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## The Australian Style Guide™: a definitive reference for the digital age

Ever wondered whether to use “percent” or “%”? What’s the difference between an em dash and a hyphen? How long should a sentence be? And exactly what is “camel case”?

Australian writers and editors have cause to celebrate today, because the new online Australian Style Guide™ from Plain English Foundation has all the answers.

The ASG covers contemporary Australian writing practice for both print and digital environments. Writers and editors across the government, corporate, media and university sectors will welcome it heartily.

According to Foundation Executive Director Dr Neil James, “Until now, Australia hasn’t had a definitive online style reference, unlike other English-speaking countries. The Australian Style Guide™ fills that gap.”

“Whether you’re looking for how to structure a document, format a number or punctuate a sentence, the ASG has you covered,” Dr James said. “The Australian Style Guide™ is comprehensive yet easy to use. And it’s free.”

The Australian Style Guide™ offers clear and practical advice, and it gives enough explanation to understand a style rule and where it might have changed.

“In the digital age, a lot of style practices have been evolving,” Dr James said. “It’s timely that the ASG sets out how to make content clear and consistent for online use, without losing the editorial rigour of the traditional print environment.”

The Australian Style Guide™ has 120 major entries and hundreds of sub-entries in 7 categories to answer the most common style questions. And the innovative online interface makes it easy to navigate.

“No longer will Australian workplaces have to scroll through a cumbersome PDF or scour a weighty tome,” Dr James said. “You can search the ASG by browsing categories, using the A-Z menu or doing a direct search on your style questions.”

“This makes the Australian Style Guide™ the ideal style reference for communications specialists, students and academics – and especially for professionals writing at work.”

The Australian Style Guide™ is free and accessible through any browser or device. Simply register at [www.australianstyleguide.com](http://www.australianstyleguide.com).

Dr Neil James, Executive Director, Plain English Foundation is available for interview about the Australian Style Guide™.

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Following are some examples from the ASG of what’s new in Australian style.

## What's new in Australian style?

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As we do more and more reading online, Australian writing style has been evolving for the digital age. Following are some of the notable changes, featuring an example from each of the 7 categories in the Australian Style Guide™.

### Plain English: communicating clearly

Where once government and corporate organisations wrote to sound impressive, now they just want to get to the point. This involves:

- writing shorter texts that highlight key messages
- using cleaner design and many more headings
- choosing short words and sentences and the active voice.

### Language: increasing the use of lower case

A decades-long trend against the overuse of capital letters continues. Only in a full formal title should we use title case. In short form, “The Department of Government Services” can just be “the department” not the more formal “the Department”.

### People and places: accepting the singular they

The singular “they” has been used for years in our spoken language, but it’s now accepted in written English as an inclusive alternative to the gendered pronouns “he” and “she”. Never again will you need to use the awkward “he/she” construction.

### Numbers: using numerals for numbers

This sounds obvious, yet the most contentious style change for numbers is whether to spell them out in words or use numerals in body text. The ASG supports the contemporary shift towards numerals, as growing evidence shows they are easier to read – particularly online.

### Punctuation: giving the asterisk a new lease on life

Social media has brought one of our oldest punctuation marks back into common use. The humble asterisk can now convey emphasis and action, as well as censoring content and flagging explanatory notes.

### Formatting: reducing the use of italics

Traditionally, writers have used italics to emphasise text and reference a published title. The trend has moved firmly away from italic text because it is less legible and physically harder to read. Removing italics from publication titles will be radical for some.

### Referencing: preferring endnotes to footnotes

Footnotes were once a place for taking extended intellectual excursions. Today, they tend to interrupt the text and annoy more readers than they help. The ASG recommends endnotes over footnotes, and encourages you to save them for sources only.