**[Date]**

Writing Style Guide

**[Organisation name]**

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# Language and tone

*[Rewrite this section to reflect your organisation’s purpose and preferred tone.]*

Our responsibility to our audience is to inform.

Our tone is relaxed, without being silly or inappropriate. We write clearly, in a way that informs and engages. We embrace, in moderation, puns, contemporary cultural references, and general informality. We impart our expertise with clarity, empathy, and wit.

We use inclusive language. We acknowledge diversity in the words we use, and avoid lumping groups of people together and assuming shared experiences or perspectives.

To help ensure clarity, we use plain language. This means we:

* keep sentences short. Lengthy sentences make content more difficult to follow. An average sentence should be no longer than 15–20 words.
* choose the straightforward option when choosing words. Don’t use more words when fewer words give the same message.
* use ‘you’ and ‘we ‘to make it personal, rather than ‘the applicant’, for example.
* choose words appropriate to the reader. Avoid jargon and slang that the general population won’t understand. If you need to use a technical term, briefly define it so everyone can understand.
* give instructions directly and concisely.
* use positive language, e.g. Please send you payment so we can renew your licence, ***not,*** If you don’t send payment, we won’t be able to renew your licence.
* use active voice, not passive voice, e.g. The government has passed a bill, ***not,*** The bill was passed by the government.

# Style guides / grammar guides

Use these references to check spelling or grammar rules.

## NZ English spelling

Use the *New Zealand Oxford English Dictionary* for spelling and when to use hyphens.

If you don’t have access to a hard copy, then use Lexico, the [Online Oxford English Dictionary](https://www.lexico.com/), set to UK English. This dictionary includes New Zealand English words.

## Grammar rules

When checking grammar rules, use *Fit to Print: The Writing & Editing Style Guide for Aotearoa New Zealand* byJanet Hughes and Derek Wallace. (2010, Dunmore Publishing).

Or, the *New Oxford Style Manual (3rd ed.)* by Oxford University Press (2016, Oxford University Press). [[Online subscription](https://global.oup.com/academic/product/oxford-dictionaries-premium-9780191836718?cc=nz&lang=en&).]

## Te reo Māori spelling

To check correct spelling of te reo Māori words, including correct use of macrons (tohutō), use the [Māori Dictionary](https://maoridictionary.co.nz/).

For guidance on how to format Māori words within English text, use the [*Guidelines for Māori Language Orthography*](https://www.reomaori.co.nz/orthography) by Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori | The Māori Language Commission.

*Remember to know your limitations when using te reo Māori and seek expert help to ensure te reo Māori and cultural values are respected and correct.*

## Accessibility and inclusivity

For print accessibility, follow the guidance from the [Ministry of Social Development](https://msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/accessibility/accessibility-guide/design-for-print.html).

For web content accessibility, follow the guidance from [Digital.govt.nz](https://www.digital.govt.nz/standards-and-guidance/design-and-ux/accessibility/).

For inclusive language, follow guidance from [Digital.govt.nz](https://www.digital.govt.nz/standards-and-guidance/design-and-ux/content-design-guidance/inclusive-language/).

# **Formatting**

## Fonts

*[Include preferred fonts for reports and correspondence, heading fonts, and when to use bold and italics.]*

## Margins

*[Include preferred margin settings and column widths.]*

## Headings

*[Include fonts, size and colour of headings, heading punctuation and capitalisation.]*

# Punctuation

*[Include types of punctuation that people have difficulty with or the preferred choices for your organisation.]*

# Capitalisation

*[Include whether capitals are used for job titles, department names, and brand names.]*

# Abbreviations / acronyms

*[List your organisation’s preferred use of acronyms and abbreviations, whether they are allowed, and how often they should be spelled out.]*

# Numbers

*[Include when to spell out numbers or use numerals, how to format time and dates, whether to use commas, and how to format measurements, money, fractions and symbols.]*

# Quoting / dialogue

*[Include whether to use single or double quote marks, how to punctuate quotes and dialogue, and how to use scare quotes.]*

# Word list

*[List words where there is a choice or have unusual spelling.]*

# Negative word list

*[List words up that are never to be used.]*