DIA Style Guide

Guide to writing plain English for print and web

The Style Guide may be updated at any time – download the latest version

Contact DIA’s Design and Channels Team
Visual design and page layout ................................................................. 4
  Visual design ...................................................................................... 4
  Selecting a graphic design agency ..................................................... 4
  Word templates ................................................................................ 4
  DIA logos .......................................................................................... 4

Why proofreading is important ............................................................... 4

Style Guide .......................................................................................... 5
  Addresses .......................................................................................... 5
  Age and gender .............................................................................. 6
  Apostrophes .................................................................................... 6
  Brackets .......................................................................................... 7
  Bulletpoints ..................................................................................... 7
  Capital letters ................................................................................ 7
  Commas .......................................................................................... 8
  Contractions ................................................................................... 10
  Dashes ............................................................................................ 10
  Dates and time .............................................................................. 10
  Ellipses .......................................................................................... 11
  Footnotes and references ............................................................... 11
  Fullstops ......................................................................................... 12
  Hyphens ........................................................................................ 12
  Jargon, initials and acronyms ......................................................... 13
  Latin forms (eg, ie, etc) ................................................................. 14
  Legal term abbreviations .............................................................. 14
  Measurements ............................................................................... 14
  Numbers ........................................................................................ 15
  Official titles ................................................................................ 16
  Organisation and company names ............................................... 16
  Place names ................................................................................... 16
  Page number references ............................................................... 17
  Phone numbers ............................................................................. 17
  Plain English ............................................................................... 17
  Quotation marks ......................................................................... 18
  Semicolons ................................................................................... 18
  Sentence spacing ........................................................................ 18
  Shortened words .......................................................................... 19
  Spelling ........................................................................................ 19

Writing for web .................................................................................. 20
  Structure content on 3 levels ......................................................... 20
Visual design and page layout

Visual design
The Visual Identity Guide is a manual for graphic designers and a resource for staff to create DIA material that is visually consistent. The guide is updated periodically, so please refer only to the latest online version.

Selecting a graphic design agency
The Design and Channels Team provides in-house design, print and web uploading services. When outsourcing we use design agencies from the All-of-Government panel. Select a graphic design agency from DIA’s intranet.

Word templates
To ensure consistency between Ministry documents created in Word, please use these templates, which include our logo, font styles and colours already set up.

Open Word and select “Templates” in the ribbon.

DIA logos
Request DIA logos from the Design and Channels Team.

Download the Visual Identity Guide for instructions on using the DIA logo.

Why proofreading is important
I cnduo’t bvleiee taht I culod aulaclty uesdtannrd waht I was rdnaieg. Unisg the icndeblire pweor of the hmuan mnid, aocdrnig to rseecrah at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it dseno't mtttaer in waht oderr the lterets in a wrod are, the olny irpoamtni tihng is taht the frsit and lsat ltteer be in the rhgit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it whoutit a pboerlm. Tihs is bucesae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey ltteer by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Aaznmig, huh? Yaeh and I awlyas tghhuot slelinpg was ipmoranntt! See if yuor fdreins can raed tihs too.
Style Guide

Addresses

New Zealand Post prefers no full stops, commas or spaces between numbers in addresses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PO Box 16100</td>
<td>P.O. Box 16 100,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Bag 1666</td>
<td>Private Bag 16 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DX Box SR51201</td>
<td>DX Box SR 51201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exception: Use “R D” not “RD” for Rural Delivery to avoid confusion with the abbreviation for road (Rd)

New Zealand Post prefers street number ranges are not used. Use the first number only:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45 Pipitea Street</td>
<td>45-47 Pipitea Street</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use a postcode at the end of towns or cities. Addresses without postcodes can cause delivery delays.

Web addresses and emails

Don't underline website and email addresses on printed material

- Though Word inserts underlines automatically, remove this function by right clicking on them and selecting “Remove Hyperlink”.
- Only use underline in electronic Word documents
- If a website or email address ends a sentence, use a fullstop as normal.

Don’t use http:// if there is a www in the website address.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.dia.govt.nz">www.dia.govt.nz</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.dia.govt.nz">http://www.dia.govt.nz</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dia.govt.nz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Age and gender

Age
Reference people by their age range, not age group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children aged 5 and younger</td>
<td>The under 5s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People aged from 13 to 19</td>
<td>Teenagers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People aged 20 and older</td>
<td>The over 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older people, people in later life</td>
<td>The over 60s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender
Use terms that are gender neutral.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They</td>
<td>He or she</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artificial</td>
<td>Manmade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff the phones</td>
<td>Man the phones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce</td>
<td>Workmen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apostrophes
Possessive apostrophes – something belongs to someone or something. If something belongs to one person, then put the apostrophe before the “s”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Minister’s portfolio</td>
<td>The Ministers portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Ministers’ portfolio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contraction apostrophes – shows letters are missing
The apostrophe replaces the missing letters when two words are written as one word, eg, I’m, you’ve, he’ll, she’d, hasn’t

Don’t use an apostrophe in plurals, unless something belongs to that plural
- Plurals that aren’t owners, like FAQs
- Decades that aren’t owners, like the 1990s
- Made up words, like ifs and buts, and Ps and Qs

Acronyms with plural apostrophes
The same rules apply as to normal words
Brackets

Round brackets
Use round brackets ( ) to add definition, clarification or comment. They also help to break up a long sentence and minimise overusing commas. Don’t use brackets within brackets – use commas or en dashes (not hyphens). Type an en dash by holding the Ctrl button and the minus key on the number pad on your keyboard.

Square brackets
Only use in quotations to add clarity to somebody’s quote or to avoid confusion:

- “Though I live in Petone, I am originally from Mt Cook [Wellington]”
- Do not use angle < > or curly brackets { }

Bulletpoints
When we’re writing a list, we:

- Start with a stem sentence that all the list items have in common
- Use capital letters, with no full stops at the end
- Sometimes use “and” or “or” on the second-to-last item
- Check that each list item makes a full sentence with the stem

If a list has no stem sentence, each step should start with a capital letter with no full stop at the end.

- Each point is at least one full sentence
- Each point begins with a capital letter
- Each point ends with a full stop

If you need a list within a list:

- Use en dashes – hold down CTRL key and press minus key on number pad – rather than another set of bullet points
- Never mix styles of bullet within a list

Capital letters

Capitalise proper nouns only
Proper nouns are people and place names. If a noun is plural or preceded by “a” or “an”, it is not a proper noun.

Capitalise job titles and locations when referring to a named person or place
Give the name of the person or place the first time you refer to them.
Use lower case for job titles and locations in subsequent references to the same person or place.

Example:

- Jenny Smith, Senior Advisor – then the senior adviser

**Government**

Use uppercase when referring to the Government of the day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Government will release its budget today</td>
<td>The government will release its budget today</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The Crown
- Parliament
- The House (of Representatives)
- The Cabinet
- An Act
- A Bill
- A Budget
- A Minister

**If in doubt, don’t capitalise**

Capitalising a word or term does not make it more important – it only makes it harder to read.

**Commas**

Commas group and separate words, phrases and clauses to make the meaning of their sentences clear.

**Use commas only for clarity**

If the meaning of a sentence would be clear without commas, don’t use them.

**Separate each item in a simple list with a comma, except the last two items**

“And” does the work of a comma at the end of a list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My favourite sandwiches are chicken and avocado</td>
<td>My favourite sandwiches are chicken, and avocado</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Add a comma before the final “and” for clarity
If the list is too complex to make clear with commas, you should rewrite the list or turn it into a bulleted list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My favourite sandwiches are chicken and avocado, bacon, lettuce and tomato, and pastrami, cheese and pickle on rye.</td>
<td>My favourite sandwiches are chicken and avocado, bacon, lettuce and tomato and pastrami, cheese and pickle on rye.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My favourite sandwiches are:

- Chicken and avocado
- Bacon, lettuce and tomato
- Pastrami, cheese and pickle on rye

Use commas to separate information that is not essential to the meaning
Separate a phrase or clause when the sentence would have the same meaning with or without that information.

Example:

- Mary, who has two young children, has a part-time job
- Mary has a part-time job as a teacher’s aide

Use colons before and after quoted speech
A comma before the first quotation marks introduces quoted speech.

Examples:

- He said, “Tomorrow we’ll go to the cafe.”
- “I’ll be there at one,” said Mavis.

Don’t use a comma after direct speech that ends with an exclamation or question mark
“Did you see that?” he asked.
Contractions

**Its and it’s**

“It’s” is a shortened form of “it is”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s one of the remaining salt marshes</td>
<td>Its one of the remaining salt marshes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Its” is a possessive form and denotes something belonging to “it”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Select Committee will vote at its next meeting</td>
<td>The Select Committee will vote at it’s next meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dashes

Use an en dash ( – ) when breaking up a sentence. Always leave a space before and after the en dash. Create an en dash by holding Ctrl and pressing the minus symbol of the number pad.

Don’t use hyphens ( - ) in this context and never use em dashes (—) because they are a USA standard.

Dates and time

Write dates in full and day, month and year order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 November 2011</td>
<td>November 11 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 25 June 2014</td>
<td>Wed 25 Jun 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 June</td>
<td>25th of June</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Financial year vs calendar year

Use a forward slash for financial years (include the words “financial year”).

Use a hyphen when writing about a period of two years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014/15 financial year</td>
<td>2014-2015 financial year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The years 2014-15</td>
<td>The years 2014/15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use the 12 hour clock
Write “am” and “pm” in lower case, with no full stops or space after the hour.

Use a full stop, not a colon, between the hour and minutes.

Don’t include minutes when they aren’t needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5pm</td>
<td>5.00pm , 5:pm, 5 P.M. 17:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12noon</td>
<td>12.00pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Show start and end times in full
Use “to” to separate date ranges in proper sentences.

Use a dash in tables, graphs, infographics or incomplete sentence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentences</th>
<th>Graphs, tables, etc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6am to 9am</td>
<td>6-9am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6am to 7.30pm</td>
<td>6am–7.30pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ellipses
Ellipses indicate more information before or after a sentence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If indicating more information after a sentence, place the ellipses at the end of the sentence with no gap... Then have a space before starting the next sentence.</td>
<td>If indicating more information after a sentence, place the ellipses at the end of the sentence with no gap ... Then have a space before starting the next sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...If indicating more information before a sentence, place the ellipses at the beginning of the sentence with no gap (have a space before the start of the ellipses).</td>
<td>... If indicating more information before a sentence, place the ellipses at the beginning of the sentence with no gap (have a space before the start of the ellipses).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Don’t place a fullstop after an ellipses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t place a fullstop after ellipses...</td>
<td>Don’t place a fullstop after ellipses....</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Footnotes and references

Don’t use footnotes to add information
Add the information to the main content or leave it out.

Don’t use footnotes in web content
Use links instead. Footnotes in print work in a similar way to links in web content.
Reference the sources of your information
Include enough information in each reference for our customers to identify and retrieve your source.

For more about references, see the American Psychological Association style for references (American Psychological Association website).

Acknowledge your source in the main content
Acknowledge your source whether you are paraphrasing or quoting directly.

Examples:

- “... can be viewed as the catalyst for an emerging analysis of practices” (Smith 2016, p288)
- Smith says that the events can be viewed as the catalyst for an emerging analysis of practices (Smith 2016, p288)

Fullstops

Use fullstops at the end of sentences in the main content only
Don’t use fullstops in page names, photo captions, headings, subheadings, bullet points or initials.

Use fullstops after web addresses if they are at the end of a sentence.

Hyphens

Hyphens are used to join:

- Separate words in compound words
- Prefixes and suffixes to words

Avoid using hyphens in compound words
The trend is to minimise punctuation that isn’t critical. Only use hyphens if the meaning would be unclear without them.

Write compound words as one word
Many compound words can be written as one word – without a hyphen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online, broadband</td>
<td>On-line, broad-band</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Try leaving separate words separate instead of hyphenating them
If a compound word can’t be written as one word, try writing it as separate words without a hyphen.

- 3 dimensional, full time, long service, long term, up to date
Join prefixes and suffixes directly to words
Prefixes and suffixes are increasingly joined directly to other words. See how e-mail became email.

- Childlike
- Egovernment
- Enewsletter
- Socioeconomic
- Sublevel
- Email

Exceptions:
Use a hyphen to separate a prefix from a name used as an adjective, or from a numeral – post-Freudian, pre-1990.

Use hyphens to avoid confusion with another word
Re-cover, recover

Jargon, initials and acronyms

Avoid using jargon, initials and acronyms
Don’t assume that our customers understand our jargon and acronyms. Explain it in plain English.

Use a term in full instead of its initials or acronym
Use part of the full term after its first use.

Examples:

- Department of Internal Affairs – then the department
- Ministry of Education – then the Ministry

Write an acronym that can be read as a word with an initial capital letter followed by lower case letters.
Example:

- Nasa

Write a plain English equivalent to a legal or technical document
In the plain English equivalent, give just enough information for our customers to act.

Support this information with the full story in plain English, separately, for customers who need it.

Make the original document available as the “fine print”.
Use “must” if a requirement is mandatory
Refer or link to information about the penalty for not meeting it.

Example:
- Your employer must pay you at least the minimum wage.

Use “need” if a requirement is administrative
An administrative requirement has no penalty in law for not meeting it.
Refer or link to information about any cost associated with not meeting the requirement.

Example:
- You’ll need to provide a copy of your birth certificate.

Latin forms (eg, ie, etc)
Place a comma before and after a Latin form without using use fullstops. Don’t use “etc” if there’s an “eg” before it in the sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The letter should state what type of school, eg, primary or secondary, the continuing school would be</td>
<td>The letter should state what type of school e.g. primary or secondary, the continuing school would be etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legal term abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long form</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>section</td>
<td>s 1, s 9(2)(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subsection</td>
<td>subs (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paragraph</td>
<td>para (a), paras (a) and (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subparagraph</td>
<td>subpara (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clause</td>
<td>clause 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regulations</td>
<td>reg 234, regs 65-7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measurements
Generally abbreviate commonly used measurements, with no space between number and measurement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100km</td>
<td>100km/h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10cm</td>
<td>10 cm, 10 centimetres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80 percent, 80 per cent, 80 %, 80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10°C</td>
<td>10 degrees Celsius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct</td>
<td>Incorrect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Generally don’t abbreviate less common measurements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66 hectares</td>
<td>66ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 kilojoules</td>
<td>13kJ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Financial measurements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$5 million (use in sentences)</td>
<td>$5million, $5.0 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5m (use in tables and graphs)</td>
<td>$5M, $5 m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Numbers**

Write numbers in full from one to nine in proper sentences (this only applies to writing for print).

Use numerals only in graphs, tables and infographics.

Exception:

- If a number begins a sentence, page name, image title, or subheading, write the number out in full. Or try to reword the text so it doesn’t begin with a number.

**Don’t use superscript**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21st</td>
<td>21st</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Writing number ranges**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From 14 to 21 (in sentences)</td>
<td>From 14-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-21 (in graphs, tables and infographics)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Units and currency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In main text</th>
<th>In graphs, tables and infographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$43 million (in full)</td>
<td>$43m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$43m (when using often in main text)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**International currencies**

NZ$100, AU$100, US$100, etc.

**Use a comma to separate thousands**

$1,012.65
Official titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Refer to as</th>
<th>Begin letters with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministers</td>
<td>Hon Peter Dunne, MP</td>
<td>Dear Minister Dunne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>Rt Hon John Key</td>
<td>Dear Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor-General</td>
<td>His/Her Excellency the Governor-General</td>
<td>Your Excellency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knights</td>
<td>Sir Edmund Hillary</td>
<td>Dear Sir Edmund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dames</td>
<td>Dame Augusta Wallace</td>
<td>Dear Dame Augusta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambassador</td>
<td>Your Excellency or Ambassador</td>
<td>Your Excellency or Dear Ambassador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayors</td>
<td>The Mayor of Auckland</td>
<td>Dear Mayor or Dear Len Brown (“Your Worship” is considered archaic and individual Mayors usually make it known how they wish to be styled)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Court Judges</td>
<td>The Hon Justice Allen</td>
<td>Dear Judge or Dear Sir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Hon Justice Cartwright</td>
<td>Dear Judge or Dear Madam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Justice</td>
<td>The Chief Justice, Dame Sian Elias</td>
<td>Dear Chief Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillors</td>
<td>Councillor John Pertwee</td>
<td>Dear Mr Pertwee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organisation and company names

Organisations should always be spelled as they want to be spelled.

Organisation names can be written in full first, with the accepted abbreviation in brackets. The abbreviation is used from then on, for example “the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA)”, then “DIA”.

Write from the DIA’s viewpoint

Use the first person plural. You are representing the DIA, not yourself.

| Correct                                                        | Incorrect                                                                 |
|                                                               | I believe our purpose is to “Lift aspiration, raise educational achievement for every New Zealander” |
| The Ministry believes its purpose is to “Lift aspiration, raise educational achievement for every New Zealander” |                                                                 |
| We believe our purpose is to “Lift aspiration, raise educational achievement for every New Zealander” |                                                                 |

Place names

Refer to all place names by their official names. For information on official names, see the LINZ website’s Gazetteer of place names.
Page number references

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p43</td>
<td>p 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p43-44</td>
<td>pp 43-44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phone numbers

National and international format
Domestic – 01 234 5678. Do not use dashes to separate numbers.

International – +64 1 234 5678.

0800 numbers – 0800 123 456.

Show numbers in brackets for word numbers
0508 FAMILY (326 459)

Use the word “phone” for landlines and “mobile” for cellphone numbers
Don’t use a colon after “phone” or “mobile”.

Examples:
- Phone +64 4 123 4567
- Mobile +64 21 234 5678

Plain English
The DIA’s style is to write in plain English.

Plain English means that something can be instantly understood and meets the needs of its audience. It is achieved by using language, structure and design so clearly and effectively that the audience has the best possible chance of readily finding what they need, understanding it and using it.

Add the Word Readability Index to your Word and Outlook ribbons.

Use language that our customers will understand
Avoid language that is bureaucratic, academic, wordy or imprecise.

Use everyday terms instead, eg:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Avoid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>with</td>
<td>accompanying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extra</td>
<td>additional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promote, encourage</td>
<td>advance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helpful, useful</td>
<td>advantageous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quotation marks
Use “double quotation” marks. Use ‘single quotation’ for quotes within quotes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Getting an online passport was ‘super easy,” says John Smith.</td>
<td>‘Students love becoming “data detectives”. It helps them engage with statistics,’ says John Smith.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Don’t use quotation marks for the titles of publications
Use *italics* instead.

Semicolons
Do not separate sentences with semicolons – rewrite the sentences using fullstops, commas or en dashes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not separate sentences with semicolons – rewrite them to include fullstops or en dashes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not separate sentences with semicolons. It’s better to rewrite them to include fullstops or en dashes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not separate sentences with semicolons, as it’s better to rewrite them to include fullstops or en dashes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not separate sentences with semicolons; rewrite them to include fullstops commas or en dashes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use a bulleted list to differentiate items in a complex sentence instead of using semicolons.

Sentence spacing
Use single spaces between sentences. Don’t use double spaces.

Double spacing was a necessary practice based on the limitations of typewriters, specifically typewriter fonts.

Typewriter fonts are monospaced, which means that every letter, whether it’s a wide letter such as “m” or a narrow letter like “i”, takes up the same amount of space. This makes for very open-looking spacing, so the convention of adding an extra space between sentences was established to achieve a noticeable separation between sentences.

Conversely, nearly all computer fonts (except Courier) have proportional spacing, which means that the width of the characters and the spacing surrounding them are in proportion to each other. Proportional spacing results in a more even, balanced appearance. Because of this, a single space is enough to create the necessary visual separation between sentences.
Shortened words
Always use words in full in sentences, headings, captions, etc.

Exceptions include for tables, graphs and charts (e.g., Mon, Tue, Nov, Dec).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For more information, contact...</td>
<td>For more info, contact...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spelling
Set you spellcheck in Word to New Zealand English.

- Anti-money laundering
- Apostille (uppercase)
- Bicultural/Multicultural
- Cashflow
- Cooperate, coordinate
- Crown (uppercase)
- e-Apostille
- ePassport
- Email
- Helpdesk
- Mailout
- Nationwide
- Online
- Subheading
- Videoconference
- Webpage
- Website
- Workplace
Writing for web

People do not read content on the web the same way they read print; they scan and skim read. On average, our customers read only a quarter of the words on a web page – if they stop to read it at all.

The first 7 words of a heading, a link or a navigation label should include the information the customer needs to decide if they want to use that content.

Structure content on 3 levels
This makes it easy for our customers to use it.

1. “Just enough” content at the surface for customers to act.
2. The “full story” below that, for customers who need it.
3. Include “fine print” below that. Fine print can be content we need to publish or links to policy or other documents.

Page name
Make page names, unique – the meaning of the page name must be clear to people with no knowledge of the subject.

Make page names 4 to 10 words

Don’t use short words in names and titles

Use plain English in page names – don’t use jargon, initials, acronyms, or abbreviations.

Page summaries
Summaries immediately tell readers who the content is for and what they can do with it.

Write a page summary that can double up as the metadescription (see below).

Metadescription
Search engines (eg, Google) sometimes use the metadescription to provide information snippets about a site that they can match with search queries. Only the first 100 characters including spaces will be displayed in the search result, so your description or summary needs to be concise and understandable.

Use subheadings
Subheadings structure content for customers, helping them find what they need.

Make subheadings specific and unique

Each subheading occurs only once on a page.

Make subheadings meaningful to customers
Writing paragraphs and sentences
Give each topic its own paragraph.

Aim for 7 paragraphs on a page.

Make sentences about 12 to 15 words.

Writing numbers
Write Zero and One as words.

Write from number 2 onwards as numerals.

If a sentence starts with a number then it needs to be written as a word.

Lists – numbered and bulleted
Bulleted lists can make content easier to understand.

Bulleted lists summarise points that don’t have a necessary order.

Numbered lists order points in a sequence, like steps in a process.

Use an opening statements before a list (as above).

Tables
Tables display information in 2 or more columns and rows.

Make tables no more than 7 rows

If a table has more than 7 rows, chunk the information in to separate tables.

Give each column a heading and use correct table heading styles.

Anchor links
Anchor, or “jump” links act like a table of contents at the top of a webpage. They link to the subheadings on the page and help our audience work out if the content they want is on the page.

Images, infographics or diagrams

Use meaningful images
Images should include useful information and enhance understanding of the surrounding text, rather than be used simply for decoration.

Provide “alt text” (a short text description) for each image to enable accessibility. The text should stand alone as a description of the image.
Get permission to use every photo
We must have permission to publish a photo on the web.

Links
Link only to content that is directly relevant to the page’s content.

Using too many links is distracting and weakens the page’s message.

Don’t use “click here” or “find out more”.

Use meaningful and instructive links at the start of the sentence.

Example:
- Download the application form and contact us with any questions

When linking to another page or document use “webpage name” or the “name of a document”

Example:
- For privacy legislation, go to Privacy Act 1993 (New Zealand Legislation website).

Use email addresses as link text for email links

- Example: help@dia.govt.nz

Useful resources

Jargone
Jargone is a web tool that highlights jargon in text content on a web page. It’s based on a list of words identified by the UK’s Government Digital Service.

To find out how to install the tool, open Google Chrome and go to the Jargone tool at https://github.com/rooreynolds/jargone.