

Writing guide

Be consistent. When unsure, check the *Australian Defence Force Writing Manual*.¹

Write simply

- Tailor your writing to your audience
- Use words the reader will understand
- Vary sentence length
- Use fewer words
- Avoid jargon and too many acronyms
- Start a new paragraph for each idea
- Use lists where appropriate
- Use headings to break up text
- Use active rather than passive voice

Capitals

Don't over-capitalise. Use at the beginning of sentences and for proper nouns.

Use initial capital when referring to Groups and Services.

Use initial capital for each word in publication name, but not chapter names:

Defence Health Manual
'Privacy of information'

Use initial capital when referring to a specific government, but not generic use:

The Australian Government announced...
...review of government initiatives

Use all capitals for names of exercises, projects, operations (NEPTUNE, RESOLUTE).

Don't use capitals when referring to parts of legislation (section 7 or s 7).

Underline

Use for hyperlinks. Do not use for other purposes.

Italics

Italicise publication names, but not chapter names or article names.

Italicise the full name and date of Acts.

Do not italicise the short form of Acts.

Do not italicise Bills and Regulations.

Short forms

No full stops (eg, Jul, NSW, PhD etc).

Write in full for first use followed by short form in brackets. Then use the short form:

project manager (PM)
Joint Health Command (JHC)

First use of an Act is in full and italicised. Thereafter, no italics and no date or use abbreviation:

Public Service Act 1999, Public Service Act,
PS Act

Add 's' to make plurals (NCOs).

Numbers

Spell out one to nine. Use numerals for 10 and above.

No space in 4-digit numbers. Use a non-breaking space (Ctrl Shift Space) to separate three-digit groups of numerals when five digits or more.

Use combination of words and numerals for complex numbers (eg 2.5 million).

When two numbers are consecutive, write the first as a word and the following as a numeral (eg three 5-year projects).

Use symbols in tables [%, \$m, \$b], but write out in text (eg 20 per cent, \$8 million).

Use numerals when a symbol is used (\$3).

Use en dash in number spans (2015–16).

Dates and time

Use non-breaking spaces (Ctrl Shift Space) in dates and times,

Use leading zeros in dates:

01 April 2017 or 01 Apr 17

Use 24-hour time in Defence; use 12-hour time out of Defence (*1330 or 1.30 pm*)

For 24-hour time, Only use hours (h) if the omission of 'h' or 'hours' would cause confusion (1330 h or 1330 hours).

Dot point lists

If points are full sentences, write as:

The committee came to two conclusions:

- We should develop guidelines.
- DPE should fund research.

If points are fragments, no initial capitals, no semi-colons and no 'and'. Put a full-stop at end of last point. Write as:

The branch provides:

- services
- advice
- support.

Telephone numbers

Telephone: 08 9264 1711

Mobile: 0456 123 789

Freecall: 1300 365 111

Hyperlinks

Hyperlink, set link to open to new window, and include link in footnote: (The *[Defence Health Manual website](#)*).

Use generic mailboxes rather than individual email addresses.

Common terms

Use Defence or Department of Defence (not ADO).

Use Navy, Army and Air Force when abbreviating Services (not RAN, RAAF).

Use 'Australian Government' rather than 'Commonwealth Government' or 'Federal Government'.

Don't use ampersand (&) unless it is part of a title or a citation.

Standardisation

Use an s not a z, unless it is in a proper noun (organisation, North Atlantic Treaty Organization).

Referring to people

Avoid terms that may cause offence.

Use Defence member (not ADF member).

When referring to an individual, don't mention their gender, religion, nationality, racial group, age or physical or mental characteristics unless relevant.

Always capitalise Aboriginal, Elder, Torres Strait Islander, Indigenous.

Mention the person first, not the disability. Avoid 'the disabled' and 'the blind'.

Postnominals

Don't use postnominals in internal Defence minutes and emails. For other documents, place postnominals after the name, separated by commas, and with no full stops:

LTCOL J Smith, AC, DSC
CAPT J White, AC, DSC, RAN

Using ranks

Don't capitalise ranks unless referring to a specific person:

Give it to Major Petersen.

The majors were late.

If abbreviating ranks, refer to the '[ADF badges of rank and special insignia](#)'.ⁱⁱⁱ

When referring to Navy captains, put RAN after the name:

This was approved by CAPT Smith (RAN).

When writing a formal letter to a Defence member, address them by rank, family name and any postnominals:

Dear Lieutenant Colonel Smith, AC, DSC

Referring to things

When referring to the Services, the order of precedence is Navy, Army then Air Force.

Use italics for the name of a specific aircraft, ship or vehicle, but not for types:

HMAS Anzac, Enola Gay

Anzac class of ship, Abrams tank, Hornet

Use initial capital for types of equipment:

Orion aircraft, Abrams tank

Punctuation

Use non-breaking spaces (Ctrl Shift Space) to prevent breaking titles, names and dates across lines.

No full stops in initials for name (MB Toms).

Always use an apostrophe before 's' in singular, and after 's' in plural (government's policies, governments' budgets).

Use en dash (–) to link. Unspaced when one word on either side. Spaced when more than one word on a side:

pages 31–5, hand–eye coordination,
Australia – United States MOU

Semicolons

Avoid if you are unsure on how to use.

Use to link two clauses that could be separate sentences but have a closer link than such separation would imply.

Quotation marks

Use double quotation marks when quoting direct speech, single quotation marks at other times.

Common comma mistakes

Never put a comma between a subject and a verb, or between a verb and an object.

A comma splice is a bad thing. It occurs when you use a comma to join two complete sentences, which is not the role of a comma. For example, 'Maree wrote the policy, Toni released it in the DHM.' This is a comma splice. Instead you should:

- join with a conjunction: Maree wrote the policy, but Toni released it in the DHM.
- join with a semi-colon: Maree wrote the policy; Toni released it in the DHM.
- join with a full stop: Maree wrote the policy. Toni released it in the DHM.

Use bracketing commas when providing non-essential information:

John, who is a single parent of young children, has asked for a posting near his family.

For restrictive relative clauses, which narrow meaning, do not use bracketing commas.

Aircrew who are certified may fly the aircraft. (restrictive)

Aircrew, who are certified, may fly the aircraft. (non-restrictive)

i

<http://intranet.defence.gov.au/home/documents/data/DEFPUBS/DEPTMAN/ADFWritingManual/ADFWritingManual.pdf>

ii

<http://defweb.cbr.defence.gov.au/home/documents/adfdocs/dhm/dhm.htm>

iii

http://www.navy.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/ADF_badges_of_rank.pdf



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We specialise in writing for Defence and government.

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- Plain English
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