Keeping up appearances – some basics of style

Whatever style decisions you make, be consistent. Style decisions are easier to remember if they are based on logic.

Element	Style decisions
Capitals	Use minimal capitalisation.
	Use initial capitals for:
	• proper nouns and full formal titles of people and organisations
	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade King Charles III President Biden
	• geographic terms (eg country and city names)
	• scientific terms in some fields (eg genus names, soil types)
	Don't use initial capitals for:
	• informal names or plurals the department kings and queens of England
	• professions obstetrician electrician
	• expressions whose shortened forms consist of capitals
	genetically modified organism (GMO) chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
Hyphens	Use minimal hyphenation.
	Prefixes: set solid wherever possible
	antenatal postmortem nongovernment subspecies semipermanent coordinate
	Exceptions:
	• 'self' words self-evident self-reported
	• words starting with a capital anti-Australian
	• unfamiliar or awkward double vowels anti-inflammatory
	• where meaning could be confused re-cover versus recover
	• shortened forms non-CNS anti-myc
	Suffixes: set solid wherever possible
	fourfold worldwide airborne
Hyphenation rules	For many compound adjectives, a hyphen is required when the compound is used immediately before the noun it modifies but not when used after the noun:
	the long-term estimates but estimates for the long term
	high-risk enterprises but enterprises that are high risk
	Do not hyphenate compound verbs, but set the compound solid when used as a noun or an adjective:
	we will back up the system but the backup will run this afternoon
	the water will run off to the south but the runoff water is polluted
	For further hyphenation rules, see our quick guide 'Compound adjectives – to hyphenate or not to hyphenate'.

amos@stylemanual.com.au
02 6282 2280

Element	Style decisions

En and em dashes	En dash (Ctrl+- on numeric keypad; or Alt+0150 on numeric keypad) indicates conjunction. Use for:
	• number ranges 12–15 km
	• linked terms that are of equal 'weight'
	  Neuman–Keul test Australia–Japan relations public–private partnership
	• minus sign −20 °C
	
	Either an en dash or an em dash (Ctrl+Alt+- on numeric keypad; or Alt+0151 on numeric keypad) can be used to set off information in text. The most common forms are:
	• spaced en dash
	  Two main rivers – the Darling and Murrumbidgee – were surveyed
	• unspaced em dash
	  Two main rivers—the Darling and Murrumbidgee—were surveyed
	
	The spaced en dash is increasingly recommended, because it causes fewer problems when text is viewed on screen.

Spelling	Where the dictionary gives alternatives, the first given is the one used most commonly: focused, focussed Australian Government departments commonly use the *Macquarie dictionary*. International journals in English generally use either American or British spelling: • Merriam-Webster (American) – www.merriam-webster.com • Oxford English (British) – www.askoxford.com.
Abbreviations, initialisms and acronyms	General rule: define at first use in the abstract (or summary) and main part of the document; for longer publications, define at first use in each chapter. Generally require no punctuation: Australian Bureau of Statistics – ABS Exceptions include abbreviated genus names: *S. aureus* Use shortened forms only if the term is used more than a few times.

ie and eg	Only use in parentheses. Spell out in running text:
	  (ie mice) or that is, mice
	  (eg mice) or for example, mice
	
	Do not use stops within or a comma after:
	  (eg mice) not (e.g. mice) (e.g., mice) (eg, mice)
	
	Use a nonbreaking space between the *eg* or *ie* and the following text so that they stay together and don't split over a line.

Element	Style decisions
Numbers	Use numerals rather than words in all cases, especially if writing for the web, except for 'one' when it is acting as an indefinite article: There is one main reason we do this Alternatively, write out one to nine, and use numerals for 10 or higher. Use commas in numbers with more than 3 digits:　2,000 Use numerals for quantities expressed with units or as percentages: 8 km　200 g　4 days　5% Always spell out numbers at the start of a sentence or recast the sentence: Forty-three businesses were invited to participate We invited 43 businesses to participate Indicating ranges: between 1999 and 2004　from 12 to 18 months not between 1999–2004　from 12–18 months
Units	In technical publications, there is generally no need to define units at first use. In publications for a general audience, define at first use. Always use numerals for abbreviated units: 5 mm　or　5 millimetres　or　five millimetres　not　five mm Spell out units at the start of a sentence or recast the sentence: Ten millilitres of the sample was …　A sample of 10 mL was … [The unit is treated as singular whether or not it is abbreviated] Place a nonbreaking space between the number and the unit: 10 mm　not　10mm
Bullet point lists	If the bullet points follow on from the lead-in sentence, use lower case for the first word of each point and punctuate only with a stop at the end of the list. If the bullet points are whole sentences, change the lead-in sentence to a whole sentence, and start each point with a capital letter and end each with a full stop.