Website Content Writing Guidelines

Contents

Content and design principles

- Start with needs: user needs, not government needs.
- Do less.
- Design with data.
- Do the hard work to make it simple.
- Iterate. Then iterate again.
- This is for everyone.
- Understand context.
- Build digital services, not websites.
- Be consistent, not uniform.
- Make things open: it makes things better.

How users read web pages

Users read very differently online than on paper. They don't necessarily read top to bottom or even from word to word.

Instead, users only read about 20 to 28% of a web page. Where users just want to complete their task as quickly as possible, they skim even more out of impatience.

Web-user eye-tracking studies show that people tend to 'read' a webpage in an 'F' shape pattern. They look across the top, then down the side, reading further across when they find what they need

Content approval process

Each Business Unit is responsible for creating, maintaining and editing their web pages. Each area has an assigned editor or editors. All editors must have completed web training.

All pages must be submitted for approval. All content on the City's website is approved and published by the Digital Marketing Officer. Pages requiring approval are reviewed every morning.

Please ensure your supervisor and/or Manager has approved your content prior to uploading to the website CMS.

Stages of content:

Stages:

Editor

↓

saved as DRAFT or

Sent FOR APPROVAL ⟶ Publisher

↓

DECLINED or APPROVED

↓

PUBLISHED information is live on the site

Writing for the web

Writing content is a skill that continues to refine the more we practise it. Writing for the Web requires a different approach than writing for print purposes.

Whether you are writing new content or repurposing/updating existing content, the strategy is the same:

- **Audience**
  Always consider your audience and pitch your content to their level. As a rule of thumb, it's best to keep content simple, clear and concise.
- **Purpose**
  Content needs a purpose, otherwise it's pointless having it. Therefore, it's helpful to keep in mind the 'Who/what/when/where/why and how' style of writing, ensuring your content is doing what it's intended to do: inform users.
- **Consider mobile users**
  More people are viewing web sites on mobiles and tablets which have a smaller screen size.
- **Short paragraphs**
  Several sentences at a maximum, make paragraphs easier to read. If you have a lot of text, break it up into smaller chunks of information by using paragraphs (one per idea), bullet points and lists.
- **Active voice**
  Keeping verbs active lends credibility - instead of 'Your report must be reviewed by your manager', use 'Your manager must review your report'.
- **Don't abbreviate**
  Where possible, keep abbreviations and acronyms to a minimum, as these are meaningless to those unfamiliar with your particular industry-related terms.
- **Be informative, not formal**
  Use language that is neither too simple nor too formal. Always keep your audience in mind

Content Criteria

To communicate your message effectively, it is important to address five basic criteria:

- what - what is it about?
- when - when is it?
- where - where will the information come from?
- who - to whom is it for? Eg. Target market.
- why - why is it required?

Page Titles

Most people who use the City's website start with a search engine. Use the same vocabulary as your audience so they can find your content. This starts with your page title, summary and first paragraph.

- Keep all titles to 65 characters or less (including spaces). This is because search engines truncate (cut off) titles in Google search results over that number. Words or parts of words will be cut off.
- Make sure your title is unique. It's not helpful for people if search results show a list of pages with the exact same title.
- Titles should be clear and descriptive. The title should provide full context so that people can easily see if they've found what they're looking for, eg 'Guidance for potato growers', not 'Potatoes'.
- Make titles active where possible - avoid gerunds and participles eg 'Submit Statutory Declarations' not 'Using and submitting Statutory Declarations'.
- Only use an acronym in the title if it is a commonly used search term (like EU).
- Avoid puns or wordplay since these can make the content difficult to find.

Headings

- **Be clear, not clever**
  Unless you're writing for an entertainment web site, keep it simple: e.g. 'Library resources' is better than 'Awesome library links'
- **Keep the main topic in the heading**
  Headings aren't a guessing game - let the user find what they need as they scan the page. If a user is searching for information on how to pay their rates, then a heading such as 'Pay your rates' makes sense to a user.
- **A heading should stand on its own**
  It has been said that if you removed all content and just left headings, a user should be able to tell you what the page is about. It is worth taking the time to get your headings right.
- **Front loaded: important keywords first**
  As well as improving search engine optimisation, keeping key words at the front of a heading makes it faster for users to find what they need. Remember our 'Library resources' example?
- **Predictable and familiar**
  Help users find the content they would expect to, by keeping headings consistent.

Sub-headings

Make sure your sub-headings are front-loaded with search terms and make them active. Don't use:

- Questions
- Gerunds, eg 'Apply for a licence' not 'Applying for a licence'
- Technical terms unless you've already explained them

Content structure

Keep your body copy as focused as possible.

When structuring content use:
- Meaningful sub-headings.
- Bulleted lists.
- One idea per paragraph (users will skip over any additional ideas if they are not caught by the first few words in the paragraph).
- The inverted pyramid style, starting with the conclusion.
- Half the word count (or less) than conventional writing.
- There is no minimum or maximum page length but remember that the pressure on the brain to understand increases for every 100 words you put on a page.

Writing conventions

This style guide covers style, spelling and grammar conventions for all content published on the City's website. This guide is arranged alphabetically.

A

Aboriginal people

Government preference is to use Aboriginal and Indigenous, capitalised, when referring to Indigenous Australians (both words standing as both nouns and adjectives). 'Aboriginal(s)' is preferred over 'Aborigine(s)'.

When referring to the Aboriginal people of the south-west of Western Australia please use Nyungar on the website.

Abbreviations

An *abbreviation* is a shortened form of a word that *does not* include the full word's final letter. If an abbreviation is needed it should be followed by a full stop, for example Rev. Green, Prof. Plum, Dec. (December), ch. (chapter), p. (page), e.g. (exempli gratia – two words therefore two full stops); however, try to avoid abbreviations such as 'e.g.' and 'i.e.' as much as possible.

Abbreviations printed in capital letters do not take a full stop, for example WA, QC, MP. These are also known as *initialisms.*

The word number is often shortened to no.; which is a contraction of the Italian word *numero.* Unlike other contractions – which do not take full stops – a full stop is used so that confusion with the word *no* is avoided.

Abbreviation following a full structured word is acceptable, provided the full structured word has been identified early in the content and followed by the abbreviation in parenthesis '( )', for example: District Planning Scheme 2 (DPS2)

Following the identification of the abbreviation with the full structured text, the abbreviation may then be used for the remaining of the content, not in brackets, in this example: DPS2.

Acronyms and simplified language

Acronyms can be used when the full word or name has been written in full once in the document.

Example: The WA Local Government Association (WALGA) is the voice of Local Government in Western Australia. As the peak industry body, WALGA advocates…

To avoid the over-use of the title 'the City of Joondalup', it can be used in full in the first instance and then referred to as 'the City' from that point on. It is not necessary to show (the City) in brackets after the first use.

Generally, we refer to the City (being the organisation) and the City of Joondalup (as being the region).

Example: The City installed play equipment through the City of Joondalup.

Do not refer to the City as COJ in external publications as this abbreviation is not commonly known.

Addresses

Do not use punctuation in the last line of any address type.

Street addresses
A street address (number and street) is to be in sentence case. Suburb and state/territory are to be capitalised with two spaces either side of the state abbreviation for example:

10 Sample Street
JOONDALUP WA 6027

Where the address includes a level or unit, this is to precede the street number followed by a comma and is to be in sentence case, for example:

Level 4, 10 Sample Street
JOONDALUP WA 6027

Where a flat, unit or apartment is indicated, the use of a solidus '/' is to be used, for example:

Unit 2/28 Sample Street
JOONDALUP WA 6027

Note: a solidus is not to be used to separate other address elements, such as shop, suite, factory number or building level number.

Post office addresses
A post office box address is to be in the following format. The use of commas or full stops in post office addresses should not be used:

PO Box 21
JOONDALUP WA 6919

Apostrophe

Single apostrophes should be used only as contractions or possessives.
Contraction: It's going to be a fun day out.
Possessive: Contact the City's Economic Development Advisor.

Apostrophes no longer have a place in geographical/mapping names.

Incorrect: St George's Terrace

Correct: St Georges Terrace
Do not use an apostrophe to indicate a plural.

Incorrect: 1990's

Correct: 1990s

Ampersand (&) and symbols

Do not use shorthand in place of writing words in full. The word 'and' should always be used instead of '&'.

Accordingly, the use of other symbols to replace a word, such as '@' instead of the word 'at', should not be used.

B

Bullet Points and Numbered Lists

Bullets which are used to break up an otherwise long sentence should include a semi-colon (;) at the end of each bullet and a period (.) at the end of the last bullet to close the sentence. Each bullet should start with a lowercase letter in this instance.

Example: The Community wants:
- improved transport and connectivity;
- to celebrate and maintain our natural assets;
- increased local job opportunities;
- a vibrant City Centre; and
- quality public open spaces.

Bullets which are used to provide a list of items or actions which are often prefaced with the words "the following" should include no punctuation at the end of the bullets except the last bullet which should include a period (.) to close off the list. The list of items can be written in sentence case with a capital letter at the start of each bullet.

Example: In addition to the City's regional context, it is also aware of the following burgeoning challenges:
- Climate change
- Transport congestion
- Ageing infrastructure
- Financial sustainability
- Competition for investment attraction
- Ageing population
- Sustainable tourism.

Bullets which are used to highlight or list items with no lead in sentence should include normal punctuation rules for sentences. eg. periods (.) between sentences and sentence case capitalisation.

Example: Strategic initiatives
- Attract a diverse elected body that represents, promotes and reflects the composition of the community. In doing so, the City can provide good leadership and governance.
- Ensure the elected body has a comprehensive understanding of it roles and responsibilities.
- Develop and deliver training initiatives that will foster a skilled and confident elected body.

Bullet points are generally preferred over numbers or numbering. Numbers and letters should be reserved for quoting legislative provisions and in cases where it is necessary to show priority or chronology within a series, or where individual items need to be identified for later reference.

Brackets

Use sparingly, use to aid clarity.

Buttons

Buttons should be used to indicate hyperlinks.

C

Capital letters

Generally, capitals should be restricted to starting a sentence, proper nouns (a name used for an individual person, place, or organisation) and official titles.

Do not capitalise when using a term generically or where the full title of the document is not quoted.

Example: Strategic Community Plan 2012-2022 should be referred to as the "plan" not the "Plan".

For headings use 'sentence case', not 'title case', for example, *Going green for the future* is in sentence case, with a capital only at the beginning, *Going Green for the Future* is in title case, with capitals used for all major words. It is the City's style preference to use sentence case in all instances for headings, including PowerPoint presentations.

When used in bullet points, the list of items can be written in sentence case with a capital letter at the start of each bullet.

City-specific styles

City – reference to

When referring to the City, never use personal pronouns. Text should always be reworked to use the third person perspective:

Incorrect: We encourage you to complete the online application form on our website.

Correct: Please complete the online application form available on the City's website.

When referring to the local government of the City of Joondalup use 'the City', with a capital C, including publications or items belonging to the organisation: for example City policies, or the City's organisational structure. Use 'City Centre' with upper case 'c's to refer to the geographical location of the Joondalup City Centre. Use 'City of Joondalup district' or 'City of Joondalup region' to describe the local government's geographical area and to distinguish it from the City, being the local government.

Council – reference to

When referring to the City of Joondalup Council, capitalise the word Council. Write 'Council' rather than 'the Council'. No need to write 'City of Joondalup Council' in full unless the circumstance requires.

Reference to external websites

When referencing external websites other than the City's website, the rule is:

- If the website can be accessed typing in the address without 'www', just write the web address without this preface in the same style as the City's website (this will need to be tested on an individual basis); or
- If the address needs the 'www' in front to work, include this preface.

Leisure centres and libraries

The City's Leisure Centres and Libraries should be referred to by their correct titles:

Incorrect: Craigie Leisure Centre

Correct: The City of Joondalup Leisure Centre - Craigie or the Leisure Centre - Craigie

Incorrect: The Joondalup Library

Correct: City of Joondalup Libraries – Joondalup

Additional information

Incorrect: For more information contact the City on…

Correct: For further information contact the City on…

Employees – reference to

Do not put names of employees or positions on the website, just provide the relevant contact number. Avoids details needing to be uploaded when people change positions.

Colon

Use a colon to introduce a list.

Words that appear after colons do not begin with a capital letter unless they are the start of a quote.

Common word list

In some cases, there are several acceptable spellings or formats of words. The following list sets out the City's preferred use of such words. This list is not exhaustive; if you are not sure of the City's use of a word please contact your Marketing Officer.

- Email (not e-mail) Note: where the word 'email' is used at the beginning of a sentence, capitalise the letter 'e' *Example* 'Email'.
- Website (one word)
- Web page (two words)
- Online (not on-line)
- Wi-Fi (not WIFI or WiFi)
- iPad, iPod, etc
- Website (not web site or web-site).
- eBooks, eMagazines, eNewsletters (not EBooks or E-books).

Commas

Sometimes when writing short sentences, you often create a stop–start effect when using full stops. Although correctly punctuated, short sentences can run more smoothly when joined together with a comma to form a single sentence. These commas are usually followed by a small joining word such as 'and', 'but', 'for', 'nor', 'or', 'so' and 'yet'.

D

Dates

A slash (with no spaces) should used when shortening a time span of financial years: The 2013/14 Financial Plan.

An en (short) dash should be used to indicate a date range with no space on either side of the dash: Strategic Community Plan 2012-2022.

Dates should be written in the format: Saturday 3 November 2014.

Where space allows, dates and times should be used together they should be separated with a comma.

Example: Saturday 3 November 2014, 3.00pm - 4.00pm

Dashes and hyphens

Dashes and hyphens have different grammatical uses and should be used appropriately.

An 'em' dash introduces an explanation or an amplification, signifies an abrupt change, or sets apart parenthetic elements of a sentence.

Use an 'en' dash (unspaced) to indicate a span or range, for example 'see paragraphs 24–29', or 'open Monday–Friday' or *Strategic Community Plan 2012-2022*.

Symbol	Name	**Microsoft Word shortcut**
-	hyphen	**minus** (next to '0' on top row) or numeric minus (top-right corner of numeric keyboard).
–	'en' dash	**ctrl + numeric minus** (top-right corner of numeric keyboard). It is about the same size as the letter 'n'.
—	'em' dash	**ctrl + alt + numeric minus** (top-right corner of numeric keyboard). It is about the same size as the letter 'm'.

E

Ellipses

Ellipses (…) should be avoided.

Etc (etcetera)

Etcetera (etc) should be avoided as it implies imprecision or disengagement with the subject.

Exclamation marks

Use exclamation marks (!) very sparingly. They should only be used to indicate very strong feelings or indicate an interjection in speech. Avoid using exclamation marks in formal writing unless absolutely necessary.

F

Footnotes

Footnotes should be included in documents at the end of the sentence. Formatting of these should be after the full stop for the relevant sentence and displayed as superscript.

Example: The City of Joondalup's population is 167,623.[1]

Short reference footnotes should be included in the bottom left corner of the same page the footnote appears.

Example: [1]Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011

Formatting Event Information

To maintain consistency across all event promotional materials, details should be formatted as below:

Event Name
Date, time
Venue
Cost (if applicable)

Example: **Little Feet Festival**
Sunday 23 October 2016, 1.00pm – 5.00pm
Edith Cowan University, Joondalup
Free entry

Full stop

Following a full stop, double spacing between sentences should not be used. Use a single space between the full stop and the new sentence.

A full stop is placed after an end parentheses ( )) when the words do not form a complete sentence. If the parenthesis encloses a complete sentence the full stop is placed before the end parentheses. The same applies for quotations.

G

Gender – reference to
Female

Use the reference 'women' unless the context requires, for example – female toilets.

Male

Use the reference 'men' unless the context requires, for example – male toilets.

Nouns and gender

Most English nouns do not have grammatical gender. Nouns referring to people do not have separate forms for men and women. However, some nouns traditionally had different forms. Nowadays, people usually prefer more neutral forms, following are a couple of examples:

Male	Female	Neutral form
Chairman	Chairwoman	Chair or Chairperson
Policeman	Policewoman	Police Officer

H

Heading formatting

Headings are designed to convey logical hierarchy. Since headings indicate the start of important sections of content, it is possible for users with assistive technology to jump directly to the appropriate heading and begin reading the content.

When formatting the page, utilise the three tier heading style:

- Heading One (H1) for page title/question

- Heading Two (H2) for major section heading, call to action, sub title of a page

- Heading Three (H3) for sub section or sub headings within content.

Use sentence case for headings *Example*: How do I give feedback? *Not*: How do I Give Feedback

Headings and titles

A capital letter should only be used for the first word in a heading or title, except if the sentence includes a proper noun. Headings and titles are phrases not sentences, so they do not end in a full stop.

Example: Another successful year for the Joondalup Festival

Titles of legislation, books and major City documents should be italicised, when used within the body of text:

- ...the *Local Government Act 1995* states...
- The City's *Strategic Community Plan 2012 - 2022...*
- Meet Michael Muhling, author of *The Real Middle Earth – the origin of The Lord of the Rings*...
- *Policy/Plan/Act/Scheme/Law/State and Federal Regulations* should all be italicised

Italics should not be used in headings.

All caps should only be used within designed branding as it is difficult to read and often portrays shouting or aggression.

Song titles are always surrounded by quotation marks, while album titles are italicised.
Example: *NSYNC's "Bye Bye Bye" from the *No Strings Attached* album.

The titles of plays and artwork should also be italicised.

Hyperlinks

Avoid linking text by saying "Click here". Apart from making little sense for users of text-only or speech browsers, this gives an amateur feel to the website, and does not describe the link or action that follows.

Try to keep links brief but descriptive. If links are included within text, simply pick the words that describe the link.

Hyphens

Hyphens can be used to connect compound numbers when spelt out, for example 'ninety-nine'. Refer to Dashes and hyphens

I

Images

Images are only used in news and events section. If an image gallery is needed within a Knowledge Based Article please contact the Digital Marketing Officer.

Italics – use of

Italics should not be used to emphasise or highlight a word. Italics should be restricted to titles of polices, plans, legislation, schemes and scientific names. Italics should not be used for the words 'Program', 'Strategy', 'Schedule', 'Guidelines', 'Procedures', 'Glossary' or 'Assessments'.

Example: The City's *Environmental Plan 2012-2014* outlines the recommendations to address the species *Phytophthora* and *Armillaria.*

J

K

L

Legislation – reference to

Acts of Parliament should be named in full with the year at the end and italicised, for example the *Local Government Act 1995*. There is no need to place the year in brackets or state '(as amended)' when quoting legislation.

If the legislative jurisdiction is other than WA include this in brackets at the end, but not italicised - *Trade Practises Act 1974* (Cwlth) or *Local Government Act 1999* (SA).

Subsidiary legislation, such as regulations and local laws also use capitals and are italicised, for example, *Building Regulations 2012* or *City of Joondalup Parking Local Law 1999*. A Bill however is not italicised.

Write 'sections' of an Act with a lower case 's' followed by a space and then the number, unless at the start of a sentence in which case spell out the word 'Section' or 'Regulation'. Follow the same rules for Regulations, but with a lower case 'r' for the abbreviation. For example 'as prescribed in section 71 of the *Health Act 1911'*. It is permissible to substitute 'section' with 's' and regulations with 'r' in sentences but it is not encouraged, for example 'as prescribed in the *Health Act 1911,* s 71*'.*

M

Measurement

Spell out units of distance or length, for example kilometres, metres, millimetres, litres. Use symbols in tables and figures if space is restricted, or in technical documents (km, m, mm, L etc.). Follow the City's convention for numbers (one to nine – words, 10 and above – numerals).

When using symbols close up the space between the numeral and the symbol, for example 25m, 7.5L. Note that the symbol for litre takes a capital L to avoid confusion with the number '1'.

- Speed 75kmh

- Length 9mm, 56cm, 2.1m, 192km

- Weight 18mg, 23g, 5.5kg, 2t

- Volume 7ml, 20L

- Area 87m² , 3ha

- Temperature 38C

- Per cent %

- For units of storage use abbreviations, for example kB, MB, GB.

N

Naming convention - media

Where PDF's and other media and attachments are uploaded for use in content, it is very important to ensure they are named in a meaningful way for the customer, and that the naming convention is consistent across all media types used on the website.

The title for media should contain specific information pertaining to the document purpose/topic and the year and month last reviewed or published.

The following naming convention is to be followed when naming media in the CMS:

[Item Name] [Year]-[Month]

Example:

Good: Retaining Wall Fact Sheet 2016-July

Bad: 9451 RW Fact Sheet v2

Again, please be aware, the name you apply to media will be seen by the customer, it is therefore imperative it is easily understood as to what it is and presented in a professional manner. Files from Marketing should be renamed.

Numerals and values

Numbers less than 10 should be written in words and numbers over 10 are to be shown as numerals.
Example: Between nine and 12 people will attend the ceremony.

Numbers of four digits or more i.e. greater than 1,000 should include a comma within the number to make it easy to read. *Example:* 2,350 or 100,000

Dollar values are always expressed in numerals. Dollar figures up to $1,000 must always include the cent value (even if the value is zero). *Example:* $5.00 or $100.00

Numbers and dollar values in the thousands or millions should include the relevant word after the number, or include commas to make it easy to read. *Example:* $12million or 1,234,567 and $100,000 not $100K.

It can be referred as $12m if space is restricted (eg. tables), however there should never be a space between million (for instance $12million not $12 million). This ensures it is read as one number and always displayed together.

Percentages should always be written in numbers followed by the percent symbol. *Example: 5%*

The word percentage should only be used when there is no number given. *Example: 'in order to determine the percentage of residents'*

When using the adjectival form of numbers: write 'first', not '1st'.

Nyoongar/Nyungar/Noongar
For additional information refer to the section [Aboriginal people](#).

O

P

People titles
If the job title is part of someone's official title, use capital letters.

Incorrect: financial analyst

Correct: Financial Analyst

Phone numbers
Write phone numbers without a dash or hyphen.

Incorrect: 9400-4000

Correct: 9400 4000

Q

Quotation marks

Quotation marks should only be used when quoting people or publications. When including a quote from a person or publication within an existing sentence, adjacent punctuation should be included on the outside of the quotation marks, in these examples, the placement of a full stop.

Incorrect: The City of Joondalup follows the 'Bradley Method' of bush regeneration, i.e.

"remove weeds competing with native plants in the good condition sections of bush and work out at the pace of natural regeneration, disturbing the soil as little as possible."

Correct: The City of Joondalup follows the 'Bradley Method' of bush regeneration, i.e.

"remove weeds competing with native plants in the good condition sections of bush and work out at the pace of natural regeneration, disturbing the soil as little as possible".

When using a quote as a standalone sentence, adjacent punctuation should be included within the inside of the quotation marks.

Incorrect: "Congratulations to everyone involved in this fantastic event".
Correct: "Congratulations to everyone involved in this fantastic event."

R

S

Semi colon

Use semi colons sparingly.

In the context of sentences in bullets points, include a semi colon (;) at the end of each bullet and a full stop (.) at the end of the last bullet to close the sentence.

Spelling

Avoid US-English spellings such as capitalize, recognize, color and behavior. Use the preferred Australian-English spellings: for example capitalise, recognise, colour and behaviour.

Slash

When using a slash (/) to separate words, there should be no spaces on either side.
Example: The sentence is far too long and/or it has more than one theme.

T

Times

Times should be written with a period separating hours and minutes (not a colon), and with no spaces before the am/pm: 3.00pm or 5.45am.

Time periods should be separated with an en (short) dash and spaces on both sides of the dash: 3.00pm – 4.00pm

Noon and midnight should be written as: 12.00noon or 12.00midnight

Where space allows, dates and times should be used together they should separated with a comma. *Example*: Saturday 3 November 2014, 3.00pm - 4.00pm

Tone

Active over passive voice

Wherever possible, an active rather than a passive voice should be used when writing. This improves the clarity of writing and helps convey a sense of vibrancy and interest.

Incorrect: Registrations for the session will be opened by the Library on Wednesday.

Correct: Registrations open on Wednesday at the Library.

Incorrect: On examination of the process, it was revealed....

Correct: Examining the process revealed...

Positive over negative voice

Wherever possible, text should be written in a positive tone rather than in a negative tone. This is important for the City's brand as local governments are often perceived to be bureaucratic and a hindrance.

Incorrect: Residents should not place bulk rubbish on the verge before the specified date.

Correct: Residents can place bulk rubbish on the verge from the specified date.

Present tense over past tense

Wherever possible, avoid writing in the past tense as this weakens writing.

Incorrect: The City has reviewed its procedures and has made a number of changes.

Correct: Following a review of procedures a number of changes have been made.

U
V
W
X
Y
Z