



Correspondence Quick Reference

QUICK STYLE GUIDE

Published material

- Always write out legislation titles in full at the first reference, including the year.
- Use italics in: titles of Acts, Regulations and Disallowable Instruments
- Use normal type in: Bills and abbreviated titles for Acts, Regulations and Disallowable Instruments

Punctuation

- Use non-breaking spaces (*Ctrl Shift spacebar*) to prevent breaking titles, names and dates across lines
- Use a non-breaking hyphen (*Ctrl Shift hyphen*) in doubled up vowels, except coordinate and cooperate (e.g. co-owner)
- Possessions - the apostrophe comes before the 's' in the singular, and after the 's' in the plural
Examples: The government's policies don't... Governments' budgets aren't...

Numbers and dates

- Numbers from one to ten are spelt in full, e.g. three days not 3 days
- Use commas as separators in numbers (e.g. 20,000)
- Use symbols in tables [% , \$m , \$b], but write out in text (e.g. 20 per cent, \$8 million/billion)
- Use numerals in a series (e.g. she has 17 laptops and 20 manuals)
- When two numbers are consecutive, write the first as a word and the following as a numeral (e.g. there are three, 5-year projects).
- The financial year should be written as 2015-16
- Use date structure as 1 April 2015, not 1st April 2015

Abbreviations

- i.e. 'that is' or 'in other words'
- e.g. 'for example'
- Do not abbreviate 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'
- Instead of using 'etc.', redraft using 'such as' or 'including'
- Write acronyms and abbreviations in full the first time you refer to them.

Capitalising

- use capitals when referring to a specific government or directorate
 - The Australian Government has announced ...
 - The Community Services Directorate is announcing...
- use lower case in generic instances
 - ...review of government initiatives
 - Our directorate is ...
- use lower case in plural instances
 - The TAMS and Health directorates are ...
- Capitalise 'the Territory'
- **Budget** - only when it refers to the specific event or published document

Grammar

- A directorate, or body, is a singular entity (*Examples:* Each directorate **is** circulating **its** brief. Directorates **are** circulating **their** briefs. Shared Services ICT **has** been involved to date. Ministers **have** unanimously agreed.)

Standardisation

- Use an **s** not a **z**
e.g. Organisation, apologise, prioritise, analyse, specialise
- Use 'Australian Government' rather than 'Commonwealth Government' or 'Federal Government'

TROUBLESOME WORDS

Accept and Except

'Accept' means to receive, admit, regard as true, say yes.
'Except' means to exclude, other than, to leave out.

Advice and Advise

'Advice' is a noun.
It is a suggestion, opinion or recommendation.
'Advise' is a verb, meaning 'to give advice', to give information, notify and suggest types of action.

Affect and Effect

'Affect' means to produce a change in or influence something.
'Effect' means a change that occurred.
When an 's' is added, 'effects' means personal belongings.

Alternate and Alternative

'Alternate' means by turns or every other.
'Alternative' is one of two or more choices/opportunities.

Compliment and Complement

'Compliment' means praise or admiration.
'Complement' is to make complete or perfect, goes well together.

Dependent and Dependant

'Dependent' means relying on something.
'Dependant' means a person supported by someone else.

Discrete and Discreet

'Discrete' means separate, distinct, detached.
'Discreet' means cautious, restrained.

Disinterested and Uninterested

'Disinterested' means impartial or having no stake.
'Uninterested' means lacking interest.

It's and Its

'It's' is the abbreviation of it is.
'Its' is the possessive form.
Examples:
It's an excellent written summary.
Its summary was excellent.

Licence and License

'Licence' is a noun,
e.g. she holds a pilot's licence.
'License' is a verb,
e.g. they will license her to fly.

Personal and Personnel

'Personal' means belonging or relating to a particular person.
'Personnel' refers to the people employed in an organisation, business, or service.

Practice and Practise

'Practice' is a noun,
e.g. he did a lot of practice.
'Practise' is a verb,
e.g. he practised a lot.
Examples:
Doctors and lawyers practise their profession; both have practices.

Principle and Principal

'Principle' means a rule.
'Principal' means main, chief, most important.
Example: The school principal set very clear principles.

Stationary and Stationery

'Stationary' means still, not moving.
'Stationery' means writing paper, materials.

There and Their

'There' refers to a place.
'Their' shows possession, that something belongs to them.



Correspondence Quick Reference

BRIEF CHECKLIST

Template

- Ensure template is correct, by obtaining your new template from <http://shareservices/ACTGovt/Branding/downloads.html>
- All instructional text has been deleted
- All headings remain; 'nil response' is used where necessary

Reporting line

- The reporting line includes all officers required for final appropriate approval/information, but does not necessarily represent 'everyone' in the clearance process

Length of Brief

- The brief should be as concise as possible and should not exceed three pages. Attachments are included where necessary (and indicated such as: [Attachment A](#))
- Use "Attachment" not "Appendix"

Critical date and reason (if used in your template)

- **Immediate** must only be used for an emergency
- **Urgent** is only to be used if the matter is truly urgent and should never be used just to meet a deadline
- For Immediate or Urgent matters liaise with the DLO by phone to ensure the Minister's office is prepared
- The Minister's Office should always be provided sufficient time to receive, process and action the briefing
- The reason stated, is simply to advise the Minister why you require a response by a certain date

Body

- Issues should be clearly explained in a logical sequence and potential solutions/ approaches addressed for progressing the matter/s

Media

- Any potential media opportunities/ concerns are identified, as appropriate. A draft media release/talking points should be attached where significant media attention may follow

Recommendations

- Where there is only one recommendation, the agreed/ noted line is included under the Minister's signature
- Where there are multiple recommendations, the agreed/ noted line is repeated under each recommendation
- Only one signature line is required at the end of the brief (unless more than one minister is signing)

Attachments

- Titling and relationship of attachments to the brief are sufficiently clear for electronic transmission to the Minister's office

Quality Assurance

- Spell check has not been relied upon
- A structured approach to proofreading has been taken
- A peer has reviewed
- Attachments are appropriately marked and referenced in the brief
- The title and years for Acts, Instruments and Regulations are correct

MINISTERIAL STRUCTURE

Letterhead

Ensure letterhead is correct by obtaining your new template from <http://shareservices/ACTGovt/Branding/downloads.html>

Address

Use the full name and title. Members of the Legislative Assembly must have MLA included after their name. The suburb, state and postcode should be in capitals with double spacing. Use a PO Box or an email where provided.

Dear Mr/Mrs/Dr/Ms...

Where the correspondent has not indicated a preference for Mrs/Ms, use Ms. Where gender is unclear, use Mr/Ms.

First paragraph

(when responding on behalf of the Chief Minister, replace the word 'regarding' below with 'about', and do not include the date of the inbound correspondence, unless the date is critical to the response).

Standard opening sentence:

Thank you for your letter/email of (date) regarding (subject).

If the correspondent has already received an interim reply:

I refer to your letter/email of (date) regarding (subject).

When the Minister is replying to correspondence referred to by another Minister:

Thank you for your letter/email of (date) to (name and title) regarding (subject). (Name and title) has referred your letter/ email to me because this matter falls within my portfolio responsibilities.

When the Minister is replying to correspondence that has also been sent to another Minister:

Thank you for your letter/email of (date) regarding (subject). I understand that you have also written to (name and title). I am responding on behalf of the ACT Government because this matter falls within my portfolio responsibilities.

If a Member of the Legislative Assembly has made a representation to the Minister on behalf of a constituent:

Thank you for your letter/email of (date) on behalf of your constituent, regarding (subject).

If the reply is late, the final sentence of the first paragraph is: I apologise for the delay in responding to you.

Second paragraph

The Minister's position should be clearly stated at the first opportunity.

Following paragraphs

Add further information where necessary to justify the Minister's position. Stay on topic and provide only relevant contextual background. Do not use jargon. Discuss related issues or further elaborate on the primary issue and include details of work being undertaken within the directorate. Do not pre-empt future government decisions.

Final paragraph

This should thank the correspondent again for their letter, or thank them for their interest in the subject/ bringing the matter to the Minister's attention.

Actively provide assistance, such as providing a contact officer or link to a website for further information.