth

Upper case: *the Commonwealth of Australia, the Commonwealth of Nations*.

captions

Our style for crediting images is agency, colon, photographer name: *Reuters: Adnan Abibi*. ABC images are credited: *ABC News: Margaret Burin* or *ABC Radio Sydney: Luke Wong*.

career

When used as a verb means to rush headlong (*careen* is to keel over).

career girl, career woman

Don't use.

cast off

The boat cast off from the quay.

cast-off

We accept cast-off clothing.

casualties

Includes dead and injured, so not a synonym for deaths.

caucus

Capitalise when referring to the current caucus, e.g. *the Labor Caucus*.

celsius

Generally, write in full and upper case: *34 degrees Celsius*. For stories with many temperature references, abbreviate in second and subsequent reference: *34C*.

cement, concrete

Technically these are not interchangeable terms: cement is an ingredient of concrete, which is a mix of aggregates and paste.

census

Lower case in generic use. Its full name is the *Census of Population and Housing*.

censor, censure

Documents may be "censored", but people who are criticised severely are "censured".

century, centuries

Lower case: *the fifth century*. Spell out centuries under 10: *fifth century*, but *15th century*. Hyphenate for adjectival use: *19th-century passenger ships*.

CFMEU, CFMMEU

Not exactly interchangeable. The CFMEU is a collection of affiliated (and to an extent autonomous) trade unions: *CFMEU Victoria & Tasmania*, *CFMEU Western Australia*. These chapters are further divided by industry: *CFMEU Construction*, *CFMEU Mining*. The above are further grouped under a separate national organisation: *the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union*. Where material to a story, be sure to note the difference.

chair (title), chairwoman, chairperson

Where there is no stated preference by a company or individual, default to *chair*.

Channel Seven, Channel Nine, Channel Ten

Spell these out in article text, but can be *Channel 9* etc in headlines.

Chechen, Chechnya

Chechen Republic, Chechen people, Chechen Prime Minister, Chechen war, Republic of Chechnya.

child porn, child pornography

Avoid these terms where possible. Most Australian legislation uses *child exploitation material*, *child abuse material* or similar.

childcare, child care

Use the compound form for adjectival senses: *childcare worker*, *childcare fees*. Keep the separated form for noun senses, or names of government programs: *it can be hard to find decent child care*, *the Child Care Subsidy*.

Chinese names

Generally, Chinese names consist of a family name and a given name in that order: *Li Keqiang*. Use the full name on first reference, and the family name on subsequent reference: *China's Premier Li Keqiang*... *Mr Li*. Family names are generally one syllable, and given names are often two syllables: *Xi Jinping*. Given names may be hyphenated, as is conventional in Taiwan and Hong Kong: *Tsai Ing-wen*, *Chow Yun-fat*. Where possible, check for preference. It is common for people with Chinese names to adopt Western naming order: *Weili Zhang*.

Choice

Consumer group.

chronic

In medical contexts, not exactly interchangeable with *acute* or *bad*. A chronic health condition is one that has continued or lingered.

Christian, Christianity

Note capitals. Also: *Christian name*, but *unchristian* and *christening*.

church, Church

Lower case for established organisations: *the church is no longer relevant today*.

choke, strangle, suffocate

Generally interchangeable in senses relating to domestic violence or criminal offences.

cisgender

People whose gender identity is in line with their sex assigned at birth. See entry under **LGBT**.

claims

“Claims” carries a hint of incredulity (as do “reputedly” and “so-called”). If there is no reason to doubt the veracity of a statement, “says” is better. For example, “the party says it will field candidates in all electorates”, rather than “the party claims it will”. The authority of the person or organisation making a claim (that is, something not previously accepted, known or understood), and the nature of the claim, will decide whether we would report it without corroboration. A claim, therefore, must be attributed. “Claims” implies the ABC is seeking further confirmation or reaction.

cleaning lady

Avoid. *Cleaner* instead.

Clem7

You don’t need to use all caps, just an initial cap. Can also be called *the Clem Jones Tunnel*.

Coca-Cola, Coke**collateral damage**

Avoid this term as a euphemism for civilian casualties.

collective nouns

There are no iron-clad rules about whether collective nouns should be matched with singular or plural verbs. Both constructions are acceptable, if they are part of common usage and conversational. But they must never be mixed in the same sentence or story: *The team is playing this afternoon. They say the game will be their best test yet*. Better to use singular verbs with collective nouns when expressing the sense of a single entity: *the government is planning to increase defence spending, Brisbane is unbeaten this season*.

colleague

This term can elide power dynamics in e.g. stories involving allegations of workplace misconduct or sexual assault. Consider modifying (e.g. *junior colleague*) or replacing (e.g. *employee*).

collide

Only moving objects can “collide”, so a moving object cannot collide with a stationary one. Therefore, two moving cars can collide, but it’s not possible for a car to collide with a parked car or a tree.

come, cum

When used to indicate combined objects (*studio-cum-apartment, chef-cum-scientist*) make sure to hyphenate.

commercial references, trade names, brand names, logos

Contrary to popular belief, commercial references are not verboten at the public broadcaster. Such references are often appropriate, though they must be editorially relevant and not undermine the ABC's independence or integrity. For more information, consult the [relevant editorial policy](#).

Commissions

We cap Human Rights Commission, but not human rights commissioner.

committees

Upper case full titles: *the Senate's Environment and Communications References Committee*. Lower case plural or generic reference: *countless Senate committees, a committee will be formed*.

communism, communist

Lower case except in name of party: Communist Party.

community

A favourite among politicians and bureaucrats who speak of *the wider community*, when *people* would do. Some journalists are inclined to use it to refer to any group of people who share an interest or occupation — as in *medical community, aviation community, business community*, and *chess community*. In most references, *doctors, pilots, business people* and *chess players* are better.

compare

Compare like with like: yesterday's weather with today's. But compare two different things with the aim of finding similarities: compare her outfit to an unmade bed. Therefore, say "compared with" if you want to draw attention to the difference: "He compared radio with television." Say "compared to" when drawing attention to the similarity: "Life has been compared to a pilgrimage."

compass points, cardinal directions

Lower case for regions: *southern Australia, the south-west, north-east New South Wales, south-east Queensland*. When part of the place name, capitalise: *East Java, North Sulawesi*. Some geopolitical regions take a capital: *the Middle East, South-East Asia, Latin America, the Balkans, North America, South America*. When names become semi-official, they then take a capital: *Central Australia, Far North Queensland*.

compound adjectives, compound modifiers

Compound adjectives need to be hyphenated, whether in general copy, headlines or captions. Examples: *eight-hour search, loud-mouthed punter, rose-tinted glasses, middle-aged woman*. Here's a tip on how to figure out if the compound adjective rule applies: *Big red car* is not a compound adjective because you can have a *big car* and you can have a *red car*. *Old-growth forests* is a compound adjective because while you can have *old forests*, *growth forests* doesn't make sense. Saying *old growth forest* (sans hyphen) could be interpreted as meaning a growth forest that happens to be old. Consult a dictionary if unsure.

comprise

Means to consist of. *Comprise of* is therefore incorrect and while increasingly heard, will likely attract criticism if used.

concedes

“Concedes” can be seen as an admission or even a confession. Make sure you use it correctly. It means to admit as true. “Says” is usually sufficient.

congenial, congenital

Can heart disease be a pleasing thing? It can, according to one report, which said a sportsman who died had “congenial heart disease”. What was meant was “congenital” (meaning existing from birth), not congenial (agreeable).

Congo

Acceptable to say Congo on second mention for the Democratic Republic of the Congo; never write “the Congo” unless referring to the river.

conjoined twins

Not Siamese twins. Once separated, you can no longer call them conjoined twins.

consensus

Means general agreement or concord, or majority of opinion, so ‘opinion’ is redundant in ‘consensus of opinion’.

constitution

Upper case if writing a full title: *the Australian Constitution*. Lower case at other times.

continual, continuous

Continual means continuing on with stops and starts; continuous means going on without stopping. Parliament sits “continually” (regularly, with breaks) while some politicians drone on “continuously” (without stopping) for hours.

contractions

For broadcast

If abbreviating *will not* to *won't* (or *does not* to *doesn't*), think how it will sound when read. Often the fuller form is clearer. A commonly abused contraction is *there's*, as in *there's new claims*. That should be *there are new claims*.

Some reporters tend to start sentences with *it is* (or *it's*) and then get to the subject. For example: *It's the wind and the rain that are causing the damage*. Choose more direct speech, for example, *Wind and rain are causing the damage*.

For online

In formal news copy, spell out contractions, except in quotes. For example: *Police said he did not appear to be injured*, but *“I wasn't injured,” he said*. In feature copy, where you're aiming for a more conversational tone, contractions are acceptable.

controversial

Usually an unnecessary word in our stories. It means “disputation on a matter of opinion”. Current affairs and news stories are full of opposing opinions on all sorts of things, so consider how meaningful it is to attach the word “controversial” to your subject. If you do use it, make clear what the point of controversy is.

coronavirus, COVID-19

All terms are in widespread use. The disease *COVID-19* is caused by the virus *SARS-CoV-2*, which is a member of the coronavirus family. Where relevant (e.g. if discussing the scientific structure of the virus), make this distinction clear. Do not call COVID-19 a *virus*. Avoid tautology, as in: *a new strain of novel coronavirus*. In less formal reference or in quotes, *COVID* can stand in as a catch-all term for the disease.. In less formal reference or in quotes, *COVID* can stand in as a catch-all term for the disease.

coroner, Coroner

Upper case only when spelling out the full title: *Deputy State Coroner Caitlin English will continue in the role*. Lower case other usages. Do not use as a courtesy title.

corrections

Part of the ABC’s commitment to accuracy involves taking corrective action when factual errors occur. Corrections can take many forms: from a clarification, to removing content, to issuing an apology. Consult the relevant Editorial Policies [standard](#) and [guidance note](#) for more information.

correspondent

Writer or reporter, but *co-respondent* in a divorce case. Do not cap.

council

Take the article outside of quotes: *The council has decided*. Do not cap local council names unless it is the official title: *Brisbane council* but *Brisbane City Council*. Always use the full title on the first reference. So *Livingstone Shire Council* on first reference, *the council* thereafter.

court martial, courts martial

The verb is to court-martial.

courts

Cap if full name, e.g. *Court of Appeal*, *High Court*, *Supreme Court*, *International Criminal Court*. Always check the wording and punctuation of the court’s proper name — this varies from place to place. *Brisbane Magistrates Court* and *Childrens Court Brisbane* don’t have apostrophes, but *Melbourne Magistrates’ Court* and *Children’s Court of Victoria* do. It’s acceptable to use a generic name for a court, e.g. *the Victorian magistrates court* rather than *the Magistrates’ Court of Victoria*. The same goes for courts in the plural, e.g. *Australia’s magistrates courts*.

COVID variants

Use Greek nomenclature, not regional descriptors, in all references: *the Alpha variant*, *the Delta variant*.

crackdown, crack down

In a nationwide *crackdown*, the government will *crack down* on welfare fraud.

credibility

The quality of being believable. A “credulous” person will believe anything. “Credence” means belief or trust.

crescendo/climax

A crescendo is a gradual increase, usually in the volume of music, and is not a climax. Often it’s incorrectly stated that something has “reached a crescendo”. Things reach a peak or climax.

crisis

Heavily overused. Let other people (for example, in actuality) say if the moment truly warrants it.

criteria (plural), criterion (singular)

and it’s phenomena (plural) but phenomenon (singular)

crossbench

One word.

crossbenchers

Not *cross benchers*.

cult

Be careful in using the word ‘cult’. It is a loaded term and almost always regarded as pejorative. Do not presume to label any group a cult, unless it is widely held by experts to be one (such as Heaven’s Gate or Aum Shinrikyo). If a reputable person or group uses that label to describe such a group, you could use the term, provided it is attributed.

curb

To restrain (kerb is the edge of the footpath).

currency

Our style for writing currency in online copy: \$2, \$7.50, \$3 million, \$4.2 billion. In headlines or other confined spaces, shorten like this: \$16b, \$500m. Do not use a hyphen after an amount in body text: *the \$3 billion house*. (But hyphenate if using a multi-part constructions: *multi-million-dollar property*.)

If a story uses a foreign currency, convert the amount to Australian currency in brackets following the original amount: *the man was fined 3,500 rupees (\$70) and allowed to walk free*. Don’t convert items that are globally measured in US dollars e.g. West Texas Crude oil, Tapis, and spot gold. Our audience will assume you’re talking about Australian currency unless you specify otherwise: \$US7.50, 98 US cents, 4 euros, 69 eurocents, 5 British pounds, 52 British pence, 78 Japanese yen, \$NZ2, 50 NZ cents.

customs, Customs

Upper case initial if referring to the government department; lower case for traditions.

cutbacks

Cuts is better.

cyclone

They have names, and take capitals: *Cyclone Tracy*; also *Tropical Cyclone Tracy*. Continue to cap even if cyclone has passed. Whatever the name, cyclones are neither male nor female: *Cyclone Brenda is causing havoc. It is centred 20 kilometres off Townsville*. Spell out the numeral in the cyclone's category: *Tropical Cyclone Ului is a category four system*.

Czechia, Czech Republic

Use *Czechia* to refer to the country. Where space constraints allow, point out the country is also known as the *Czech Republic*.

D

D-Day

In reference to the Normandy landing.

Dad, dad

Lower case unless using as a proper noun, e.g. 'Mum and Dad came over' but 'My dad came over'.

Dark Mofo

Not Dark MOFO.

dashes, hyphens, ens and ems

Hyphens

The hyphen is the most common device for linking words and word fragments. Appropriate use often depends on context.

Use a hyphen:

when using terms adjectivally, but not when using them as nouns: *the decision-making process was protracted*; *this procedure expedites decision making*

when the last letter of a single syllable prefix and the first letter of the word are the same vowel: *re-educate* not *reeducate*; *de-emphasise* not *deemphasise*

(however, *cooperate*, *coordinate* and their derivatives are no longer hyphenated)

to avoid confusing one word with another: compare *he re-signed the document* with *the executive resigned*

with co-(joint) and ex-(former), whether or not the attached word begins with a vowel: *co-accused*; *co-worker*; *ex-admiral*; *ex-wife*.

En rule (–)

Use an en rule, not a hyphen:

to link spans of figures, time and distance, and Bible verses: pp. 466–53; 1979–91; May–July; City–Pymble buses, Mark 6:3–5

to show a link between words that retain their separate identities: the body–mind split; a north–south alliance; a copper–zinc alloy.

Use a spaced en rule if more than one word is to be linked on either side: the Victoria – New South Wales border; 16 BC – 70 AD. The en rule is achieved on modern keyboard by holding down ALT and typing 0150 on the numpad.

Do not use an en rule to substitute for *and* with the word *between*, or to substitute for *to* with the word *from*: ‘the years between 1990 and 2005’, not ‘the years between 1990–2005’; ‘from 20 to 25 applicants’, not ‘from 20–25 applicants’.

Em rule (—)

Use em rules sparingly to:

link words that signify an abrupt change: We decided to go by air — a momentous decision under the circumstances.

introduce an amplification: Budget cuts will have dramatic effects — for example, Australian television content will ultimately decrease.

indicate parenthesis within a sentence: Her abrupt change of direction — this time in favour of the savings — left them mystified.

To produce the em rule: alt key and enter 0151 on the numpad. If you haven’t got a numpad on your keyboard copy and paste from this subheading.

dates and times

Online

Our style for dates: *February 9, 1985*. Abbreviate top-of-the-hour times, but write others in full: *6am, 3pm, 9:30pm, 11:58pm*. Abbreviate time zones without parentheses: *the launch was scheduled for 6:25pm AEST*. Avoid tautologies such as *3am this morning*, though *3am today* or similar can be useful to dispel ambiguities.

See more under **AD, BC, centuries, decades, seasons**.

Broadcast

By convention, the spoken style for dates: *January the 30th, the 30th of January*. Avoid: *January 30*.

If the precise date is not critical to the meaning, be approximate: *at the end of January, in mid-March, early last month*.

daylight saving

Not *daylight savings*.

deaf, Deaf, hard of hearing

Use *deaf* and *hard of hearing* to refer to people with hearing loss. Note they are not interchangeable: *hard of hearing* describes people with acquired deafness. Do not use *deaf mute, deaf and dumb* or *hearing impaired*. Avoid descriptions of deafness as something to be cured or fixed.

Upper case in reference to the wider social group, and lower case for the medical diagnosis or similar: *“Initially I thought that I wasn’t deaf enough to be part of the Deaf community,” Fiona said.*

deadly virus

What corpus linguists call a high-frequency collocate, others might call a cliché. What's wrong with *virus*?

death

Call it what it is. Avoid euphemisms: *passed away*, *deceased*, etc.

death toll

There is something morbidly hopeful about the way this term is sometimes used: *the death toll so far* or *the death toll is expected to rise*. Better to say *the number of people killed [or dead]*.

decades

Our style: *the 80s*, *the swinging 60s*, *the roaring 20s*, *a woman in her 70s*, *the first reader's email of the 00s*.

declare victory, claim victory

Electoral candidates generally claim victory and do not declare it. The AEC generally declares *results*, not *victories*. Thus, usage like the following should be avoided: *Kristy McBain declares victory in Eden-Monaro*.

decimals

Broadcast

Generally, round to the nearest full number. When precise decimal figures must be given, use this form:

For .05, say "point-oh-five".

For 2.32, say "two-point-three-two" (not "two-point-thirty-two").

When writing for on-air graphics using decimal points, "0.4" is the correct form, not ".4".

decorations

Use only if relevant to the story. For example, "the 90-year-old Victoria Cross winner returned to the battlefield"; "John Smith refused an Order of Australia medal three years ago, and is now in jail for treason".

Democrat, Democratic

When referring to the US political party, use *Democratic* as an adjective and *Democrat* only as a noun. *Democratic Party*, *Democratic candidate*, *Democratic National Convention*, but Barack Obama is a *Democrat*. A warning: *Democrat Party* can be considered pejorative by some in the US.

denazify, denazification

Solid form, no upper case.

Department of Defense (US)

With an 's', but Australian Department of Defence with a 'c'.

departments

It's the Department "of" Defence, the Department "of" Foreign Affairs and Trade, but it's the Minister "for" Defence.

descendant

Not to be confused with *ancestors*. This happens more often than you'd think!

desperate

Often found in clichéd use: *desperate appeal*, *a desperate escape bid*.

determine

This is a word we often use clumsily. Instead of writing "facing a committal hearing to determine whether he'll stand trial" or "the cause of his death/the fire/the accident is yet to be determined", it's better to write "a committal hearing will decide if he stands trial" and "the cause of the death/fire/accident is not yet known".

devastate

One to watch out for when it comes to overuse. Floods and bushfires need not always be described as devastating, even though we all know they are.

developing countries

Use this term in preference to Third World or similar.

diabetes

Type 1 and type 2, not type one and type two, or type I and type II.

diagnose

Diagnose a condition, not a person. *Her schizophrenia was diagnosed* not *she was diagnosed with schizophrenia*.

diagnosis, prognosis

Don't confuse the two: a *diagnosis* is what a doctor determines to be the problem. A *prognosis* is a forecast about the likely outcome of an illness or injury.

diehard

General adjective. But the film series is *Die Hard*.

dietician

In Australia, dieticians must be trained and qualified in dietetics. They are not the same as a nutritionist, a less precise term (although some nutritionists are also registered dieticians).

diplomats and consuls

Ambassadors are accredited "to" a country. Say "the Australian ambassador to the United States". Countries of the Commonwealth have "High Commissioners". "Consuls" look after the interests of their own nationals in foreign countries and deal with immigration matters.

disability

Words relating to disability have the potential to cause great offence to many people. Some general rules:

Take care not to make gratuitous references to disabilities.

A disability is not necessarily a *handicap*.

People who use wheelchairs are not necessarily *confined* to them.

If a disability is relevant to a story, be specific: *a man in a wheelchair has been swept off a bridge by floodwater*.

Generally, avoid: *victim of, suffering from, afflicted by, crippled by, wheelchair-bound, in a wheelchair, invalid, mentally handicapped, backward, retarded, slow* to mean a person with learning difficulties, *the disabled, the handicapped, the blind, the deaf, deaf and dumb*.

For more context, consult the editorial policies [guidance note on Harm and Offence](#).

discomfit, discomfort

Discomfit is stronger, in the sense of disconcerting, thwarting or foiling than *discomfort*, which when used as a verb means to make uneasy or less comfortable.

discrete

Separate, distinct (*discreet* is circumspect, unobtrusive).

disinterested

Means objective, or unbiased. It does not mean *uninterested* — which is the last thing a reporter should be.

dissatisfied, unsatisfied

Dissatisfied is usually applied to people and it expresses a specific discontent with emotion attached to it. *Unsatisfied* is used in more detached and analytical ways, to suggest that a certain requirement has not been met.

dissociate (from)

Disassociate has now been accepted as an alternative spelling and pronunciation – same meaning.

divorcee

Male and female.

Doctor Who

Not Dr Who.

domestic transmission, community transmission, direct transmission

In general use, interchangeable when referring to the spread of infectious diseases within a country's borders (cf. *international* or *cross-border transmission*). In medicine, *direct transmission* (i.e. person-to-person) is contrasted with *indirect transmission* (i.e. from surfaces).

domestic violence

There are important differences between *domestic violence*, *family violence* and *intimate partner violence*. Do not trivialise or sensationalise. Avoid the euphemisms *domestic dispute*, *volatile relationship*, *domestic*

incident, etc. Where appropriate, use the active voice rather than the passive voice. The latter can often mask the agent of the action: compare *the man repeatedly hit his wife* to *the woman was repeatedly hit in the stomach*. This is especially important in headlines. For more information on terminology and approach, read the [guidance note on domestic violence](#).

double vaccination, full vaccination

Be aware of the potential ambiguity of *double vaccinated*. For vaccination schedules involving two separate doses, it is often better to speak of a person as being *fully vaccinated*.

Down syndrome

Use person-first language: *a baby with Down syndrome*, not *a Down's syndrome baby*.

drivers licence

I'm going for my drivers licence (no apostrophe) but *that driver's licence has expired*. Other places where apostrophes have disappeared: girls school, travellers cheques, widows pension.

drug companies, drug dealer, drug raid, drug squad

Not drugs raid, not drugs squad etc.

drug charges

Avoid *drugs charges*.

drug use

Prefer to *drug abuse* or *drug misuse*.

dual names, dual naming

The official titles of many Australian placenames contain both Indigenous and introduced elements: *kunanyi / Mt Wellington*, *Grampians National Park / Gariwerd*. Occasionally, a place that is officially dual-named will be referred to solely by its traditional name: *Uluru*. Some general principles for stories dealing with dual-named locations:

Reference both the Indigenous and introduced names

Where space constraints permit only one name, use the more widely known name

If there is the potential for audience confusion, reference the dual-naming process

Australia's official naming process does not always move in tandem with community sentiment. In many stories, it may be appropriate to use — or, potentially, offensive to exclude — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander placenames that are not widely known by the public.

If unsure whether a feature is dual-named, check with your talent, a relevant Indigenous community organisation, the [Gazetteer of Australia](#), or your state-based geographical names board. These principles also apply to countries with similar dual-named locations, such as New Zealand.

dwarves

Plural of dwarf (not dwarfs). The verb is to dwarf: *Q1 dwarfs the surrounding buildings*.

dye, dyeing, dyed

For hair or fabric dye.

E

E. coli

Note the capital letter, full stop and space.

each other

Of two only; otherwise one another.

earlier

Often redundant: *they met this week* is preferable to *they met earlier this week*, and will save space.

earn, earned

Both earned and earnt are acceptable, although earned is the more commonly used. However, it is 'hard-earned cash', not *hard-earnt*.

Earth

Cap in reference to the planet: *the Earth is in the path of an asteroid*. Lower case in reference to the ground, or extended figurative senses: *a pile of earth, earth-shattering*.

earthquakes

In writing, our style is *a magnitude-7.7 earthquake*.

East Jerusalem

East Jerusalem is a specific place defined as the part of Jerusalem under Arab (Jordanian) control prior to the 1967 war. Upper case *West Jerusalem*, too.

East Timor, Timor-Leste

In first reference: *Timor-Leste*. An *also known as East Timor* can be used if required.

eBay

Note the medial capital.

Ebola virus

Initial capital.

effect, affect

His nagging had no *effect* whatsoever. Wait for the drug to take *effect*. But that change will *affect* a lot of people.

eg, e.g.

From the Latin *exempli gratia* meaning "for example". Use punctuation: *e.g.*

Eiffel Tower, the Eiffel Tower

Note where the capital letters are (and where they aren't).

either ... or, neither ... nor

We have to choose **either** the pink **or** the blue. We ended up with **neither** the pink **nor** the blue. But be careful of stray 'nor's, as in 'We don't like the pink nor the blue.' It should be 'We don't like the pink or the blue,' or 'we like neither the pink nor the blue.'

election

Don't capitalise, e.g. *federal election*, *Queensland election*.

Electoral Commissioner

Note upper case.

electrocute

This means "kill by electricity", so you would not say "electrocuted to death". Nor would you say someone is in hospital recovering after being electrocuted. They'd be dead.

elicit

Means to draw out. On the other hand, *illicit* means unlawful.

elude

Escape, avoid. To *allude to* something means to refer to indirectly.

elusive, illusive

The former describes something that is hard to catch hold of. The latter describes something that might cause an illusion or a deception.

email

No hyphen. But e-book, e-business, e-commerce, e-shares, e-shopping, e-zine.

embargo

Plural embargos or embargoes.

embassy

Do not cap, e.g. Australian embassy.

emend

Take out errors, edit (**amend** is to improve).

emigrate

To **leave** one country and travel to another where you will live permanently. To **immigrate** is to **arrive** in one country from another.

empathic, empathetic

Are both used to describe someone who can empathise.

empires

Lower case for plural or generic (*he's building a private empire*) but capitalise specific empires (*Roman Empire, British Empire*).

en masse

Not 'the teachers will stop work on mass'. We still use the French term to mean together, in a large body...

en route

Not on route.

enamoured of

Not with or by.

encyclopedia

Not encyclopaedia

England

Does not include Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. Use **UK** or **United Kingdom** to refer to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as a whole. **Great Britain** includes only England, Scotland and Wales.

enquiry

Seeking information (**inquiry** is a more formal investigation into something).

ensure

Make certain; **insure** against risk, **assure** your life.

envelop (verb), envelope (noun)

epicentre

The precise meaning of epicentre is the point on the Earth's surface directly above the central disturbance of an earthquake. However, it can be used more generally to describe the central point of other activities.

epidemic, pandemic

Significant difference between the two in medical contexts, even if they are often used interchangeably. An epidemic is a disease with a temporary prevalence; a pandemic is usually prevalent throughout the entire country, continent, or planet.

epileptic

Should be used only to name the seizure; a person 'has epilepsy'.

EPO (erythropoietin)

Erythropoietin (EPO) is a performance enhancing drug. It has the same name as the naturally occurring human hormone it replicates.

ersatz

Serving as a substitute. Not *erzats*.

esky

Lower case unless specifically referring to the brand.

esports**ETA**

Basque separatists

etc

No punctuation. If spelled out: *et cetera*.

eulogy

A tribute. Not to be confused with *elegy*, which is a sad poem.

euphemisms

Plain words are best every time. Do not talk of *disadvantaged people* when you mean *the poor*. Or a woman who is *expecting* when you mean *pregnant*. Do not have people *pass away* or speak of their *demise* in bulletins — say that they *die*. Also avoid *collateral damage* when referring to *civilian casualties*.

euro

The currency used by many states in the European Union. Plural euros.

eurozone

Lower case because it refers to the countries using the currency, not the European Union.

euthanase

Not *euthanise*.

evacuate

You cannot evacuate people, you can only evacuate places.

every day, everyday

The former is a noun (*day*) modified by an adjective (*every*). The latter is an adjective commonly meaning mundane or ordinary: *an everyday occurrence*.

evocative

If you're going to say something is evocative, it helps to say what it's evocative of.

evoke, invoke

Not interchangeable. *Evoke* involves giving out or producing something (evoke a memory, a scene, a smile). *Invoke* involves trying to get help or support from an outside source: *Gillard urged federal MPs to invoke the spirit of Ben Chifley*.

exact, extract

To *exact* (revenge, money, respect) means to demand or require, or to force to give or pay. *Extract*, on the other hand, generally refers to the action of getting or taking one object or substance out of another (for

example, extracting a tooth or extracting juice from a vegetable). Avoid confusing the two, as in: *extract revenge*.

excessive

Does not mean *great* or *increased*, as in: *the rain is expected to result in an excessive wheat crop*.

execute

Judges order executions. Gangsters, gunmen, and terrorists *kill* or *murder* people. For example, hostages in Iraq should be described as having been killed or murdered, or beheaded if that has been the method of killing the hostage.

expatriate, expat

An *expatriate* is someone who lives outside their native country. An *ex-patriot* is someone who used to be patriotic but isn't any more.

explicit, implicit

Explicit is often mistaken for *implicit*, which means something assumed or implied. In fact, it's an antonym: *explicit* means something that has been expressed clearly: *Mr Brown said tax changes were implicit in the agreement, but he declined to be explicit*.

exponential

In statistics, *exponential growth* doesn't just refer to an upward trend in value. For *exponential growth* to occur, the rate of increase must be increasing over time. This can be a critical distinction in news coverage.

eyewitness

One word.

F

F/A-18F Super Hornets

Note the complicated punctuation of the name. On subsequent reference: *Super Hornets*, *Hornets*.

facility

Recognise jargon for what it is. Instead of medical facility, consider: *hospital*, *doctor's surgery*. Instead of manufacturing facility, consider: *factories*.

fall out, fallout, falling out

Compound verb: *don't fall out of the boat*. Noun: *we can expect fallout from last night's interview*. Noun, but different: *the brothers had a falling out over their father's will*.

families

In plural reference, no apostrophe: *the Rhineharts*, *the Obamas*, *the Smiths*. In possessive reference, apostrophe: *the Rhineharts' family feud*, *the Obamas' dog*.

Far North Queensland

All capitalised.

Farsi

Language spoken by the majority of Iranians (not Persian).

fatal

Fatal means “causing death”. It is clumsy to say “a Rural Lands Protection Board ranger is in intensive care in Dubbo hospital after surviving a fatal helicopter crash yesterday afternoon.” Better to say “the ranger survived a helicopter crash which killed another man”.

fatally injured

Just say *killed*.

fatwa

A religious ruling issued by a recognised Islamic institution or scholar in accordance with Islamic law. Widely misunderstood to mean a death sentence, fatwas may be issued for any number of questions of daily life. Because Islam does not have a central authority, fatwas do not necessarily bind those Muslims who do not accept the authority of the issuing agent.

federal, Federal

Upper case in full titles: *the Federal Court*. Lower case most other uses: *federal parliament*, *federal government*.

feral, wild

An important distinction: feral animals were once domesticated, and have since become wild: *feral pigs*, *feral cats*, *feral horses*. Confusingly, some non-domesticated fauna — such as foxes and cane toads — are listed by the Australian government as feral.

fewer, less

In general, use *fewer* with numbers of things: *we need fewer bottles*. Use *less* in reference to quantities: *this year, cattle are drinking less water*. *Less* is uncontroversially used in a few places where we might expect to see *fewer*, including measurements of times and certain idiomatic constructs: *the offenders served less than six months in jail*, *25 words or less*.

fiance, fiancée

The former is masculine, the latter feminine. But *divorcee* for both male and female. In all cases, the acute symbol is no longer required.

fibre-to-the-curb, fibre-to-the-node

As above in first reference. In online news, abbreviated *FTTC* thereafter (this same applies to *fibre-to-the-node*, etc).

financial markets

Dow Jones Industrial Average or *Dow Jones*, Financial Times Stock Exchange or *FTSE 100*, Standard & Poor's or *S&P 500*.

firefighter

Not fireman.

fisher, fishers, fishermen

The gender-neutral term *fisher* is preferred by some in the industry. In the absence of a talent's stated preference, use *fisherman* or *fishermen* for plural reference.

first ever

Can usually just say *first*.

first home buyer, first home buyers

These don't need a hyphen. But a related term, *first-time* buyers, does.

first lady

France's first lady, America's first lady, not 'French first lady' or 'American first lady'. And don't cap.

first names

Generally, avoid referring to people solely by their first names in news reports. Obvious exceptions include: if a name is being suppressed to keep a source anonymous, mononymic entertainers, less formal types of reporting.

First Nations, Indigenous, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

All are acceptable collective references to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and are interchangeable to an extent. Be aware of nuance: many prefer *First Nations* to *Indigenous*, on the basis that the former acknowledges the plurality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups. While *First Australians* is also used, it is considered less appropriate by some.

first, second, third

Rather than firstly, secondly, thirdly, etc.

firsthand, first hand

A firsthand account but I heard about it first hand.

fit, fitted

The preferred past tense and past participle form of the verb is *fitted*, not *fit*. *The key fitted the lock, she never fitted in.*

flak

Not flack, when referring to heavy criticism or abuse (flak is the term for anti-aircraft fire). Flack when referring disparagingly to a PR person (not that we would, of course).

flammable, inflammable

Mean the same thing, not fireproof. Something that is fireproof is *nonflammable*.

flaunt

This means "to show off" or "display proudly". Try not to confuse it with *flout* which, while orthographically similar, has the opposite meaning of "to degrade openly".

fetus

Not foetus. Less clinical terms may be more appropriate in sensitive contexts: *unborn baby*, *unborn child*.

FOI, Freedom of Information

Spell out in first reference, abbreviate thereafter. Be aware: not all states and territories call it Freedom of Information.

Where relevant, use the accurate name when referring to requests made under specific local laws.

-fold

Exercise caution with this suffix: *the population increased sixfold over 200 years* means it was six times larger at the end of 200 years than it was at the beginning. It's a tautology to say 'increased *by* sixfold'.

forbear

To refrain. Your forebears are your ancestors.

forbid

Forbid someone to do something, not forbid 'from'. You might prevent someone from doing something, but the prepositions are not interchangeable.

forever

One word.

foreword

Comes at the front of a book, but we move *forward*.

forgo

Do without. *Forego* means to go before, but given the potential for confusion, 'precede' may be a better choice.

former

Be careful about putting *former* in front of a title or description that still applies to a person. *A former Olympic gold medallist* implies that the person has been stripped of a medal.

formerly

Before, at a previous time. *Formally* means in a formal manner.

formula, formulas

Not *formulae*.

founder, capsize

Founder means "fill with water and sink to the bottom (of the sea)". It's also used with reference to projects that fail. Capsize means "overturn".

fracking

Also known as *hydraulic fracturing*. A specific technique used in resource exploration, this term should not be used interchangeably for related activities, such as *coal seam gas mining* or *shale extraction*.

fractions

Hyphenate: *one-third*, *one-quarter*, *two-thirds*. But: *a quarter of Australians approve of the concept*.

fraternity

Avoid generic use of this term (i.e. in place of *profession*, *community* etc) outside of direct quotes.

Freudian slip

Cap up.

frisbee

Originally a trademark, this has now moved into common usage and doesn't need a capital letter, unless you're talking about the specific Frisbee product produced by Wham-O. The popular university sport is *ultimate* (not *ultimate frisbee*). Most who play it refer to the thrown object as a *disc*.

front bench, back bench

Two words for noun senses: *front bench*, *back bench*. One word for adjectival senses: *frontbench members*, *backbench members*. One word for derived forms: *frontbencher*, *backbencher*.

front line, frontline

He's on the front line, but a frontline battle.

full time, full-time, part time, half time

Hyphenate the adjectival forms: *I work full time*, *therefore I'm a full-time worker*.

G

gaffe

A blunder. But a *gaff* is an old nautical hook.

gale

Not interchangeable with other wind descriptors in emergency broadcasts. The Beaufort scale of wind speeds runs, in ascending order: *breeze*, *gale*, *storm*, *hurricane*. Consult the [Bureau of Meteorology's glossary](#) for more information.

gaol

Use *jail* unless going for severe affectation, or if the old spelling occurs in a placename: *The Old Melbourne Gaol*.

garret, Garrett

If you mean a room on the top of a building, then it's garret. The one-time environment minister and current Midnight Oil is Peter Garrett.

gaslight, gaslighting

Avoid outside of quotes. If essential, clarify what is meant by the term.

gay and lesbian

Gay and lesbian people or couples — not *gays and lesbians*. Use *gay* in this sense as an adjective, not as a noun: *a gay person*, but never *a gay*.

gender transition

The process of transitioning gender is different for each individual. It may involve medical, social, or legal procedures (e.g. surgery, coming out to family, a name change), it may not. Not all medical treatment for gender transition involves surgery. Consultation and hormone therapy are part of gender transition treatment. Avoid placing undue emphasis on the role of surgery in the gender transition process.

geriatric

Avoid in reference to an older person to imply senility or irresponsibility. Fine in adjectival use in medical contexts: *a geriatric ward*.

German measles

Rubella is the preferred term. If you use the common name, cap up.

GHB

party drug

gigaton or gigatonne

Metric (tonne) and imperial (ton) differ slightly in mass but seem interchangeable when applied to gigatons/tonnes (a billion tons/tonnes) in climate change discussion. The main thing is to be consistent.

gilt, gilded

Gold leaf or gold paint. As in Lear's gilded butterflies, or a gilded cage (luxurious but restricted environments). Not to be confused with *guilt*.

glamorous

Not glamorousous.

globetrotter, globetrotting

One word.

global financial crisis

Not capitals. Avoid GFC.

GM crops, GM food

Write genetically modified in first reference, GM thereafter.

God

Capitalise in reference to a monotheistic entity: *Almighty, Holy Spirit, Messiah, He, Him, my God, oh Lord*, etc. In reference to a polytheistic religious tradition (e.g. Norse) use lower case: *the Hindu god Ganesh*.

goodness

For goodness sake (no apostrophe).

goodnight

One word.

good Samaritan

Note capitals.

Google

Cap up when referring to the company, but no cap if using it to refer generically to searching the internet: / *googled myself*.

Gordian knot

Complicated problem to be cut through.

gorilla

For the ape. If you're talking about the subcategory of warfare, you (hopefully) mean *guerilla*.

government portfolios

If a minister holds more than one portfolio, refer only to the one(s) relevant to the story. But use common sense. If referring to a minister's obscure additional portfolio, cite his or her more familiar title and then add the more obscure responsibility: *the Health Minister, who also has responsibility for aged care, says 12 new retirement homes will be opening up next month*.

Governor-General

Not our head of state. The Governor-General is the Queen's representative in Australia. Since Australia is a constitutional monarchy, the monarch is considered the Head of State. The plural of governor-general is governors-general.

grand slam, Grand Slam

The lower-case form is in wide use to refer to single major tournament wins, especially in tennis or golf. An upper case form refers to winning all major tournaments, usually in a calendar year. In speech, disambiguate: *career Grand Slam, calendar Grand Slam*.

grandparent, grandfather, grandpa, grandma, grandmother

All one word. Also great-aunt, great-grandfather, great-great-grandmother

grill, grille

Grill is for cooking, grille is a grating.

grog runners

Northern Territory police define a grog runner as anyone taking alcohol into a restricted area, whether they intend to sell it or not.

Ground Zero

In reference to 9/11 or similar, capitalise.

guilt

Is a feeling; *gilt* involves gold paint or gold leaf.

H

h, haitch, aitch

In Australia (and elsewhere) the eighth letter of the alphabet has traditionally been pronounced *AYCH*. A variant pronunciation, *HAYCH*, is also standard. Use whichever comes naturally to you.

Hague, The

Note capitals.

hale

As in *hale and hearty*, but *hail* a taxi.

half

No hyphen when used adverbially: *you look half dead*. Hyphen when used adjectivally: *a half-eaten sandwich*; *half-time oranges*.

hallowed ground

Not hollowed.

hanged, hung

Criminals are *hanged*. Pictures are *hung*. Don't mix up the two.

hanging participles, dangling participles

A hanging participle (or dangling participle, or dangling modifier — the Beast has many names) is a subordinate clause which is not attached to the subject of the sentence: *Born in Hobart in 1909, his daughter Rory has now donated her father's memorabilia to the Tasmanian Museum*

Was Rory really born last century? No — this is the second paragraph of a story about Errol Flynn and his daughter Rory. Much better to repeat the name: *Errol Flynn was born in Hobart in 1909, and his daughter Rory has now donated her father's.*

hare lip

Don't use this phrase; instead say *cleft lip* or *cleft palate*.

harebrained

Not *hairbrained*.

hashtags

Use medial capitals and a pound symbol, whether in headlines or body copy: *Louis CK's return raises questions of justice, sexism in comedy and #MeToo*. Some hashtag movements have since lost the octothorpe: *Black Lives Matter, Ice Bucket Challenge*.

hat-trick

Hyphenate

haybaling

Not bailing.

hay fever, hayfever

Two words for the noun; as in, *Katie had bad hay fever while writing the ABC Style Guide*. Single word for the adjective, as in *hayfever remedies*.

head-to-head

Note hyphen placement.

headed, heading

The use of *headed* as a present participle form is an American affectation. Instead, use *heading*: *Is Australia heading for a hung parliament?*

headlines

Capitalise the first letter of the first word and proper nouns only: *Lorde talks about headlining Splendour*.

healthcare, health care

Use the compound form for adjectival senses: *healthcare costs*, *healthcare providers*. Keep the separated form for noun sense, or names of government programs: *primary health care*, *Health Care Homes*.

High Commissioner

A high commissioner is the senior ranking diplomat (generally equivalent to an ambassador) representing a Commonwealth country, in another Commonwealth country. No capitals when referring to the position, caps when referring to an identified individual and using it as a title. So, *High Commissioner John Smith is the third high commissioner appointed to the position*.

High Court

Capped when referring to a specific identified court, not capped when referring generically, for example, to the role of the high court.

historic

Overused. The word means “important, memorable or famous in history”. Historical means “pertaining to history or based on fact, as distinct from legend”. So the fall of the Berlin Wall was a *historic* event, but most public libraries hold *historical* documents.

historical periods

Take a capital if used in specific reference: *the Industrial Revolution*, *the Renaissance*.

hoi polloi

This expression means “the masses” or “the common people”. But some people use it incorrectly to refer to the rich and famous. A news item referred to Princess Mary of Denmark dining with the “hoi polloi”. In fact, she did not dine with the humble masses but with the rich and fashionable.

Holmes a Court, Peter

Not Holmes-a-Court (do not hyphenate).

Holocaust, holocaust

Upper case for historical reference. Lower case in other reference.

home in on

Not *hone* in on.

hone your skills

Not *home*.

honour killings

Avoid outside of quotes. If editorially necessary, consider qualifying: *the so-called "honour killing" has sparked outrage*.

horde, hordes

A *horde* of people, but a *hoard* of treasure.

hors d'oeuvre

Singular and plural.

horticulturist

Or horticulturalist – both are acceptable. The Australian Institute of Horticulture refers to its qualified and registered practitioners as *horticulturists*, so that is preferred.

hospitalised

Taken (never “rushed”) to hospital is better.

hurricane

Capital letter for the individual hurricane, lower case for the general: *Hurricane Katrina, the hurricane devastated the town*.

I**ID cards****illegal immigrant**

Use the term *illegal immigrant* to describe those arriving in Australia without proper papers, who are not claiming refugee status or whose claim for protection has been rejected; or anyone whose visa has expired and who is therefore not legally entitled to stay in Australia.

illegitimate

Do not use to refer to children born outside marriage.

illusive, elusive

Illusive, or *illusory*, describes something that causes an illusion or a deception. *Elusive* describes something that is hard to catch hold of.

iMac, iPod, iTunes

imam

This has two meanings in Islam. In Sunni communities (the majority of Muslims in Australia), it refers to a local religious leader and teacher who leads prayers and preaches at a mosque. This is by far the most common reference. In Shiite communities, its use is restricted to an agent of divine illumination, one of whom will come in every age to make the truth of Islam contemporary. This will only rarely be used in Australia.

improvised explosive devices, IED

Spell out in full on first reference with parentheses, abbreviate thereafter: *It was an improvised explosive device (IED) ... the IED was not sophisticated.* An alternative is *roadside bomb*, assuming it is actually on the roadside.

in vitro fertilisation, IVF

Full name in first reference, abbreviate thereafter. *IVF* fine in headlines. No italics or hyphen for *in vitro*. Children are *conceived through IVF*, not *born through IVF*. Avoid *test tube baby*. Along with surrogacy and fertility medication, IVF can be considered an *assisted reproductive technology*.

inclusive language

References to sex and gender

Beware of generic masculine pronouns (i.e. using *he* or *his* for both sexes).

Look out for gender-specific occupational titles (e.g. use *police officer* in preference to *policeman*).

Use women or men where the issue largely relates to the general population: *men's health*, *women with breast cancer*.

Where the experiences of transgender or non-binary people are the focus of content, it can be appropriate to use other terms: *pregnant people*, *transwomen*, *those assigned male at birth*, *people with a prostate*. It may be necessary to explain such language.

References to people with a disability

Ensure any reference to a disability is editorially relevant. It may not be.

Generally, use person-first language: that's *a person with a disability* instead of *a disabled person*. This foregrounds the person rather than the disability.

Focus on ability rather than disability: people who have a disability are multi-dimensional, and their disability is only one characteristic.

Don't use collective terminology to describe disability and people with disabilities. People with disabilities are often referred to as a category of people and this can be depersonalising and offensive.

More information: [People With Disability's guide to reporting disability](#).

References to mental illness

Be careful not to imply that all mental illnesses are the same.

Avoid stereotypes and use inclusive language.

Additional resources about the reporting and portrayal of people with a mental illness can be found at [Mindframe](#).

References to ethnic groups

Where it is relevant to the discussion, immigrant groups can be named by reference to their previous nationality or region of origin: *Americans*, *Vietnamese*, *Kurds*, etc.

Avoid equating linguistic or ethnic groups with particular religious beliefs. Not all Lebanese-Australians are necessarily Muslim. Not all Muslims are Arabs.

Be careful to check names of people from different cultures — don't presume the standard European naming conventions and order of names.

Ensure that the values of Australia's many different cultures are taken into account, and that background issues are adequately explored. Ethnic cultures within Australia interact with each other and cannot simply be equated with the cultures of their country of origin.

Use caution with generic geographical descriptors (eg *South American cartels*, *African migrants*).

Where you can be sure of accuracy and it is editorially relevant, be specific (*Argentinian cartels*, *Ugandan Asian migrants*).

Do not use abbreviations or slang terms that are likely to offend ethnic groups.

independent

Do not cap when referring to senators, members of parliament or candidates in elections: *he will run as an independent candidate for the seat of Mayo*.

Indigenous, indigenous

Upper case in any reference to a country's original inhabitants: *The Black Lives Matter movement inspired Indigenous minorities to speak out about systemic racism*, *Canadian prosecutors have dropped charges against an Indigenous chief tackled by police*. Lower case in reference to flora or fauna: *How do you choose plants that are indigenous to your area?*

Indonesian names

Some Indonesian people are known by one name: *Iriana*, *Boediono*. In news stories, use a courtesy title with such names on subsequent reference: *Megawati* ... *Ms Megawati*.

industrial action

A catch-all term that can be ambiguous. If you mean "strike", "sit-in", "lock-out", "go-slow", then say so. Be specific. Avoid the expression "strike action".

infer, imply

You imply something, I infer it. While many dictionaries do list a verb sense of *infer* that is equivalent to *imply*, it is widely considered to be nonstandard English. So do avoid it, unless that's the look you're going for.

infinite

This word is commonly used in two related but separate senses: "very large"; and "without limit". There are occasions, particularly in scientific or mathematical contexts, where the sense of *infinite* meaning "very large" is best avoided.

infinitives

One of the English language's oldest and most storied bugbears, splitting an infinitive means inserting a word (usually an adverb) between the word *to* and a verb, as in *to boldly go* instead of *to go boldly*. There is no general or formal grammatical rule against splitting an infinitive. There are times when it can sound awkward or confusing: *He had advised his staff to not insist on their demands*. It should read: *He had advised his staff not to insist on their demands*.

inflammable, flammable

Mean the same thing: not fireproof. Something that *is* fireproof is *non-flammable*.

injured, wounded

A soldier is wounded if they are hurt in battle. A soldier is injured if they're hurt in an accident even if on the way to an operation.

innovation

Avoid the tautology *new innovation*.

inquiry, enquiry

The first is usually used to describe a formal investigation: *an inquiry into operations at the City of Perth has identified a large number of "very serious" matters*. The latter is normally used to describe the act of seeking information: *'numerous lines of enquiry' related to Moama double murder*.

International Date Line

internet

Don't cap.

iPad

iPhone

Ireland, Northern Ireland

Not interchangeable. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom; Ireland is not.

Islamic State, IS, ISIL, Daesh

Our style: *Islamic State militants*, *Islamic State group*, etc. Avoid *the Islamic State* or other constructions that could be seen to legitimise its claim to statehood. For a more comprehensive overview of the differences between these terms, consult [the Arabic and Islamic Primer](#) on the ABC Intranet.

iTunes

Small *i*, capital *T*, no space, no hyphen.

J

jail

Avoid *gaol* outside of place names or affectation.

jab

Take care when using in medical contexts, especially in headlines. While standard, many take issue with the term's colloquial nature: *Will aged care workers get the Pfizer jab?*

Jamaat-ud-Dawa

Terrorist group in Pakistan.

Japanese names

Generally, Japanese names consist of a family name and a given name in that order: *Abe Shinzō*. This order is conventionally reversed in Western media: *Shinzō Abe*.

jargon

Most agree that jargon should be avoided. Why not simply favour words that are clear and direct? The problem is twofold: nobody can agree on what jargon is, and the examples keeps changing. Usage manuals, in their infinite wisdom, have formerly picked as jargon words that today seem uncontroversial: *housing stock*, *due process*. Perhaps it is enough for the writer to remember that there are disciplines whose lexicon is necessarily obscurantist (the law, the arts, philosophy) and gird their pens accordingly.

Jeep

Jemaah Islamiah

Jerusalem

We also cap East Jerusalem and West Jerusalem. East Jerusalem is a specific place defined as the part of Jerusalem under Arab (Jordanian) control prior to the 1967 war.

jihad

Jihad means “effort” or “striving” and refers to a struggle on behalf of a principle. It is viewed as something positive for a Muslim to do and it applies to many spheres of life, not only violent actions. Jihad does not translate as “war”.

Joneses

As in “keeping up with the Joneses”.

judges and magistrates

As a handy general guide, a magistrate is found in a local court, a judge in a district or county court and Justice is the term used for any higher level courts including Supreme, Federal and High.

Magistrates

First reference: “Magistrate Michael Jones”, then “Magistrate Jones said”, “the magistrate said”.

District and County Court Judges

First reference: “Judge Jane West”, then “Judge West said”, “the judge said”.

Senior Judges (State and Territory Supreme Courts, the Federal Court, the High Court)

First reference: “Justice Rex Chong”, then “Justice Chong said”, “the judge said”.

Chief Judges/Chief Justices (High Court, Supreme Court, Federal Court, Family Court, District and County Courts)

First reference: "Chief Justice Mary Wilson", then "the chief justice said".

In a story, employ the definite article, for example, "the chief justice of the Federal Court".

judgement, judgment

For most senses: judgement. In legal settings: judgment.

jujitsu

Judo is a less aggressive style of self-defence derived from jujitsu. No longer any need to insert a hyphen in jujitsu

junior

Is shortened to **Jr** when part of a name, as in Robert Downey Jr. Not 'Jnr' or any other combo.

However, it is usually always written out in full as 'junior' in broadcast copy to make it easier to read.

just deserts

Not *just desserts*, unless you are saying you only want pudding.

justify

A word that is too often misused as a synonym for "defended" or "explained". Justify means "to show something was right or warranted".

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K

Kashmir

Adjective Kashmiri; but cashmere fabric.

Kellogg's Corn Flakes

But cornflakes in general.

kerb

Not *curb*, when referring to the edge of the footpath.

KFC

Not Kentucky Fried Chicken

kg

Not kgs, so it's **10 kg**.

kick-off

Hyphenate noun; *kick off* verb.

Kickstarter, kickstarter

Capitalised when referring to the specific platform, but lower case for verb forms *kickstart*, *kickstarting*, *kickstarted*.

killed, murdered, died

Not interchangeable. *Murder* has a specific legal meaning (i.e. the accused killed somebody deliberately or recklessly, and is therefore more morally culpable). Only use when that is the relevant charge or conviction: *court documents allege Gabriella Delaney was murdered by Lucas Delaney*. When the responsibility for a person's death is not in dispute, *killed* can be preferable to *died*, as it helps makes agency clearer: *Hannah Clarke was killed by her estranged husband*. Get legal advice if unsure.

Kimberley, The, Western Australia

The Kimberley region, the Kimberleys.

king hit

Avoid where possible: use *one-punch assault* instead. An alternative, *coward punch*, is emotive and judgemental. (Names for this type of offence differ by jurisdiction in Australia, from *unlawful striking causing death* to *single punches or strikes*.)

King's Cross Station

For the station in London, an apostrophe. Not so for Australia (see below).

Kings Cross, St Georges Terrace, Frenchs Forest

As a general (gazetteer) rule, no apostrophes in Australian place names.

Kleenex

Trademark, so capitalise.

km/h

Not kph. In broadcast copy, write in full to avoid misunderstandings: *kilometres per hour*.

knee-jerk reaction

Note the hyphen.

knights, dames and ladies

If John Smith has been knighted, the convention is to call him *Sir John Smith* or *Sir John*, but not *Sir Smith*. The same applies to dames: *Dame Kiri Te Kanawa* or *Dame Kiri*, *Dame Mary Gilmore* or *Dame Mary*. The wife of Sir John Smith, Jane Smith, should be referred to as *Lady Smith*, not Lady Jane.

knockout

Single word for noun; knock out verb.

koala

Not *koala bear*.

Kolkata

Formerly Calcutta

Kokoda Track, Kokoda Trail

Both *Kokoda Track* and *Kokoda Trail* are in common use and are considered acceptable (including by the Australian War Memorial). But the ABC's preferred usage is *Kokoda Track*.

Kombi, kombi

Use a capital letter if you're referring to a Volkswagen Kombi, but lower case if you just mean a generic, family-sized van.

Koran, Qur'an

Koran is the more established spelling in Australian news contexts; *Qur'an* is more accurate to the Arabic word. The latter is fine in specialist content, or when preferred by contributors. Avoid *Quran*.

Korean names

Names in both Koreas generally consist of a family name and a given name in that order. Use the full name on first reference and a family name on subsequent: *South Korean President Moon Jae-in ... Mr Moon*. Given names in South Korea are usually hyphenated, with a lower case second element: *Min Yoon-gi*. By contrast, given names in North Korea are spaced with an upper case second element: *Kim Jong Un*. Check if unsure.

Kosovo, Kosovans

Adjective, noun Kosovan; better than Kosovar

kung fu

No caps.

Kyrgyzstan

Adjective Kyrgyz.

Kyiv, Kiev

Use the preferred Ukrainian spelling for the city's name: *Kyiv*.

L

La Trobe University

but Latrobe Valley

labelling of groups and individuals

The ABC takes no editorial stand in its programming, and its journalism is accurate, impartial and objective. We should take care with labelling groups or individuals. When we do label them, we should ensure we do so in a factual, relevant and consistent way. This applies whether we are talking about the use of words such as *terrorist*, *extremist*, *hardline*, and *militant*, or labels such as *right-wing*, *left-wing*, *conservative* and *radical*. In most cases, it is far better to report factually on the group or individuals and what they have done, rather than apply a label which (more often than not) requires some sort of value judgement and comparison to be made.

In reviewing your copy, the key test is whether you can report on events in a clear and concise way, giving the audience all the information it needs to understand what is happening without the use of labels. On most occasions, this will be the case. Inevitably, there will be times when labels are needed to provide valuable information or context. In such circumstances, it is important that we rely on descriptions that are factual and accurate, and that do not involve subjective judgements. In cases where a third party has used a label to describe a group or individual, this should be made clear within the broadcast.

Apply the editorial principles on labelling consistently to all groups and individuals in a story. The ABC has [editorial guidance](#) on accuracy which includes helpful advice on when to include labelling.

Labor, Labour

Australian Labor Party (ALP), Labor Party. But: Labour Day, labour movement (everywhere), Labour Party (UK, NZ)

LandCruiser

Single word, with a second capital letter.

landholder

Not hyphenated

laptop

One word.

larva, larvae, lava

Larva are insects — plural *larvae*. *Lava* is volcanic magma.

lasso, lassoes

There's an e in there.

the Last Post

Military tradition. A bugle call played at military funerals and at ceremonies to commemorate those who have died in battle.

latitude

Like this: 21 deg 14 min S

lawmaker

An Americanism, this refers to a sitting politician. It's imprecise, so consider alternatives: *members of Congress*, *senators*, *members of the House of Representatives* or just plain *politicians*.

lay, lie

Hens *lay* eggs. People *lay* things such as carpets and tablecloths. *Lay*, as a transitive verb, needs a direct object and its past form is *laid*. *Lie* (meaning "to be in a horizontal position") does not take a direct object. Its past tense form, *lay*, can understandably cause some confusion with the above. Adopt the following usage:

"Why don't you *lie* down and have a rest". (Present tense)

“We found it *lying* under the bed”. (Present participle)

“As he *lay* dying” (Past tense)

“He *lied* about his involvement in the war.” (Past tense of the verb meaning to make a false statement.)

layby, laybys

Our style.

lbw

Leg before wicket (cricket). No need to capitalise.

lead, led

Lead is a verb meaning to show the way. The past tense of the verb *lead* is *led*. Pronounced differently, *lead* is a metal that is soft and grey. *I will lead the march and, having led it, will write about it with a lead pencil.* Often in sports broadcasts we hear about a team with an *unassailable lead*. That would suggest it cannot be overtaken. They might just have a *commanding lead*.

lead-up (to), lead up (to)

Lead-up is a noun: *in the lead-up to the final exam we'll be taking weekly tests.* By contrast, *lead up* is a phrasal verb: *weekly tests will lead up to a final exam.*

leaderboard

One word.

learned, learnt

Both “learned” and “learnt” are acceptable as the past tense and past participle of learn. Just be careful to avoid confusion with the adjective “learned” as in ‘learned’ scholars.

leavened

A talk might be leavened by humour (not ‘levelled’).

left wing, the left, the Labor Party’s Left faction

Left-wing is hyphenated when used as an adjective. Left-winger is also hyphenated but consider before using (see labelling).

legionnaires’ disease

Named after an outbreak at a conference of American Legionnaires.

Lego

A trade mark, so capitalise.

Leicester

Pronounced *LES-tuh*. A city in the county of Leicestershire, England.

lepers

Do not use; regarded as inappropriate and stigmatising; prefer *people with leprosy* or, if they are being treated, *leprosy patients*.

lese majeste

No hyphen; the crime of violating the majesty. Thailand is one the few countries to keep this law.

levee, levy

The town hoped the flood *levee* would hold. A *levy* was imposed to raise revenue.

LGBTQIA+

Use *LGBTQIA+* to refer to all such communities in general terms: *Should the mining sector do more to support LGBTQIA+ workers?* Prefer specific gender identities, sexual orientations, or communities where relevant: *What it's like to be a woman in love with a bisexual man, lesbian couples drawn to Alice Springs by friendship, new Olympic guidelines for trans and intersex athletes*. Consider using clearer or more accurate terminology: *people with diverse sexualities and genders, people with intersex variations*.

Several umbrella terms are in use to refer to a broad range of sexual orientations, gender identities and communities. These include LGBTQIA+, and others. The letters usually indicate lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual people, with the plus symbol including other related identities. Note that a person's intersex status is separate to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Liberal, liberal

Capital for the Australian political party: *Liberal, Liberals, the Liberal Party, Liberal Party of Australia* (official name). Lower case for *liberal* views.

Liberal National Party

As in Queensland political party: *LNP*.

licence, license

Licence is the noun and *license* is the verb. So when you have a *liquor licence* you have been licensed to serve alcohol. But (in the context of NSW lockout laws) *liquor licensing restrictions*.

licensee

Holder of a licence.

licorice

Not liquorice

lifelong

A lifelong supporter.

light bulb

Two words.

lightning, lightening

Lightning when you mean thunder and lightning. *Lightening* describes the act of making something lighter, like a load, or a colour.

likeable

Though *likable* is also accepted by dictionaries.

like, such as

Be aware: *like* can exclude, where *such as* includes. The phrase *countries like Fiji are poor* suggests the writer has in mind countries that aren't Fiji, for example, Vanuatu or Samoa. The writer actually means, *countries such as Fiji*. But *like* should not always be changed to *such as*. You might end up with a sentence similar to *He is not an actor, such as Tom Cruise, the Scientology enthusiast*.

line-up

Not lineup.

liquid, liquefy, liquefied

As in liquefied natural gas.

littoral

Relating to the shore of a lake, sea, or ocean. Not to be confused with *literal*.

liveable, liveability

Livable is, generally, the American spelling. But bear in mind it persists in some charities and other brand names, such as *Livable Houses Australia*.

lo and behold

Not *low and behold*.

loath, loathe

Loath (an adjective) means reluctant or unwilling, while loathe (a verb) means to dislike intensely. "I am *loath* to heap praise on someone I *loathe*."

loan, lend

Loan is a noun. *Lend* is a verb. You don't *loan* someone money; you *lend* them money — you give them a *loan*.

local government

Only upper case official titles: *Brisbane City Council*, but *a Brisbane council*, *the council said*. Do not cap *local government*. Australian local government nomenclature varies. Council heads can variously be *mayors*, *lord mayors* or *presidents*. Elected members are variously *councillors* or *aldermen*. Ensure your descriptors are accurate.

lockdown, shutdown

Imprecise as general descriptors. Explain their meaning where possible, and what they mean for audiences. *Lockdown* implies restriction of personal movement, usually by the state, especially

confinement to homes, as evinced shown by modified forms: *partial lockdown*, *full lockdown*. *Shutdown* normally implies closure of business or governments.

logbook

One word

Londonderry, Derry

In news stories, first reference for city and county: *Londonderry*. Second and subsequent, if you like: *Derry*. The local council is *Derry City Council*.

look to

Used too often in place of *hope to* or *expect to*.

lore man

Position within some Indigenous communities. As with *clever man*, most generic reference is two words.

Lord's

English cricket ground.

Lycra

Note capitals.

M

MacKillop

Mary MacKillop became Australia's first saint on 17 October 2010.

mackintosh

For the garment. In historical reference to the phone manufacturer's celebrated home computer: *Macintosh*, *Mac*.

maiden speech

Avoid outside of quotes. Alternatives: *first speech*, *inaugural speech*.

major

An over-worked adjectives, and usually unnecessary.

malice aforethought

Means premeditated harm.

manned, manning

Avoid this verb use where possible, as it implies a generic masculine: *The China National Space Administration plans to carry out manned missions to the Moon*. Prefer *crewed*, *staffed*, *human*.

man-made

Avoid this descriptor where possible, as it implies a generic masculine: *Intelligence reports say “the wide scientific consensus” is that COVID-19 was not man-made*. Prefer *synthetic*, *artificial*, or (in the context of climate change) *anthropogenic*.

manta ray

Two words.

Māori, Maori

Singular and plural. Where possible, use the form with the diacritic.

Marines

Use *US Marines* when referring to the Marines as a branch of the US armed forces: *US Marines say they have killed a number of insurgents*. Use lower case when referring to individual marines: *three US marines are charged with killing civilians in Iraq*.

Marseille

The place. For the French national anthem: *La Marseillaise*.

Mary-Louise McLaws

massage parlour

Use with caution: can imply provision of sexual services where that is not the intention. Consider *massage provider*, *massage business*, etc.

maybe, may be

One word for the adverb, two words when the copular verb is modified by an auxiliary: *maybe the island will be overrun*, *the island may be overrun*.

meanwhile

Avoid when linking unrelated events. When a transition device is required, there are usually more subtle ways.

Mecca

Upper case in reference to the Islamic holy site. Lower case in generic reference: *The Hobart tip shop is a mecca for keen recyclers*.

medevac, medivac

Avoid outside of direct speech. In quotes, use the former or its inflected forms: *medevaced*, *medevacing*.

megabits per second

Used to describe the rate of data transfer. When abbreviated: *Mbps*

meltdown, melt down

A toddler may have a *meltdown* in the supermarket and a nuclear reactor can suffer a *meltdown*. A smelter may *melt down* iron ore.

memoir

Meaning autobiographical writing, has no final E. *Aide-memoire*, a reminder, does.

meningococcal

This is an adjective. For a noun form, use *meningococcal disease*. Some lenience here for headlines and other space-constrained environs.

menstrual products

Use in reference to products designed to assist menstruation such as tampons or pads. Avoid the euphemistic or ambiguous: *feminine hygiene products*, *period products*.

metered content

online content for which one may be charged. Not 'metred'.

methyated spirits

metric

Australia uses the metric system as its standard for weights and measures. There are some exceptions: sailors and aviators measure distance in *nautical miles* and calculate speed in *knots*. A knot is one nautical mile an hour, so avoid constructions such as *16 knots an hour*. Pilots measure altitude in *feet*; aircraft and ships specify engine output in *horsepower*; horses are measured in *hands*; and bullion dealers weigh gold by the *troy ounce*. Do not convert these into metric equivalents.

mic, mic'd, mic-ing

Use when transcribing colloquial phrases around microphone use. Avoid: *miced*, *mic-ing*.

micro-parties

Micro-party, *micro-parties* — two words joined by a hyphen.

midterm, midterms

Lower case, no hyphen.

mileage

But not *kilometreage*, unless you're having a laugh.

militia

This means a body of soldiers — usually civilians, rather than professional soldiers. An individual from the militia would be a *militiaman* or *militiawoman*.

Milky Way

Capitalised as such.

mindful of

Not *about*.

minister, Minister

Upper case the full titles of incumbent government ministers, here or elsewhere: *Prime Minister Scott Morrison*, *Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab*. Lower case for generic and plural use, or in reference to

former office holders: *the minister said, federal and state health ministers, then-foreign affairs minister Alexander Downer.*

minutia, minutiae

Small or trivial details.

miracle

Fine in attributed quotes, but prone to overuse. Be wary.

misnegation

Be wary of combining negated forms, as in the following: *Once again the Australian public completely fails to miss the point of the Barmy Army.* Logically, such a sentence conveys the opposite meaning to what they intend: the Australian public has not missed the point of the Barmy Army. Such sentences are relatively common, but for clarity's sake cut the Gordian knot: if you mean the point *should not be missed*, say (or write) exactly that.

mitigate, militate

"Mitigate" is sometimes used by mistake for "militate". "Mitigate" means "to make something less extreme". It's often used in reference to the severity of a punishment or the intensity of heat, anger or pain. "Mitigating circumstances" are those that reduce blame. "Militate (against)" means "to be a force (against)" or "to work (against)".

mixed metaphors, literary allusion

As the following example sentence shows, if you start a sentence in one metaphor it's wise to finish in the same one: *they've put all their eggs in one basket and it's misfired.* Take special care, too, when using literary or classical allusions. The type of person apt to notice them is especially apt to notice if you muck them up, as in: *After a decade of inaction, we may already be too far down the Rubicon.*

mixtape

One word.

Mohammed

Preferred spelling for the prophet of Islam. For a more comprehensive overview of terminology in Islam, consult [the Arabic and Islamic Primer](#) on the ABC Intranet.

Lord Monckton

It is either: Christopher Monckton; Christopher Monckton, 3rd Viscount Monckton of Brenchley or Lord Monckton. Never Lord Christopher Monckton as this would only be used if he was the younger son of a Duke or Marquis eg. Lord Randolph Churchill son of the Duke of Malborough.

Moqtada al-Sadr

An Iraqi Shiite cleric.

MP

Abbreviation for member of parliament. Plural: *MPs*.

mullah

A Muslim teacher or scholar. The term is most commonly associated with countries such as Iran where Shia Islam is dominant but is also used in countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan where Sunni Muslims dominate. The term is rarely used in Sunni Arabic-speaking communities, where Imam” or shaykh are the common usages.

Mumbai

Formerly Bombay

Murray-Darling Basin

Always hyphenate. Not *Murray-Darling basin*, but can be *the basin* in subsequent reference. Also *lower basin*, *upper basin*, etc. Adjacent geographical features don’t always take capitals: *Murray lower lakes*.

music genres

Here are some that cause orthographic trouble: *hip hop*, *metalcore*, *heavy metal*, *hardcore*, *post-punk*, *nu-metal*, *R&B*, *rock ‘n’ roll*.

mutant

Avoid *mutant strain*, *mutant virus* and other alarmist language; mutations are changes in the genetic material, happen frequently and are not (by themselves) cause for alarm. Emerging forms of the SARS-CoV-2 virus are best referred to as *variants*.

Muzak

trademark, so capitalise

My School

Official website name is two separate words, both capped

Myanmar

Is the name of the country. Avoid *Burma*, unless the country’s previous name is editorially relevant. When referring to the country’s residents: *people of Myanmar*, *Myanmar people*. Adjectival form: *Myanmar custom*, *Myanmar cuisine*. Not *Myanmarese*.

myself

Myself is a reflexive pronoun, which means it is used when the object of a verb is the same as its subject: *he gave himself a raise*. Sometimes reflexive pronouns are incorrectly used where a subject or object case pronoun (*me*, *I*) would do just as well: *experienced professional journalists like myself and Mia Freedman*. Avoid this misuse.

N

name changes

Unless there are compelling editorial or legal reasons not to do so, refer to a person by their chosen name. When an individual is known to the public by their prior name, it may be necessary to use it sparingly to inform audiences: *Canadian actor Elliot Page, formerly known as Ellen, says he is transgender*. Once the new name is established, avoid using the former name. Use an individual’s chosen name in headlines.

NAPLAN

No need to spell out or explain the acronym in headlines, or even body text. If it needs explaining, simply refer to it in the first mention as “the standardised literacy and numeracy tests” or similar.

narc

For the pejorative contraction of “narcotics agent”. Not *nark*.

narrow victory

A win by 100 to 99, in sport or politics, is self-evidently a narrow one. Avoid the obvious.

NASA

National Aeronautics and Space Administration, but no need to spell out.

National Broadband Network, NBN

Cap and write out in full in first instance. The abbreviation is acceptable in second reference.

Native Title, native title

Lower case in most reference: *a native title action, the court determined a native title claim*. Upper case in specific reference to legislation or official bodies: *the Native Title Act, the National Native Title Tribunal*.

NATO

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, but no need to spell out.

New Testament

new year, New Year’s Eve, New Year’s Day

No cap for the generic sense: *Parliament delayed voting until the new year, new year celebrations*. Upper case for specifics: *New Year’s Day, New Year’s Eve, Chinese New Year, New Year’s Honours*.

New York City

But lower case in other related constructions: *New York state*.

newspapers

The Age, not *The Age newspaper*. In passing reference, drop the definite article: *the news was reported in today’s Age*.

Ngaanyatjarra

Aboriginal group of the Australian Western Desert.

nicknames

Usually capitalised in reference to famous sobriquets: *the Iron Lady, Alexander the Great, Andre the Giant*

ni-Vanuatu, Vanuatu

Avoid *Vanuatuan*. Use either as the adjectival descriptor for ethnic Melanesian people from Vanuatu: *More than 300 ni-Vanuatu workers are picking mangoes... seasonal workers from Vanuatu*. *Ni-van* is also commonly used, though is colloquial. Depending on the context, it may be necessary to explain that *ni-Vanuatu* is the term for people from the country.

Nobel prize

Capitalise the name of each prize, e.g. the Nobel Peace Prize, the Nobel Prize in Literature. Some will say there is no such thing as *the Nobel Prize in economics*. This is technically true, if overwhelmingly pedantic. The *Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences* is younger, true (first awarded in 1968, against 1901 for the main awards) and more commercial (presented by a bank, not the Swedish Academy). But it is presented at the same ceremony as all the other ones and so is commonly referred to as *the Nobel Prize in Economics*.

none

It is a myth that “none” has to take a singular verb: plural is acceptable and often sounds more natural, e.g. “none of the issues have been resolved”.

none the wiser

I was none the wiser (or *I was little the wiser*) means to be was still confused. But drop the article in the positive version: ‘I was a little wiser’, not ‘I was a little *the* wiser’

Noongar

Largest Indigenous population in Western Australia.

nor

A conjunction used to continue negation after an initial negative clause, as in: *Myer’s performance since listing has not helped, nor has the recent brutal market correction*. It is also commonly found acting as a correlative conjunction after *neither*, as in: *your health records are neither safe nor secure*. In this example, using *or* would be nonstandard.

Nordic countries

Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland. Scandinavia is a more specific ethnic/cultural term, which is generally only used for Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and tends to exclude Greenland, which is a territory of Denmark.

North Pole

numbers, measurements

Online

For plain numbers, spell out from *zero* to *nine*, but use numerals from *10* to 999,999. *Millions* and *billions* are written in words and figures, e.g. *1 million*, *8.6 billion*. Once a number gets to 1,000, use a comma. Spell out ordinals from *first* to *ninth*, thereafter *10th*, *31st*, *100th*, etc.

With measurements, always use a numeral, even if the number is smaller than 10, e.g. *3 kilometres* rather than *three kilometres*, and *6 kilograms* rather than *six kilograms*. Spell out measurements in the first instance, then use the symbol in subsequent references. Like this: *Sydney could expect up to 200 millimetres of rainfall ... Only 10mm is expected in the state’s west*. Put the symbol next to the numeral; you don’t need a space between them.

Use numerals in reference to timed events. Spell out *hours*, *minutes*, and *seconds* in the first reference; in subsequent reference, separate units of measurement with a colon: *Mary Jones finished the marathon in 2 hours, 18 minutes and 42 seconds... silver medallist Mary Macklin crossed the line in 2:18:46*.

When starting a sentence with a number, do not use numerals: *Fourteen Board members arrived; five were from Queensland*. For ages: *22-year-old Joseph Nagel* and *six-year-old Jenny Sanders*. But *the woman was in her 30s*. Betting odds are separated by an en dash: *100–1*, *10–1*, and so on.

Broadcast

General principles:

Avoid overusing numbers in script copy.

Avoid putting numbers first in a sentence. Listeners can easily miss the first words of a news item.

When writing scripts for broadcast, write measurements in full: *millilitres*, *kilometres per hour*, etc. Consider whether the numbers or measurements involved in your story require precision, or a round figure.

On rounding: say *about*, rather than *approximately* or *some* — the latter is non-conversational, formal-speak. Say *more than 500*, not *over 500*.

If a precise figure is essential to the meaning, it may be necessary to repeat it.

O

Occupied Palestinian Territory, Occupied Territories

Use *Occupied Palestinian Territory* or *Occupied Territories* to refer to Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

OECD

Spell out in full on first reference: *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*. Abbreviate in second reference: *OECD*.

off of

People often object to this particular construction (preposition + *of*) on the basis of colloquialism. In more formal registers, just use *off* instead.

offbeat, offhand, offside

offshore

One word.

Oh!

Not O!

oil rig

For exploration and drilling.

OK

Not *okay*. But write out the verb form in full: *okaying*, *okayed*.

Olympics, Olympian

Capitalise in all references: *the Olympics, the Winter Olympics, the Olympic Games, the Games*. Avoid “former Olympian”; once an athlete competes they are an Olympian for life.

ombudsman, ombudsmen

Capitalise the full name of the ombudsman in the first reference: *the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman*. Lower case in subsequent reference: *the ombudsman*.

on to, onto

onto, like *into*, is written as one word when a preposition (*jump onto the boat, walk onto the stage*) and otherwise as two words (*carry on to the end, move on to discuss other things*).

one another

Use one another if more than two use each other for two only.

one in six, one in ten, agreement

Q: Are constructions like this singular or plural? A: Yes. Both singular and plural verbs are used depending on whether the referent is a single person or a mass of people: *One Australian in every three is a migrant* exists happily alongside *one in five Australian children have gone hungry in the past twelve months*.

one-time

one-time adviser to the Liberals

online, offline

working online, etc

only

Misplacing “only” can greatly affect the meaning. Put it as close as you can to the phrase it modifies and take care that you don’t turn the sentence into a comment. “He was sentenced to only three years jail” suggests we think he got off lightly.

onscreen, offscreen

She’s likeable *onscreen*; *offscreen* less so. Same goes for *onstage, backstage, offstage*.

ophthalmologist

Are specialists in ophthalmology. Mind that first *h*.

Order of Australia

There are four levels of appointment, listed in descending order of prestige, with attendant postnominal:

Companion (AC), Officer (AO), Member (AM) and Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM).

The Order of Australia is not an award. It recognises people for achievement or for meritorious service. People are not awarded an Order of Australia.

A person is made a Companion (AC), an Officer (AO) or a Member (AM) of the Order of Australia, or receives a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM)."

orangutan

No hyphen.

ordinance, ordnance

The former refers to laws or regulation, the latter to weaponry.

orient, disorient

Same as (and preferred to) 'orientate', 'disorientate'.

-our, -or

Use -our, not -or, for words such as *behaviour, flavour, saviour*.

our

The ABC does not own cities, troops, a swimming team, or the weather. Use the appropriate terms: *Australian cities, Olympic swimmers, Adelaide weather, the Australian dollar*, and so on.

outlook

The outlook is good. Not *the outlook looks good*, which is tautological.

Oxford comma, serial comma

A comma placed before the last item in a list: *she ate grapes, toast, and cheese*. Avoid unless it aids the reader or prevents ambiguity.

P**p's and q's**

Lower case, no apostrophes.

Pacific Islander, Pasifika

Both terms are used to refer to people living in Australia or New Zealand with Pacific Island heritage. Both are collective terms: where possible, be specific and describe your talent the way they wish to be described. See also **Polynesian, Micronesian, Melanesian**.

paean

song of praise

paedophile, paedophilia

Not *pedophile* or derived forms. Be careful with the use of hyphens: a *child-sex offender* can only be a paedophile; a *child sex offender* could be a young person charged with sex offences.

pair

In reference to two people, treat as a plural: *the pair were charged, the pair are due to face court*.

palate, palette

Palate is taste, or the roof of your mouth ... *palette* is a range of colours or a painter's board.

Palestinian Authority

PA for short.

Palme d'Or

The highest prize awarded at the Cannes film festival.

panic buy, panic buying

Hyphen for verb senses, but not for noun senses: *an epidemic of panic buying, Canberrans panic-bought toilet paper.*

pantyhose

Not pantihose.

paparazzi, paparazzo

Plural and singular, respectively.

on par, on a par with

Not quite the same: *I'm feeling a bit below par. The golfer finished the round six under par.* But: *Can home schooling be on a par with the state-run system?*

Paralympic Games

Or Paralympics.

Parker Bowles, Camilla

Duchess of Cornwall. No hyphen.

Parkinson's disease

Include the possessive apostrophe

Parliament, parliament

Upper case proper names or full titles: *Parliament House, the 46th Parliament of Australia*. In all other cases, lower case: *state parliament sits next week, all eyes in parliament have been on Peter Dutton*. Upper case the full names of overseas parliaments and their equivalents: *US Congress, Britain's House of Commons, Russia's Duma* but *Russia's parliament*

past tense

If you start a sentence in the past tense, you should continue in the past tense.

So:

Superintendent MacArthur said there is no breakthrough yet. (Wrong)

Superintendent MacArthur said there was no breakthrough yet. (Right)

He said although police have spoken to a number of people, no-one has been charged. (Wrong)

He said although police had spoken to a number of people, no-one had been charged. (Right)

See more under entry **tense**.

pastime

It's what you do to pass the time.

patient zero

In stories where scientific accuracy is critical, it may be clearer to use terms such as *index case* (the first case to come to the attention of investigators) and *primary case* (the case responsible for bringing disease to an area).

peccadillo

Plural *peccadilloes*.

pedal

What you do to a bicycle. *Peddle* is what a *pedlar* does, unless he's a drug *peddler*. Both words mean the same thing, but *peddler* is more common in the US. The US spelling has stuck when it comes to drugs.

peek, peak

A peek is what you take when you want to see something, and a peak is the top of a mountain.

pejorative

This means negative or deprecatory . It has nothing to do with the word *perjury*.

pending

It means "awaiting an outcome of some process that has already begun". *Impending*, on the other hand, means "something about to happen". For the sake of conversational English, avoid both.

peninsula

This is a noun. *Peninsular* is the adjective.

per

Avoid: *she earns \$30,000 a year* is better than *per year*. Fine to use in Latin set phrases : *per capita*, *per se*, *per annum*. Not *per head*.

per cent

Two words: *per cent*. Not *percent* or %. Can be shortened in headlines or similar: *House prices set to rise 15pc*; *analyst*. *Percentage* is one word. A percentage should be written as a figure (*2 per cent*, *24 per cent*) unless used to start a sentence. Be wary of the difference between *per cent* and *percentage point*.

per se

by or in itself; intrinsically. It's Latin, and sometimes appears in transcripts as *per say*, which is wrong.

perspex

No need to capitalise, unless you are referring to the specific trademarked product .

Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA)

Arts is plural. But in the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) the word 'Art' is singular

Perpetual Loyal

Only use initial capitals, rather than spelling LOYAL with all caps.

phase

Refers to a period of time, or a phase of development. A homophone, *faze*, means worry, as in *nothing fazed her*.

PhD

Note that capitalisation.

phenomenon

This word and its plural often get misused. *Phenomena* is the plural but many use it when they mean phenomenon. *A phenomena* is incorrect. It should be two or more phenomena.

Philippines, Philippine islands, Philippine president, Philippines government

inhabitants are Filipino (m), Filipina (f), Filipinos (m + f)

phone numbers

In broadcast, phone numbers are rarely remembered by listeners. They need to be stated clearly and repeated regularly. The aim is to make the numbers as simple as possible to remember.

Where a number has six numbers — e.g. 131300 — it should be stated as “One three one, three hundred”.

131273 should be stated as “One three one, two seven three.”

Our talkback numbers and other 1300 numbers should be stated as “One three-hundred”.

Eight numbers — e.g. 42791856 — should be expressed as “Four two seven nine, one eight five six”.

For ten digit mobile numbers use the four-number prefix — for 0428 say “zero four two eight”, and then break the following six numbers into two parts — “three six nine, five eight four”.

Double numbers such as “66” should be expressed as “double 6” and, similarly, three numbers would be “triple 6” and so on.

For broadcast, refer to emergency services numbers as “triple zero”, not “triple oh”.

Text Messages: We use the term “Text” rather than “SMS”. Don't refer to text authors by their phone number, or any abbreviation of it.

Other numbers and lists: finance information, currency, calendar dates and numbers are an area where we risk variation.

Where providing lists (such as key exchange rates), present the list in the same sequence every time — remember, listeners are creatures of habit.

phosphorus (noun), phosphorous (adjective)

Mind the extra *u*.

photojournalist

One word, no hyphen required

photos, pics

Not *photo's* or *pix*.

photoshop

Started life as a trademark, but now in such common use that it no longer requires a capital letter.

pigeonhole

Verb or noun

Pilates

You need to capitalise this, as it refers to a specific fitness regime named after Thomas Pilates.

pin number

Strictly speaking, should be referred to as *PIN* and not *pin number*, as it is an acronym and stands for *personal identification number*. Adding *number* is therefore redundant. However, the expression *pin number* is now so common that it is considered acceptable.

Pitjantjatjara

Major Aboriginal language group

plain English

Use it. For example, we prefer *begin* or *start* to the rather pompous *commence*; *buy* to the equally pompous *purchase*.

plaster of paris

No caps for paris.

Plasticine

Trademark, so capitalise.

plateau (singular), plateaus (plural)

not plateaux

Play-Doh

It's a trademark. Use *play-dough* for generic reference.

play-off (noun), play off (verb)**PlayStation****playwright, playwriting**

A playwright practises the art of playwriting. therefore it's *playwriting prize*, not 'playwrighting prize'.

pleaded

Not *pled*.

police, cop

Formal *police* is preferred to informal *cop*, *cops* in body copy. *Cop* can be acceptable in headlines, particularly for lighter stories: *Top cop honoured for bravery*. Avoid: *cop killer*.

Polynesian, Micronesian, Melanesian

Not interchangeable: all refer to different groupings of Pacific Island countries. Melanesian is sometimes considered offensive on etymological grounds. Where possible, be specific and describe your talent in their preferred terms.

Pope, papal

Upper case *Pope* when used as a full title or preceding a name: *Pope John Paul II*. Lower case elsewhere: *the pope's decision marks a significant development*.

postal workers

Not *postmen*.

posthumously

Can be an unintended source of humour, as in the following: *Scott Morrison has recommended the Queen posthumously award Edward Sheean a Victoria Cross*. Ambiguities of this type can usually be avoided by using the adjectival form *posthumous*.

postnominals

Do not include postnominals unless they are relevant to a story: *Brendan Nelson*, not *Brendan Nelson AO*. Will be relevant in some legal stories, where they should be noted in first reference but not thereafter: *Bret Walker SC ... Mr Walker said*.

Post-it

Trademark, so capitalise. Note no capital on *it*.

post-mortem

The Latin means “after death”, and is often used as an adjective: *post-mortem examination*. But *post-mortem* has also been used as a noun: *Review of post-mortem delays murder case*. Some view this as nonstandard: if you're worried, just use *autopsy*.

post-op, pre-op

Avoid in reference to transgender people. Write out in full for sporting or other medical contexts.

Prayut Chan-o-cha

Thai military leader and Prime Minister. Formerly *Prayuth Chanocha*.

Premier

Cap it for an incumbent: *Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews*. No cap for past state leaders: *former NSW premier Bob Carr*. The Chinese traditionally give their Prime Minister the title of premier: *Premier Wen Jiabao*. Bermuda, too, has a premier rather than a Prime Minister.

premiers, minor premiers, champions, championship

Not interchangeable in domestic sporting codes. In AFL and NRL competitions, teams are *minor premiers* if they complete their season at the top of the league table, and *premiers* if they win the grand final (or *premiership*). In the A-League, by contrast, teams finishing the season at the top of the ladder are *premiers*, and *champions* if they win the grand final (or *championship*).

preposition

Ending a sentence with a preposition is fine: *something to aim for ... a great place to walk to*.

prescribe, proscribe

To *prescribe* is to lay down as a rule to be followed. *Proscribing* means to forbid, denounce or condemn. A sentence such as *development can only take place under certain proscribed circumstances* is incorrect.

Prime Minister-elect

Also *president-elect*. But in Australia, we have a *Prime Minister-designate*.

pronunciation

When copy contains difficult or unfamiliar words, provide a precise pronunciation guide at the top of the page. Be guided by your talent, or by a resource such as ABC Language. If you don't know it, don't guess.

pronouns

Use the pronouns a person chooses to go by. For some people, this may include singular they, as in: *Dr Andy Kaladelfos agreed... they said*.

prophet, the Prophet

Upper case when used preceding the name of someone considered to be divine: *the Prophet Mohammed, the Prophet Elijah*. Lower case for general or idiomatic use: *a false prophet, prophets of doom*.

punctuation

apostrophe

To form the possessive of singular nouns or indefinite pronouns, add an apostrophe and s: *a dog's breakfast, a room of one's own*. Plural nouns ending in s just get the apostrophe: *the politicians' dispute, athletics' darkest day*. Treat plural forms not ending in s as you would singular nouns: *children's games*. For proper names ending in s, add an apostrophe and another s: *Lucas's parents, Higgins's claim, Laos's position in the centre of Asia*. Note some set phrases are treated as singular: *writer's block, cow's milk*.

If a period of time modifies a noun, use an apostrophe: *he was sentenced to 10 years' jail, she is taking six weeks' holiday*. Or rewrite the phrase: *he was sentenced to 10 years in jail, she is taking six weeks off*. No apostrophes when the time period is adverbial: *two weeks old, six months pregnant*.

Misplacing an apostrophe can change the meaning of a phrase. *My brother's friend's house* is different to *my brothers' friend's house*, and different again to *my brother's friends' house*. Australian place names generally don't have apostrophes: *Kings Cross, Badgerys Creek*. Some international place names retain them. Always check.

brackets

The rules for using brackets are simple: words added into a quote should be contained in square brackets, to make it clear that we've inserted them: *I like them [cakes] but I prefer to bake other things*. Keep the original word in there; don't replace it with the word in brackets. Add *[sic]* after an incorrect or unusual spelling in a written quote, to show the error was from the quoted person: *Um, drunk at a mates 21st, I tripped ofer [sic] and landed lip first*. Use round brackets for parentheses, or after an unfamiliar acronym to spell out in full.

colons

Use a colon (not a comma) to introduce quotes if the quote is a full sentence: *The company released a statement, which said: "This is a tragedy and our thoughts are with the families."* No colon if the quote is only a fragment: *Ms Asher said the taste was "bitter and horrible"*.

Use a colon to precede a list: *There are three MPs who are still undecided: Marise Clark, Joe Aberdy, and Samantha Hardy*. Use a colon when the first part of a sentence introduces a proposition that is resolved in the second part. This makes the meaning clearer than if you just used a comma. For example, compare these versions of a sentence:

She raised \$100,000 over the period, \$80,000 at the dinner, and \$20,000 from functions.

She raised \$100,000 over the period: \$80,000 at the dinner, and \$20,000 from functions.

Using a comma implies that she raised a total of \$200,000. Using a colon makes it clear that she raised a total of \$100,000, made up of two amounts.

Colons are also used to separate kickers (or quotes, or similar) from the rest of the headline. *Budget 2020: What do we know so far?* In cases like the above, cap after the colon. Normal capital letter conventions apply when you're using a colon in a headline for the purposes of attribution. *The Murray River is dying: researchers* but *The Murray River is dying: Greens*

commas

The general rule with commas is that the sentence should still make sense without whatever sits between the commas: *The director, Sofia Coppola, said she deliberately made the film highly stylised*. You could also write this without commas at all: *Director Sofia Coppola said she deliberately made the film highly stylised*. Both are correct. The comma-free option can run into trouble if the person being described has a long title: *UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process Robert Serry arrived on Tuesday*. If that's the case, rewrite with parenthetical commas.

Whatever you do, don't drop a single parenthetical comma but leave the other one in. In other words, avoid punctuating like this: *The director, Sofia Coppola said she deliberately made the film highly stylised*. Broadcast scripts — like much 19th century literature — often use commas to indicate points at which a reader can take a breath. Such commas should be removed in any online copy.

dashes

There are three types of dashes: the em rule, the en rule and the hyphen. Internationally, their use is far from standardised. At the ABC we use them in the following ways.

Use an em rule (—) to create breaks in a sentence — like this. Create it by holding down the Alt key and pressing 0151 on your keyboard's number pad.

Use an en dash (–) to separate numbers, dates or distances: *50–60 protesters*, *June–July figures*, *the Perth–Broome route*. If the dates include digits, put a space either side of the en dash: *June 6 – July 4*. Create it by holding down the Alt key and pressing 0150 on your keyboard's number pad.

Use a hyphen (-) to link select words and phrases: *post-mortem*, *multi-billion-dollar deal*.

Don't use a hyphen between words that could be better written as one word: it's *waterfowl*, not *water-fowl*. Always [check the Macquarie Dictionary](#) if unsure. But no hyphen after adverbs ending in *-ly*, or *very*: a *highly respected lawyer*.

Compound adjectives take a hyphen when they precede nouns: *middle-aged women*, *an eight-hour search*. If you're unsure whether your compound takes a hyphen, try each modifier against the phrasal head. *Big red car* doesn't need a hyphen — you can have a *big car*, and you can have a *red car*. On the other hand, *old-growth forests* needs a hyphen. *Old forests* make sense, but *growth forests* does not.

ellipses, ellipsis

Use an ellipsis to show that you've removed words from a quote: "*But I really wanted him to know, I mean I wanted him to know that he was wrong.*" becomes "*I really wanted him to know ... he was wrong.*"

Put a space either side of an ellipsis. To create: hold down the Alt key and press 0133 on your keyboard's number pad. This creates an unbreakable ellipsis, which means you won't end up with some full stops on one line and the rest on another line. It's also only a single character, too, so it's handy for Twitter.

semicolon

Semicolons serve two purposes: linking independent clauses, and clarifying items in a series. When linking independent clauses, the semicolon often serves a similar function to the coordinating conjunctions *and*, *but*, or *for*. It has a degree of obstruence greater than a comma but less than a full stop: *My sister loves mussels; her husband hates them.*

quotation marks, quotes

Only use single quotation marks for quotes in headlines and subheads: *'Win for democracy' as NSW government backflips to release secret documents*. Use double quotation marks for quotes in text: *"Look at the beauty!" Mr Palta said.*

For quotes within quotes, alternate between double and single quotation marks. If both quoted elements end at the same time, group punctuation together: *"I told her, 'I know who you really are.'"*

Nicknames, irony, and unfamiliar terms all take double quotes: *Andrew "Twiggy" Forest, the "debate" turned into a free-for-all, the government's new "medihotels" will be privately built and operated*. Be aware: irony and unfamiliar terms may be mistaken for quoted material. Write around this if necessary.

Where quotes run over several lines, begin each with a double quotation mark. Don't use closing quotes until the end of the excerpted speech:

“At this stage we don’t believe the containers themselves pose a threat to the whales themselves.

“[There have been] no reports of any injury to wildlife or marine life, no strikes of any vessels at this stage.”

puns

The occasional and judicious use of puns can brighten up our writing. But it is easy to overdo.

Q

Qantas

QC, KC

Use without comma for postnominals: *Stuart Littlemore QC, KC*.

Queen’s Birthday honours list

Queensland, Qld

abbreviation is Qld, not QLD

Question Time

Capped

queue, queueing OR queuing

both spellings are acceptable

quarantine, isolation

Some medical authorities maintain a distinction between these terms. In this view, *isolation* means separating the infected from the healthy, and *quarantine* means removing the healthy from the general public to monitor the development of symptoms. Where relevant (e.g. contrasting global public health approaches, explaining health directives), note the difference.

R

R U OK? Day

Note spacing and capital letters.

R&B

Not *RnB*.

radiographer

Takes x-rays ... a radiologist interprets them afterwards

raft

Raft has become a popular way to describe a big collection of things, like ‘a raft of awards’, but it has a subtly ironic tone. Therefore ‘...following a raft of attacks on Indian students’ was a questionable choice of words. Avoid this cliché.

rain event

Meteorological jargon, best avoided in place of more prosaic substitutes e.g. *rain*, *rainfall*.

raze

Take care when using on radio or TV: *the building was razed* sounds the same as *the building was raised*.

recreational drugs, party drugs

Avoid the terms *recreational drugs* or *party drugs* outside of quotes. Better still, be specific: name the drug. Is it cocaine, amphetamines, ecstasy?

reason because, reason why

Redundancies. Avoid.

reconciled

Reconcile to an idea or a cause, but reconcile with another person: *days before his execution, he was reconciled to the idea of death*, but *John reconciled with Ahmed after their argument*.

reform, reforms

Be aware of this term's positive connotations when it comes to contentious subjects: *tax reform*, *industrial relations reform*, *abortion law reform*. Consider a neutral alternative: *change*, *overhaul*. Or remove altogether: *The government has put tax reform on the agenda* can easily become *The government has put tax on the agenda*. Also be aware of associated cliches: *sweeping reforms*, *tranche of reforms*, *raft of measures*, etc.

refute

It means "to prove something (a statement, theory, a charge) false or incorrect". It does not mean "denied", "rejected", "disagreed with", "dismissed", "ridiculed" or "repudiated". If we use "refute", we are effectively accepting and endorsing one side of an argument.

right wing, the right, right-wing politician, rightwinger, the Labor Party's Right faction

Note capitalisation.

roll over

The term implies a certain motivation for the witness's action, and may even suggest guilt. Be careful using it.

roller-coaster, emotional roller-coaster

Note the hyphens, avoid the cliché.

round-up, round up

We bring you a *round-up* (noun) of the news. We *round up* (verb) the news to bring you this round-up.

Royal Australian Air Force

In first reference: *the Australian Air Force* (RAAF). In second and subsequent: *the RAAF*, *the Air Force*.

royal commissions, royal commissioners

Use capitals when referring to the commission's full name in the first reference: *the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. In subsequent references: *the royal commission*, *the commission*, etc. If you're using a shortened version of the name use lowercase: *the royal commission into child sexual abuse*. Plural forms should also be lowercase: *multiple royal commissions*.

Royal commission heads take ordinary honorifics (not *Judge* or *Justice*) and their job title is lower case: *Mr Hayne took issue with Ms Perkovic's non-answer ... the commissioner said*.

Russian roulette

First word only is capitalised.

S

S&P 500

saccharin, saccharine

Saccharin in reference to the artificial sweetener. But *saccharine* for the adjective meaning 'of a sugary sweetness'.

Sahara

Arabic word meaning desert, so no need for *Sahara desert*.

said

Preferred over added, commented, stated etc.

Saint, St

Spell out in full for a saint's name: *Saint Joan of Arc*. For placenames, abbreviate: *St Stephen's Cathedral*. Note: no full stop.

same, similar

The words "same" and "similar" are similar but not the same. They are sometimes treated as if they are synonymous: "There were six people killed in Western Australia and a similar number in Queensland." If six were killed in Queensland, then it's the "same" as the number killed in Western Australia.

same-sex marriage

Preferred in most contexts to alternatives *gay marriage* or *marriage equality*.

Samoa

Formerly Western Samoa. Not to be confused with American Samoa.

SAS

Special forces regiment of the Australian Army. Technically it is the Special Air Service Regiment (SASR) but more commonly known as SAS, so we stick with that.

scalp, scalping, scalpers

Avoid in colloquial reference to sporting victories, electoral defeats, or ticket resales.

Scandinavia

Sweden, Denmark and Norway ... not Finland or Iceland. If you add Finland and Iceland to the Scandinavian countries, you are talking about the Nordic countries.

sceptic, sceptical

Note: the Australian Skeptics Association, and similar state-based organisations, retain the American spelling.

schizophrenia, schizophrenic

Avoid using the word in colloquial or figurative senses. It can be distressing to those living with this illness, and their families.

scientific names

Biological names take italics. Upper case genus, lower case species: *Homo sapiens*, *Tyrannosaurus rex*.

Sea Shepherd

The conservation group is called Sea Shepherd. They use various vessels in their anti-whaling activities, including the *Steve Irwin*.

seas, oceans

Generally, *sea* refers to any of the salt waters that cover the Earth. Upper case when being specific: *the Black Sea*, *the Pacific Ocean* etc. By contrast, *ocean* refers solely to the vast body of salt water that covers three-quarters of the Earth, and is divided up into five constituent parts: *the Atlantic*, *Pacific*, *Indian*, *Arctic* and *Antarctic*.

secondary, second

a secondary infection (like an ear infection following on from the primary infection of a cold), secondary education (following on from primary education). But a second heart attack, a second cold (suffering the same illness again).

secretary-general

Also director-general, vice-chancellor, vice-president — all take a hyphen.

self-isolation, social distancing, physical distancing

These terms are often used interchangeably to refer to measures designed to slow the spread of viral transmission. Where relevant, explain what is meant by each (see note at **quarantine, isolation**).

Senate, House of Representatives

Upper case.

September 11

9/11 is also acceptable

set to

If something is going to happen, “will” is better. Often the “set” can also be removed, especially in headlines. So: *government set to release budget* in a headline could simply become *Government to release budget*. The following story would then simply say “The Government *will* release...”

sewage, sewerage

sewage is the raw material that may be carried by pipes and treated in plants which together are called sewerage systems. So it's a sewage treatment plant but a sewerage system.

sex change, sex change operation

Avoid. Some alternatives: *sex reassignment surgery*, *gender confirmation surgery*. In general, avoid emphasising the role of surgery in the gender transition process. See **gender transition**.

sexual offences

Avoid referring to alleged or proven sexual offences as *having sex* or *sexual relations* outside of direct quotations.

Al Shabaab

African terrorism group. Not Shebab.

Shadow Minister, Shadow Ministers

While not an official title, Shadow Minister is a common term and is almost always used for certain roles: *Shadow Attorney General* or *Shadow Treasurer*.

shark attack

An imprecise and potentially misleading term, best used to describe serious or fatal shark bites. For less serious interactions, consider *shark sighting* or similar.

Shen Neng 1

Not Shen Neng One. The Chinese coal-carrier that ran aground off Rockhampton uses the numeral in its name, not the word.

ships

Military vessels of any nation take this form: *HMAS Adelaide*; *USS Kitty Hawk*. HMAS stands for Her Majesty's Australian Ship so you do not need to put *the* before the vessel's name. Refer to ships, aircraft, and other vehicles with neuter, not female, pronouns: *the Ever Given didn't look like it was going anywhere*.

simplistic

This word is not a fancy synonym for "simple". It means oversimplified. Be careful how you use it because it has negative connotations. There's a big difference between a simple explanation and a simplistic explanation.

singular, plural

Take care your copy does not mix up singulars and plurals. General points:

A singular subject takes a singular verb: *the murderer was sentenced to 46 years*.

Plural subjects take a plural verb: *women have 42 per cent less superannuation at retirement*.

Two linked singular subjects generally require a plural verb: *Lano and Woodley are reuniting*.

Groups, communities and governments are generally singular, unless they have a plural name: *the Coalition is maintaining its tough stance on border protection, the Brisbane Bullets are maintaining their lead*.

Some collective nouns may be used with singular or plural verbs depending on what best suits the situation. See the entry for **collective nouns** for more.

skyscraper

slander

In common usage, slander is spoken defamation, libel is printed or broadcast. In legal terms, however, both constitute defamation: libel is published defamatory comments, while slander is not.

snapshot

snapshot of, not into

Solomon Islands, Solomons

Take care: there's no definite article in the country's name. Sometimes speakers use one informally (*the Solomons, the Solomon Islands*). But avoid it in news reports, etc. Note the lack of apostrophe.

Somali, Somalian

Use *Somali*, not *Somalian*, as a modifier: *Somali refugees have settled in West Heidelberg since 1982, Thousands of Somalis gathered to pray at the site of the country's deadliest attack.*

South East Queensland, south-east Queensland

Upper case for the administrative region: *Tamborine Mountain is not connected to South East Queensland's water grid.* Lower case and hyphen in geographical reference: *a number of severe storm cells formed in south-east Queensland.*

Speaker

Upper case in reference to parliamentary office holder.

specialise, specialist, speciality

be a specialist *in* a particular field (not on). Specialise *in* something.

spectre, Spector

a spectre is a ghostly apparition. Phil Spector is the American record producer and songwriter. (And this error from one of our music experts. Shame!)

spelled, spelt

He spelled it out for us.

spokesman, spokeswoman

If it's a stated preference, though, use *spokesperson*.

sports teams

Names in plain text: Melbourne Victory, Fremantle Dockers, Silver Ferns, and so on.

Spring Racing Carnival

Is capped because it is the official name of the string of events.

stages, phases, games, tiers

Lower case and decimal number: *stage 3 cancer, phase 2 of the vaccine rollout, new stage 1 restrictions on social gatherings, tier 1 exposure site, game 3 of the series.*

Standard & Poor's

A rare case of ampersand inclusion.

standby, stand by

an old standby, but stand by your man, and stand by for updates

start-up, start up

Former is the noun, the latter the phrasal verb.

state, states

Don't capitalise in generic reference to Australian states: *state funding, state premiers*. Preferred acronyms for Australian states and territories: *ACT, NSW, NT, SA, WA, Qld, Tas, Vic*.

stationary

not moving

stationery

pens and paper

sterling

Not *stirling*.

still life, still lifes

Not *still lives*.

storyteller

One word.

straits, Strait

A bad situation is *dire straits*, a body of water is the *Torres Strait*, reformed criminals are on the *straight and narrow*. The band is *Dire Straits*.

strongman

Consider the use of this term before applying to politicians, heads of state, etc.

stock market

Two words.

Stolen Generations

Not Stolen Generation. Should be capped.

subcontinent

One word.

submarine

Submarines cannot be *grounded*.

subsequent

Watch out for tautologies like this one: *Since the subsequent crackdown that followed, signs of dissent and street demonstrations are a rarity.*

Sudoku

Note the capital S.

suffer

Cars, buildings and other inanimate objects don't feel pain. They have been *damaged*, they have not *suffered damage*. People can be hurt or injured, but do not let them *sustain injuries*.

suffer from, suffers from

Generally, avoid in reference to diseases or disorders e.g. *she suffers from depression*. The phrase can cause undue offence and take up valuable time in broadcast copy. Besides, what's wrong with *has*?

suicide, commit suicide

Avoid the phrase *committed suicide*. Other terms are readily available: *killed himself, took their own life*, etc. Advice on how to report on suicides, the language to use and the amount of detail that is justified depending on the circumstances can all be found in the ABC's [guidance note](#) on the subject.

summonsed, summoned

You can be *summonsed* to appear in court, but you would be *summoned* to the boss's office.

the Sun, the Moon

Upper case in astronomical reference to the star at the centre of our Solar System, or to our planet's only natural satellite: *the closest photos ever taken of the Sun's surface, the Moon's first 4G network*. Lower case in reference to other suns or moons, or in general reference: *she's over the moon, the sun slowly set*.

superlatives

Careful with these: as soon as you report that something is the biggest or the worst, it's likely someone will come along to claim otherwise. Avoid using words you think add impact where they are unjustified or unnecessary. Here's a handy list: *unique, unmatched, unprecedented, sole, exceptional, only, greatest, largest, fastest, heaviest, longest, smallest, record, slowest, tallest, matchless, exclusive, least, most, inimitable, irreplaceable*.

swear words, coarse language, slurs

Per the ABC's [editorial standards](#), content that is likely to harm or offend must be justified by the context in which it appears. If coarse language is likely to cause harm or offence, language warnings must generally be provided. Use common sense: isolated swearing in a lengthy news feature, for example, would generally be less likely to cause offence than that same coarse language used in children's programming.

Use asterisks to blur out harsh language in any public-facing fields such as titles and teaser titles: *Don't F*** With Cats raises uncomfortable questions, victim tells court 'no means f***ing no'*. In body copy, either asterisk out any coarse language or provide a language warning as needed.

symbols

Avoid using symbols (such as @ and &) unless they're a recognised part of a trademark or title.

T

Taiwan, Chinese Taipei, Republic of China

Generally, use *Taiwan* and *Taiwanese* when referring to the government based on the island or to people from the island: *Xi had Taiwan on his mind, Taiwanese voters head to the mid-terms*. Use *Chinese Taipei* to refer to the official name of a Taiwanese delegation, usually in sporting contexts: *Chinese Taipei was one of just three Asian teams to qualify*. Use the official name where precision requires it: *Taiwan's presidential office said the Republic of China — the island's official name — was a sovereign and independent country*.

Tarin Kot

The capital of Uruzgan (also written 'Oruzgan') province in southern Afghanistan. The town where Australian troops were based. The ADF changed the spelling to Tarin Kot in 2011, and this is now recommended for ABC use.

taser

Taser is an acronym for Thomas A Swift's Electric Rifle, but as its usage has become more common, a capital T is no longer required. Also, *taser*, *tasered*, *tasering* is the preferred verb form (over *tase*).

Tasmania

When abbreviating: *Tas*. The hypocorism *Tassie* should be avoided in most formal settings.

tautology

Means saying the same thing twice using different words: *closing the case means it won't be re-examined again*. Either *re-examined* or *examined again*. Not both.

tea-tree

but teacup, teabag, teapot, teaspoon

temperature

Upper case and spelled out in first reference: *34 degrees Celsius*. Thereafter, number and upper case C, no space: *34C*. Temperatures are *high* or *low*. The weather, or climate more generally, is *hot* or *cold*.

tenet

Nothing to do with tenants, please.

tenpin bowling

Tenpin is one word.

tenses

Writing for online

In news articles, your teaser text and short teaser text should be in present tense. The first paragraph should also be in an active tense. The rest of the story should be in the past tense, unless specifically referencing ongoing or future events.

Whatever tense you are using, ensure you are consistent. If you start in the past tense, continue in the past tense. Avoid the following:

The businessman announced plans to re-enter the political arena and says he will consider running against the MP for Herbert.

If you are writing a personal essay or a feature, the present tense is fine. But again, be consistent within sentences.

For radio news and other broadcast

In some broadcast formats (notably radio news) the preferred style is to use the present tense for stories.

The Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, says he does not know when the budget will be announced

Mr Turnbull says he is waiting to hear from the treasurer

That doesn't mean we avoid the past tense, which is useful when referring to — shock horror — actions that have taken place in the past but at worth mentioning in a current story.

At a conference in Canberra, Mr Turnbull said Australia and Malaysia “are becoming better friends.”

Keep tenses the same within the same sentence:

She says she is happy with the outcome not *She says she was happy with the outcome.*

Here's a few more tips: *led* is the past tense of the verb *lead*: Phrases like *he lead the team to victory* appear all too often.

tenterhooks

on tenterhooks (not *tender hooks*)

The origin of the word comes from the 14th century, when cloth makers would use hooks to stretch out cloth on a frame called a 'tenter'. Bet you didn't know that.

territory, territories

No capital except when referring to specific formal locations: *Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory, the Australian Antarctic Territory.*

Test

Upper case when talking about sporting matches in cricket, rugby, netball and other sports: *the first Test between Australia and England, Bradman retired with a Test average of 99.94.*

that

That is optional in many contexts in English, but don't omit it if it sacrifices clarity for brevity, as in this example:

Liberian Health Minister Carmen Jones says 300 civilians have been killed in intense fighting in the capital, warning the health services in Monrovia need urgent attention.

At first glance, *the health services* appears to be the direct object of the verb *warning* — that is, Ms Jones issued a warning to the health services.

In this case, putting *that* after *warning* would have made the meaning immediately clear.

the, The

The definite article takes a capital when it is part of an official title: *The Australian*, *The Science Show*. Not all organisations include *the* in their title and, as such, don't take a capital letter: *the West Australian Symphony Orchestra*, *the Sydney Writers' Festival*.

there's, there is, there are

In informal speech, using *there's* with a plural referent is common and acceptable: *there's lots of flowering gums out at the moment*. Avoid this use in more formal contexts, including news copy: *There have been reports of looting*.

thermos

a trademark for a particular brand of vacuum flask, but so commonly used as a generic term these days that there is no longer any need to capitalise

they

using 'they' to avoid s/he or 'he or she' in gender-sensitive writing is accepted, even when you're referring to one person.

thin end of the wedge

not thin *edge* of the wedge

think tank

no hyphen

Third World

Traditionally (since the 1950's) this has referred to developing countries collectively, especially in Africa, South America and South-East Asia. However, this term has increasingly been seen by many as derogatory, and even its replacement (*developing countries or nations*) is not without some baggage.

Less contentious alternatives can include *developing economies*, *low or lower income countries* or, less commonly, *lean economies*.

thirtysomething, twentysomething

one word, but 30-something, 40-something hyphenated

thousands

news feeds traditionally spell out thousand numbers as '30 thousand' for extra clarity. This is useful for a radio script but should be re-written for online publication as 30,000.

throes

...the Obama administration is in the final throes of deciding... not *throws*

tidal wave, tsunami

A *tidal wave* is a large wave caused by the combination of floods and high tides etc, usually caused by a hurricane or cyclone. A *tsunami* is a large sea wave, or series of waves, caused by an underwater earthquake, landslide or volcanic eruption. Both expressions can be used figuratively to refer to an overwhelmingly widespread or powerful movement or reaction.

titles (general)

Most people get courtesy titles (Mr, Ms, Mrs, Dr, etc) in news stories. Exceptions to this are: athletes, entertainers, minors, obituary subjects, historical figures, chefs, models, journalists, spies, artists, musicians, filmmakers, anyone found guilty of a crime, anyone who pleads guilty to a crime, and terrorists. Courtesy titles never take a full stop.

In first reference, use the person's first name and surname without a title. On subsequent reference, use the courtesy title and their surname: *Investment banker Harriet Morgan previously led investment missions to Spain. Ms Morgan said.* Unless someone specifically asks to be called *Miss* or *Mrs*, our style is *Ms*. (Though use common sense: if the subject of your story is a grandmother celebrating a diamond wedding anniversary, *Mrs* is a safe bet.)

Do not use courtesy titles in less formal types of coverage, including features and analysis. If omitting a courtesy title runs counter to the overall tone of a story (e.g. an athlete charged before a court), leave the title in. Some people use gender-neutral or non-binary courtesy titles, such as *Mx*. Follow a person's wish in using these titles, though in some instances it may be necessary to explain them to your audience.

titles (government)

Generally, politicians take get their full title on first reference, with courtesy titles for subsequent reference: *Prime Minister Anthony Albanese today announced... Mr Albanese said.* Senators have their own courtesy title to use on subsequent reference: *Greens senator Lidia Thorpe today announced... Senator Thorpe said.* The same principle holds for local government: *Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore today announced... Cr Moore said.*

titles (medical and academic)

Name and position description on first reference, courtesy title and surname on second and subsequent: *Andrew Jones is a general practitioner in Blackwater. Dr Jones says the town is worried about coronavirus.* Upper case *professor* when used as a courtesy title, but not when it isn't: *UNSW economics professor David Miller said ... Professor Miller explained.* Don't abbreviate *Professor*. Associate and adjunct professorships do not confer the titles Professor or Associate Professor. Where possible, check the talent's qualifications and use Dr if they have a relevant PhD.

Honorary doctorates do not usually confer the Dr title. A rule of thumb: if someone's academic or medical status has no bearing on a story, they probably don't need the courtesy title: *Through his Minderoo*

Foundation, Mr Forrest said he would provide \$10 million to build a volunteer army of more than 1,200 people.

titles (law enforcement)

Use title and full name in first reference: *Assistant Commissioner Kerry Andrews*. Title and surname in second and subsequent: *Assistant Commissioner Andrews*. Police titles do not get abbreviated (e.g. *Det, Sgt*). Avoid repeating wordy titles. *Detective* is a designation, not a rank, so *Detective Sergeant Mick Jones* can be *Sergeant Jones* on second reference. But use caution: referring to a *Senior Sergeant* as *Sergeant* is a demotion. Law enforcement ranks, and their progression, vary by state and territory. If in doubt, check with the relevant police force.

titles (military)

Upper case military ranks only when they precede a name: *Lieutenant General John Frewen today announced... General Frewen said*. Lower case at other times: *Air Vice-Marshal Meredith today announced... the vice-marshal said... air vice-marshal is one of the highest active ranks of the Royal Australian Air Force*.

titles (orders of merit)

Title and full name on first reference, title and first name subsequently: *Sir David Attenborough... Sir David*. Note that titles of this type are not required in sport or entertainment stories: *McCartney has said he wanted to continue performing with the Beatles, Verstappen overtook Hamilton on the last lap of the race*.

toe the line

To behave according to the rules. Avoid: *tow the line*.

ton, tonne

imperial unit of mass (ton) approximately 1016 kilograms; metric unit of mass (tonne) 1000 kilograms. There are adjustments to do with long or short tons in shipping but for general use, ton and tonne are very close.

Increasingly interchangeable in common usage, but strictly speaking the old imperial ton is pronounced 'tun' while the metric tonne is pronounced 'ton'. For general colloquial references (there are a ton of things to do) the preferred pronunciation is 'tun'.

top-level, high-level

Don't overdo them. Speaking in the same bulletin of "top-level Middle East talks" and "top-level talks over the future of Cottesloe Beach" will strike some listeners as silly.

tort, torte

Tort is legal term referring to a civil injury rather than a criminal wrong. A *torte* is a cake, usually a highly decorated one.

traditional owners

Lower case.

trans woman, trans man

While in use, these terms may require a degree of explanation for audiences. Consider unabbreviated forms where appropriate: *transgender women*, *transgender men*.

transcripts

Provide an accurate transcript of interview grabs and voice reports. Producers need transcripts to sub a new version of a story and make editorial assessments when compiling bulletins. Online requires transcripts to prepare its stories, including to obtain direct quotes. “In” and “out” words are sufficient if a story is being prepared close to bulletin time, but it is the reporter’s responsibility to get the transcript into iNews as soon as possible. Voice-reports filed from the field must also be transcribed – radio producers and assignment editors are responsible for vetting voice reports to ensure transcripts are completed.

transgender

Use as an adjective when relevant to a story: *Ricki Coughlan was one of the first out transgender women in Australian sport*. Do not use as a noun. Fine to abbreviate in subsequent reference, headlines, or less formal pieces: *Perth has a strong trans men culture*.

transsexual

While still preferred by some individuals, do not use the former as an umbrella term or in place of *transgender*. See the entry **LGBT** for more information.

triple-A

Not AAA

Triple Zero (000)

Headlines: *Triple Zero*. Body copy: *Triple Zero (000)* in first reference and *Triple Zero* in subsequent references. Note no hyphen.

troop

In its general meaning as an assemblage of persons or things it can be used as a singular noun, but in military usage it is far more common and accepted to use it in the plural: *Australian troops*.

trouper, trooper

A *trouper* is an actor in a theatrical troupe or someone who shows great devotion to duty. Hence the expression: *what a trouper*. A trooper is a soldier, responsible for a different expression: ***swear like a trooper***.

trucker, truckie

The former is an Americanism, best avoided in Australian stories. The latter is a colloquial shortening of *truck driver*.

Türkiye, Turkey

As of May 2022, the country’s official English name is *Türkiye*. Preference that spelling wherever possible. It may be necessary to explain the change.

turnaround

one word, as in ‘signs of a turnaround’

turnover, turn over

The team racked up 20 turnovers (noun), but he has promised to turn over a new leaf (verb).

Twenty20 cricket**type 1, type 2**

In reference to diabetes.

Twitter

Upper case for the company and social network: *Twitter*. But lower case: *tweets, tweeting, tweeted*, etc.

tyre

(American spelling is tire)

U**Ukraine, Ukrainian names**

For the country: *Ukraine*, not *the Ukraine*. Use Ukrainian romanisations for place names from that country: *Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa*, etc.

Uluru

Officially gazetted as Uluru / Ayers Rock, though fine to use *Uluru* in all references. Avoid *Ayer's Rock* unless in the context of specific historical reference.

uncharted, uncharted

Be aware of the difference. One is a metaphor for anything new, untried or unfamiliar: *uncharted waters*. *Uncharted waters*, by contrast, means a place your charter plane can't reach. Avoid.

uneducated

Considered pejorative when referring to individuals. Consider *no formal education*.

UNESCO

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

uninterested

Having or showing no feeling of interest; indifferent; not synonymous with *disinterested*, which means unbiased by personal involvement or advantage; not influenced by selfish motives.

unions

Spell out the full name in the first reference, with the acronym in brackets, then just use the acronym: *Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)*. Our style is to drop possessive apostrophes: *Workers Union*.

union bosses

Considered by many to be politically loaded and too colloquial. Consider *union leader*.

United Nations, UN

Write out in full in first reference. The abbreviated form, *UN*, can be used in headlines. Hyphens and lower case: *UN secretary-general*. But: *UN General Assembly* and *UN Security Council* takes capitals and aren't hyphenated. The UNHCR is the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, not the *High Commission*.

United States

It is acceptable to say *the US*. The abbreviation of United States, is either *US* or *USA*. *America* is also acceptable but think about context — *the Americas* also include South America, Central America, Canada etc.

universities

Cap the full name but lower case in second reference: *I attended the Queensland University of Technology. The university employed great lecturers.*

unprecedented

Avoid as a general descriptor, especially in relation to extreme weather e.g. *Tasmania's unprecedented fires, unprecedented flooding in Townsville*. Be specific, tell the audience what is unprecedented: is it the size? The number of fires?

upper house, lower house

Lower case.

user-generated content, UGC

Spell out in first reference with abbreviation in brackets, then abbreviate in subsequent reference: *user-generated content (UGC)*.

UX, UI

Abbreviated forms of *user experience* and *user interface*. A bit jargon-y, but if you must use, spell out in first reference with abbreviation in brackets.

Uyghur

Preferred spelling for the Turkic ethnic group. Not *Uighur*, *Uygur*, *Uighuir*, *Uiguir*, *Uigur*, *Weiwuer*, etc.

V

vale

Often used in the Latin sense — meaning goodbye or farewell — after the death of a prominent figure.

If that's the sense you mean, *VAH-lay* is the appropriate (and, in broadcast, least ambiguous) pronunciation.

Valium

Upper case.

vapour

But *vaporise*.

Vaseline

Upper case.

versus, vs

Australia vs Germany, Labor vs Liberal, etc.

Viagra

Cap. It is a trademark of a drug, sildenafil citrate, used to treat sexual impotence

Vietnamese names

Often consist of two to four parts. Generally, the family name comes first, then the middle name, then the given name: *Nguyễn Phú Trọng*. Because there are relatively few Vietnamese surnames, given names are conventionally used in second and subsequent reference: *Trần Nguyệt Linh ... Ms Linh*.

vice-chancellor

vice-president, vice-regent, vice-chair

vice-regal representative

The word “vice-regal” means “of or relating to a governor or governor-general”. It is an adjective, which means that it should be used to modify a noun (such as “representative”). In stories it shouldn’t be used as a noun because it can sound too casual or even dismissive. Instead of “they’ve just appointed a new vice-regal”, say “they’ve just appointed a new vice-regal representative.”

We often and wrongly refer to the Governor-General as Australia’s “Head of State”. The Governor-General is not the Head of State, but the Queen’s representative in Australia. Since Australia is a constitutional monarchy, the monarch is considered the Head of State. The plural of governor-general is governors-general.

vice versa

Not *visa versa*.

vie, vying

vis-a-vis

volcano, volcanos OR volcanoes

either form of the plural is technically correct, but ‘volcanoes’ is the more familiar, the more often used and the clearer indication of pronunciation, so it is also our preferred form.

W

waiver, waver

A *waiver* is an intentional relinquishment of some right or interest (or, commonly, a document of same). To *waver* means to move unsteadily back and forth, or to exhibit indecision

wage war

The accepted phrase is *wage war* and other constructs (*wage battle*) can sound awkward.

warnings

There may be occasions when, for valid editorial reasons, we will broadcast material – words, sounds or images – that will disturb, distress or offend some people. Warnings should be broadcast immediately before the relevant program or program segment.

The style is: *The following story contains disturbing/distressing images; The following story contains language/images which may offend some viewers/listeners*” (acknowledges that matters of taste are more subjective).

wars

Capped, Roman numerals: *World War I, World War II, World War III*. Avoid abbreviated forms unless you need them in space constrained environs (e.g. online news headlines).

weather

Temperatures

Round off temperatures to the nearest whole degree. Few people can tell the difference between a fraction of a degree and these fractions add no value to our audience. One exception is if a location is very near to setting a temperature record.

Glossary of weather terms

The Bureau of Meteorology Website provides comprehensive information about weather, climate, forecasts and its operations.

<http://www.bom.gov.au/lam/glossary/apagegl.shtml>

website addresses

In broadcast, there is generally no need to say *W W W* or preface information about websites with any further explanation. All that is needed is *online at abc.net.au* or similar.

wedge

thin *end* of the wedge, not *edge*

Weight Watchers

trademark, so capitalise

well known, better known, best known

he's well known for his wit, better known for his temper but best known for his flower arranging. We sometimes write 'most well known', which is not the best usage.

wellbeing

one word, no hyphen

west, the West

Upper case in referring to countries, regions, or institutions: *Western Australia, the West, Western Sydney*. Lower case for the cardinal direction or generic reference: *the MP faces a contest in the marginal seat of Hindmarsh in western Adelaide*.

West Jerusalem

We also cap East Jerusalem.

Western Australia

In reference to the name of the state. Do not call the state *West Australia*. To refer to someone from this state: *a West Australian, a Western Australian*. Adjectival reference: *the Western Australia coast, the West Australian coast*. But not *Western Australian coast*. Exceptions for company names, as in *the West Australian Ballet* or *the West Australian*.

wet market

A market selling fresh meat, fish, or produce. Avoid outside of quotes. Not synonymous with *wildlife market*, where animals are sold as pets or for food.

wheelchair

Not *wheelchair bound*, nor *confined to a wheelchair*.

wherewithal

One word, and one L.

which or that, that or which

A longstanding style convention holds that the relative pronoun *that* introduces restrictive clauses (i.e. parts of the sentence essential to a reader's understanding) and *which* introduces non-restrictive clauses (i.e. parts of the sentence that are not). At times, this difference can be material. Compare the following:

the dagger that he had seen earlier was covered in blood

the dagger, which he had seen earlier, was covered in blood

The difference is often easier to spot in print, as non-restrictive clauses tend to be offset by parenthetical commas.

while

Not *whilst*, in everyday writing

whip

Lower case. *Senate whip, she used a whip*.

whisky

Most whiskies are *whisky*, which is certainly the case for Scottish whiskies. But in Ireland it is more typically *whiskey*, so if you are being specific, then check. Otherwise *whisky* is fine as the generic term.

who or whom?

The traditional rule is that *who* should be used when the pronoun is in the subject case, and that *whom* should be used if the pronoun is in the object case. Despite this orthodoxy, *who* has been reliably appearing in places where we should logically expect to see *whom* for centuries, including some Shakespeare. Some usage guides advocate for *who* even in places where *whom* should appear, arguing the latter can come across as “stilted” or “super-formal”. This would suggest that the decision to use

whom is a matter of formality, rather than correctness. But a rule of thumb for those who want to know: use *who* in place of *he*, *she*, or *they*. Use *whom* in place of *her*, *him*, or *it*.

who's

For the contraction of *who is*.

whose

of, belonging, or relating to whom

wicketkeeper

one word, no hyphen

Wii

Nintendo game console.

WikiLeaks

It's important to get that upper case L in *WikiLeaks*.

wind speed

Our written style: *120 km/h winds*.

For informal broadcasts, *120 kilometre winds* is acceptable. Just don't write it online.

witness box, stand

When discussing legal affairs in Australia use witness box as opposed to the American stand.

woman, female

Use female as an adjective: *Gina Haspel is the CIA's first female director*. (Not *first woman director*.)

Where gender isn't relevant to the story, it needn't be mentioned.

working class

No hyphen when used as a noun: *the working class*. Hyphen when used as an adjective: *from a working-class family*. Can be viewed as pejorative, so take care. The Jimmy Barnes song is *Working Class Man*.

worse, worst

Remember the scale of badness: bad, worse (comparative), worst (superlative). The headline 'Pakistan's children worse hit by floods' is wrong. Here we need the superlative: *Pakistan's children worst hit by floods*.

wounded, injured

A soldier is *wounded* if they are hurt in battle. A soldier is *injured* if they're hurt in an accident (even if on the way to an operation).

wrack or rack?

Mostly uncontroversial outside idiomatic use. While the Macquarie lists both *wrack and ruin* and *rack and ruin*, the latter tends to be more popular given its orthographic alliteration. For verb senses, as in *rack your brains* or *racked with pain*, the rhotic spelling is the one usually given by dictionaries.

writers' festivals

Always check whether a festival's title includes an apostrophe: *Sydney Writers' Festival*, *Perth Writers Festival*, *Melbourne Writers Festival*, etc. Never a *writer's* festival, because that would be a festival for only one writer.

WWF

WWF stands for *World Wide Fund for Nature*. It was originally known as the *World Wildlife Fund*, but in 1986 it was changed to highlight the full scope of its work. However, the United States and Canada still retain the old name.

Not to be confused with the *World Wrestling Federation*, which changed its name many years ago to *WWE* (World Wrestling Entertainment).

X

x-ray

Xbox

Microsoft game console

Xerox

trademark, so capitalise. Also, 'copy' usually works better unless you are being quite specific. Who 'xeroxes' anymore? It has gone the way of the 'gestetner'.

Xmas

Best to avoid. Use Christmas instead

Y

Yankunytjatjara

Western Desert Aboriginal language group and people.

years, grades

Lower case and decimal number: *year 10 camp*, *grade 6*. But upper case for *Year 12 Certificate*.

yesterday

With foreign stories for broadcast, make clear which today or yesterday you mean: theirs or ours?

you're, your

You're is the contraction of *you are*.

Your is the possessive form of *you*.

YouGov

UK opinion poll.

YouTube

Capital Y and capital T, all one word.

Z**Zedong, Mao**

Formerly *Mao Tse Tung*, this is now the preferred spelling.

zero

zeros (plural)

zeugma

A general term for a literary device in which a word (usually a verb) is made to relate to other words (usually nouns or adjectives). Common enough in literature, a recent unintended example found its way into a news bulletin: *the assault was distressing for Mr Dabousi, who suffers from dementia as well as his family*.

zhoosh

Slang loosely meaning to make yourself look fabulous: *zhoosh your hair, zhoosh yourself up*.

zigzag

One word

zoo

Taronga Zoo, zoo in second reference.