RMIT University Writing Style Guide

Contents

Introduction

The RMIT Writing Style Guide provides guidelines for the preparation of content for all written communications, whether printed or digital.

Please use this guide as an easy-to-use reference and to help maintain a consistent and professional writing style across the University.

Developed in consultation with staff across the University, the Style Guide is based on major writing references as well as on accepted RMIT style.

If you have any queries or suggestions for amendment at any stage, please contact Pauline Charleston in RMIT Marketing: pauline.charleston@rmit.edu.au

Principles of Style

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Good writing should be:

Clear: Think about what you want to say, plan a logical structure, and write your message as clearly as possible. Use consistent headings, line spacing and formatting to help readers interpret the content easily and find information quickly within the document.

Relevant: Consider why you are writing (purpose), where your writing will appear (context) and who will read it (audience), and write in a tone that suits all three elements. Include only information that is relevant to your purpose.

Fresh: Avoid clichés and buzzwords (see Page 18), repetition and unexplained acronyms. Aim for strong writing with precise, meaningful words and sentences.

Accessible: Use meaningful, unpretentious language that readers will understand. Avoid using euphemisms (vague or meaningless expressions) and pompous phrases where there is a more concise and familiar way to convey your meaning (see Page 18). Use technical jargon only if it will be understood by your audience. For online content accessibility requirements, see the Web Accessibility Policy.

Readable: Write in language that is readable and natural. Aim to write the way you speak, and change any stilted or verbose wording into everyday language that could be spoken out loud. If in doubt, try reading it aloud to yourself or a colleague. Avoid writing long paragraphs of text. In most communications (especially online), text should be broken up into shorter chunks, using concise sentences and space to aid readability.

Concise: Choose short words and paragraphs where appropriate, cut out any details that aren't absolutely necessary, split content into meaningful sections, and use bullet points where appropriate.

Direct: Your tone could be formal, prosaic, procedural, conversational or punchy, as long as it is appropriate and is used consistently throughout the piece of writing. In student communications or advertising copy, replace references to "students" or "applicants" with "you" where relevant. This style of writing (second person rather than third person) is more conversational and is in line with RMIT's image as an accessible and open university. Contractions such as "we're" and "don't" are appropriate in informal communications.

Active: In most cases, use the active rather than the passive voice:

> Active: Ruth is preparing the letter.

> Passive: The letter is being prepared by Ruth.

Despite what online grammar checks might indicate, the passive voice is not incorrect and is sometimes appropriate. For example:

> They were refused entry to the event.

> The policy was drafted in April.

Both of these sentences are in passive voice and are perfectly acceptable. In the first case, it's not necessary or appropriate to name the person/s who refused entry. In the second case, the focus is on when the policy was drafted, not who drafted it.

Inclusive: Avoid gender-specific language by:

— using the plural instead of the third person ("he must", "she must"):
> Candidates must provide copies of the application to their referees.

> Copies of the application must be provided to referees.

— using the gender-neutral second person pronoun "you":
> You must provide a copy of the application to your referees.

— using "his/her":
> Every candidate must provide copies of the application to his or her referees.

Use gender-neutral nouns ("chair" or "chairperson" rather than "chairman", "actor" rather than "actress", etc.).

Be aware of any expressions or language which could exclude people on grounds of age, ethnicity or disability/ability level, and avoid highlighting factors like this about an individual unless necessary for a particular story.

When producing printed publications, take care to comply where appropriate with Vision Australia's guidelines to ensure that your content is legible and accessible to a broad audience. These guidelines set out minimum standards for font type and size, formatting, colour contrast and text layout.

Email Protocols

Email etiquette

When forwarding messages or adding a CC to replies, be aware this might be a breach of confidentiality as the sender might have intended that the message be read by you alone.

If you are sending an email to a large number of addressees, or to more than one student, use BCC so that the email addresses are not displayed to all recipients.

Avoid using IMPORTANT, URGENT and HIGH PRIORITY unless your message really is urgent, and limit the use of bold, italicised, underlined or coloured text to highlight information. If you overuse these options, they lose their impact when you need it most.

If you use ALL CAPS, it will appear that you are shouting (and the text will be harder to read).

Subject lines

Include a short and specific subject line. When forwarding or replying to emails, ensure that the subject line still accurately reflects the content. Limit each email to one subject.

Content

As with a letter, include one main idea in each short paragraph and leave blank lines between each paragraph. Questions or requests (action points) should appear early in the email, usually after a short initial paragraph.

Use "Hi …." if you know the recipient; otherwise use the standard greeting "Dear …" As a general rule, use the form of address that you would use in oral communication.

Use standard RMIT signatures that include the necessary details (title, school/unit name, building address, phone numbers etc). Do not include motivational quotes and the like.

People

Contact details

Publications and emails should always include a way for the reader to respond by telephone and email. Wherever possible, provide details in this standard format:

> Staff member's name
> Staff member's title
> School/unit name
> Portfolio/College name
> Address (building and street)
> Tel. +61 3 9925 XXXX
> Email address
> Web address

(For more details, see *Addresses*.)

The correct formats for telephone numbers are:

> Tel. +61 3 9925 2000
> Mob. 0482 000 111

Names and titles

Refer to the current <u>organisational chart</u> or use the "Find a staff member" field on the RMIT website to check the spelling, capitalisation and hyphenation of names, titles and school/unit names. Take care to use *exactly* as they appear. Examples:

> Pro Vice-Chancellor Business and Vice-President
> (*not* Pro Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President Business)

> School of Vocational Business Education
> (*not* Vocational Business School).

> Professor Cheung Wai Chun
> (hyphenated or not, depending on what's in the Staff Member listing)

Note that all VCE (Vice-Chancellor's Executive) members are Vice-Presidents of RMIT, *not* of their College or portfolio. Hence, the correct title is, for example, **Deputy Vice-Chancellor International and Vice-President**, *not* DVC and Vice-President International.

Use "Professor" or other senior titles, rather than "Dr".

In formal text (including publications and RMIT News) and external correspondence, the following rules apply:

— Individuals
full name at first mention (**Jack Smith**), then "Mr/Ms/Mrs" thereafter (**Mr Smith said**)

— Academics
full title and name at first mention (**Pro Vice-Chancellor Design and Social Context and Vice-President, Professor Paul Gough**), then title and name thereafter (**Professor Gough**). The abbreviations "Prof" or "Assoc" are never used.

— Vice-Chancellor
Vice-Chancellor, Martin Bean. Thereafter, **Martin Bean**, or **Martin**.

In signed letters, the name should be in standard text and the title should be in bold on the following line. Example:

Professor Gill Palmer
Vice-Chancellor and President

Occupations (e.g. accountant, program manager) should not be capitalised when used generally and not in reference to a specific person. However, individual titles and unit names are capitalised, e.g. Executive Director Human Resources; Academic Registrar's Group.

Qualifications (see also Academic, below)

The standard shortened form of program titles is used with a person's name, without full stops or other punctuation, e.g. **Chris Carter PhD Melb; Ho Mei Ling BSc(Hons) RMIT**.

Academic qualifications should be listed as follows:

— Lower degrees precede higher degrees
BEng, MEng RMIT

— All degrees from each institute are grouped
BBus, MBA RMIT, BSc Melb

— Associate diplomas are listed after degrees
BArch, AssocDipMaths RMIT

— Professional qualifications are listed after academic qualifications
BScQld, PhD Melb, ARACI

For more information, refer to <u>RMIT award abbreviations</u>.

Abbreviations for external institutions and awards should be consistent with the qualifications recognition data published by the Australian Education International and the Association of Commonwealth Universities.

Places
———

Addresses

Refer to the <u>campuses and maps webpage</u> to check the spelling, locations, building names and other information about RMIT's campuses, sites and partnership programs.

Include both the RMIT location and the real street address. Building names are written before building numbers:

Graduate School of Business and Law
RMIT University
Emily McPherson Building
Building 13, Level 1
379–405 Russell Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Use building names and addresses that will be recognisable externally:

Correct	Incorrect
Building 16, Level 7	Green Brain
Storey Hall Building 16, Level 5, 336 Swanston Street	Storey Hall

Internal mail addresses for RMIT locations are written in the format:

Building number.Level number.Room number (campus):
275.2.12 (Bundoora)
(i.e. Building 275, Level 2, Room 12 on Bundoora campus)

Note that specific buildings, levels and rooms always have an initial capital, e.g. **Storey Hall is in Building 16 on Level 5**.

Campuses

The word "campus" is not capitalised: **Melbourne City campus, Brunswick campus, Ho Chi Minh City campus, Hanoi campus**.

Note that there is only one Bundoora campus:

Correct	Incorrect
Bundoora campus east	Bundoora east campus
Bundoora campus west	Bundoora west campus

Some RMIT locations are known as sites, not campuses: **Hamilton site, Point Cook site**.

Colleges, Portfolios, Schools, Groups and Units

The complete name of organisational units has initial capitals. Use lower case when not referring to a particular unit:

College of Science, Engineering and Health

School of Applied Sciences

Forms should be lodged at your school

RMIT offers programs in 24 schools across three academic colleges

Marketing and Business Development Unit

Financial Services Group

All groups prepare annual workplans

Design Research Institute

RMIT has four research institutes

Our learning and teaching staff can help you …

Use lower case for "portfolio":
Engagement and Vocational Education portfolio

Universities

When referring specifically to RMIT, use an upper case "U". At other times, "university" or "universities" is not capitalised (unless as part of the name of a particular university):

RMIT University

RMIT is a global university of technology and design.

The University is committed to diversity (when referring to RMIT)

This is a problem for every university in Australia.

Curtin University

Use "RMIT University" at first mention and "RMIT" thereafter. ("Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology" is used only in financial statements and at other times required by legislation.)

Website References

For printed publications, format URLs in bold black text, without underlining.

Do not include "http://" unless there is no "www".

Correct	Incorrect
www.rmit.edu.au	http://www.rmit.edu.au/
http://nautilus.rmit.edu.au	nautilus.rmit.edu.au

For website references that are quoted in publications or correspondence, you can request a short and recognisable URL (such as www.rmit.edu.au/about/annual-reports) from RMIT Web Services and Information Policy.

Academic

Bibliographies, citations and references

Citations, references and bibliographies should follow the Referencing guidelines published by RMIT University Library.

Programs and courses

RMIT has academic "programs" and "courses", not courses and subjects. A program comprises several courses.

To name an award program, follow the standard format: Qualification (Specialisation). Take care to use the exact program title at all times.

Correct	Incorrect
Diploma of Languages	Diploma in Languages Languages Diploma
Master of Engineering (Electrical Engineering)	Master of Electrical Engineering
Certificate IV in Education Support	Certificate of Education Support

Note: **Master of** (*not* Masters of), **Certificate in** (*not* Certificate of), **Bachelor of** (*not* Bachelor in), **Diploma of** (*not* Diploma in).

To check the exact name of a particular program or course, refer to: www.rmit.edu.au/programs

Non-specific references to programs, courses, disciplines and qualification levels are not capitalised. Example:

> Students enrolled in a Bachelor of Engineering program can major in computer and network engineering. The University also offers a growing number of associate degree programs, including the Associate Degree in Design (Furniture).

Full program titles only are capitalsed. Examples:

> Bachelor of Applied Science

> The applied science degree

Semesters

Use the format "Semester Number Year":

Correct	Incorrect
Semester 1, 2015	Semester One, 2015 1st Semester 2015

Use lower case for "semester" in general text, and do not use "term": At the end of semester.

Numbers and Dates

Dates

Write dates as day, month and year with no comma:

Correct	Incorrect
17 August	the 17th of August
17 August 2013	17 August, 2013
Monday 1 August 2013	Monday, 1st August 2013
as at 30 June	as of 30 June

Include the name of the day when it is useful information, such as in invitations or advertised events. Otherwise omit.

Decades should be expressed as: the 1980s, the mid-1980s, the late 1980s. There is no apostrophe before the "s".

Centuries should be written in numerals: the 20th century (*not* the 20th century).

Dates in numerals

In a form or tables, use day/month/year: **7/12/2009** (07/12/2009 or 7/12/09 are also acceptable).

If there is potential for ambiguity with the sequence used in countries such as the US (month, day, year), dates should be spelt out in words.

Time

Use numerals for units of time, lower case, no spaces, no colons and no full stops (pm, not p.m.). Examples:

> 8pm, 7.30am

Use "noon" and "midnight" where "12am" or "12pm" could cause confusion.

Spans of dates, time and numbers

To link spans of dates, time or numbers, use a hyphen or an en dash without a space before or after. Whichever you choose, do it consistently within the one document, section of the website or series of publications.

You can also indicate spans by using "from" and "to", or "between" and "and". Do not use hyphens or en dashes in conjunction with these words.

Correct	Incorrect
2–6 June	2 - 6 June
held from 2 June to 21 June	held from 2-21 June
5–6pm	5–6 p.m.
7.00–9.30am	7.00 am – 9.30 am
between 2006 and 2012	between 2006–2012
Available in sizes 8–16	Available in sizes from 8-16
25–30 per cent	25 – 30 percent
1998–99	1998–9
1998–2006	1998–06
March to December	March through December

Numbers

Spell out numbers between one and nine. Use figures for 10 upwards (except at the start of a sentence), in percentages (see below) or in decimals (3.5). Use commas (not spaces) within all numbers beyond 10,000. Examples:

He has three cars.

There are 17 students in the class.

Thirty-five offers were made.

RMIT has 82,500 students.

Numbers higher than a million are written in words for numbers between one and nine: **four million** (except in the case of decimals – **4.5 million**), **23 million**.

Write numbers as numerals in a chart or table, or for:

— street numbers
23 Flinders Street
12/43 Goughs Lane or
Unit 12, 43 Goughs Lane

— measurements
16km

— pages, chapters or sections
Page 43, Chapters 4, 5 and 6

— dimensions
20 metres by 10.5 metres or
20.1x10.5m

Temperatures may be written as numerals (**32C**) or spelt out (**32 degrees**), but be consistent in your usage.

Use roman numerals for:

— Certificate qualifications
Certificate III, *not* Certificate 3

— World wars
World War I, II ("the First World War" is also acceptable)

Ordinal numbers should generally be written in full: **the third student**.

Where ordinal numbers are written in numerals, do not use superscript: **an 18th century sculpture** (*not* 18th)

For approximate numbers, use "almost", "nearly", "about" or "more than", or omit. For example:

China produces more than 200 million tonnes of fly ash a year.

RMIT Vietnam has 7000 students
(NB: "approximately" or precise numbers are often unnecessary).

Use "more than" rather than "over", and "less than" rather than "under".

In printed publications, avoid splitting numbers and words across two lines:

Incorrect: China and India produce more than 300 million tonnes of fly ash a year.

Percentages

Use "per cent" in written text, not "%", and write numbers in numerals (except at the start of a paragraph).

Examples:

Water levels were at 40 per cent.

Forty per cent of employees drive to work.

In forms or tables, numerals and the percentage symbol should be used. Keep decimal places to a minimum (65.7, not 65.6629), and be consistent.

Amounts and currencies

Money is written as follows:

$50

$50.00 (where mixed amounts appear, such as in tables)

$10.35

85 cents (in general text)

$1000

$100,000

$1 million

$1.26 million

Shortened Forms

Abbreviations and contractions

An abbreviation is a shortened form used in place of the whole word. Abbreviations usually end in a full stop, although the full stop can be omitted for commonly used abbreviations. Contractions are shortened forms in which the last letter of the original word is present. Contractions do not require a full stop.

Examples:

Abbreviations	Contractions
etc.	re
op.cit.	Dr
e.g.	Mr
co.	Cwlth
Vic.	Pty Ltd
The Hon. John Smith	dept

Abbreviations and contractions should be used only if they are well known or explained, and should be avoided in formal communications.

Foreign language abbreviations should be used only if the meaning cannot be expressed clearly in English, and should be italicised unless they are in common English usage (check the dictionary if unsure).

Acronyms and abbreviated forms

An acronym is a string of initial letters that are sometimes used as a word: Higher Education Loan Program – HELP (no full stops within acronyms).

If an acronym or abbreviated form is not widely recognised, the name should be spelt out in full.

If the full name is repeated in the same document or on the same webpage, the name should be spelt out in full on the first mention, and can then be followed by its acronym/abbreviated form in brackets: Singapore Institute of Management (SIM). For subsequent references, you can use only the acronym "SIM". Where there is no acceptable acronym, you should subsequently use "the Institute" or similar.

NB: Give the acronym/abbreviated form in brackets after the full version *only* if you intend to use it later.

If an acronym is widely recognised, or if an organisation is generally known by an acronym rather than by its full name, the acronym need not be spelt out.

Examples: HECS, NSW, CSIRO, ACTU, ANZAC.

Many acronyms are used widely in tertiary education or have meanings specific to the University itself – see www.rmit.edu.au/policies/glossary

Symbols

Ampersands (&) should not be used within text to replace "and", except as part of an abbreviation (e.g. L&T) or when part of a business or organisation name (e.g. Ernst & Young).

Punctuation

Apostrophes

See *Plurals and Apostrophes* below.

Exclamation marks

Exclamation marks (!) emphasise meaning or importance. They should be used sparingly or not at all.

Commas

A comma (,) marks the smallest break in a sentence. As a general rule, use commas to aid comprehension and clarity. Be aware that omission or misuse of commas can completely alter the meaning of a sentence.

Some examples of usage:

He bought a sandwich, an apple and a drink.
(no comma before final "and")

RMIT is committed to ensuring it has an inclusive and diverse student population, and to building education and training opportunities for disadvantaged urban populations. (comma before "and" to aid clarity)

a full course load, e.g. six subjects (also for i.e.)

includes paper and writing materials etc.
(no comma before "etc.")

In 2001, 3.2 million people voted …
(comma after the year if the date is followed by numbers)

The forum was held in Bundoora, Victoria, on 6 March.
(pair of commas required)

In the meantime, despite the continuing discussions, disaster was becoming inevitable.
(pair of commas required)

Ziggy Switkowski AO
(no comma required before "AO")

Prime Minister Tony Abbott spoke at the launch.
(no comma required before and after name).
However, commas are required here:
Professor David Adams, Director of the Health Innovations Research Institute, spoke at the launch.

Semicolons

A semicolon (;) provides a stronger break than that provided by a comma, and a weaker break than that created by a full stop. It can be used to connect two clauses that could be treated as separate sentences but have a close logical link. Example:

> To be rich and not complain is easy; to be poor and not complain is much more difficult.

Semicolons can also be used to break up long sentences, or to separate items in a series or list within a sentence. Examples:

> Factors contributing to reduced student numbers have included the strong Australian dollar; tough student visa regulations; increased competition from the US, UK and other study destinations; uncertainty in global financial markets; and negative publicity in the international media with the collapse of private colleges.

> The interest of students and their families in an RMIT education has never been higher; our alumni are making their mark; our facilities have improved; our finances are healthy; and our character and reputation are well defined and respected.

When writing a paragraph such as the above, note that a semicolon is required before the final item in the list, followed by "and".

Note that it's usually better to write shorter sentences, rather than long paragraphs broken up by semicolons.

Semicolons should not be used at the end of dot points (see *Bulleted and Numbered Lists*, below).

Colons

A colon (:) is a marker of relationship and sequence. It can be used to introduce explanatory detail, or to link a title with its subtitle. Examples:

> There was only one word for it: catastrophic.

> We were concerned: the key speaker had been delayed and the next speaker could not be located.

> *Learning Communities: An Indigenous Partnership Model*

> Three areas were represented: Finance, Human Resources and IT.

The colon can also introduce further information or a bulleted list (see *Bulleted and Numbered Lists*, below). Examples:

> Prerequisites: Nil (no full stop)

> Project themes include:
> — …
> — …

When a series of items flows naturally within a sentence, a colon or semicolon is not needed:

> A number of species are at risk, including those that reproduce slowly and those at the edge of their optimal range.

En dash

Use an en dash (–) within text, with a space either side, to signify an abrupt change, to introduce an explanation or to set apart parenthetic elements within a sentence. (An em dash (—) is rarely used.)

Examples:

> I didn't realise you were born overseas – but I digress.

> It's not just encouraged – it's expected.

> Albert Einstein authored a number of scientific theories – the Theory of Relativity being the most famous – which changed our perceptions of the world.

You can insert an en dash by typing Ctrl– on a numeric keyboard or Alt– on a Mac keyboard.

En dashes are also used to mean "to" in spans of numbers and time (see *Spans of date, time and numbers* above) and in expressions such as "Sydney–Melbourne train line". They can also indicate an association between words, e.g. "cost–benefit ratios". In all of these cases, the en dash is unspaced.

Dashes are used widely in casual communications such as emails, but should be avoided in formal text or published writing (print or online).

Brackets (parentheses)

Brackets ( ) can enclose definitions, comments or extra information in a similar way to commas and en dashes. If a complete sentence is enclosed within brackets, the full stop should be within the brackets, e.g.

> (This applies to all commencing students.)

Brackets can interrupt the reading experience so should be avoided.

Ellipses

Use ellipses (…) for omitted text with a space either side. Example:

> "Money affords choices … in lifestyle," she said.

Forward slash

A slash (/), also known as an oblique or solidus, is used to indicate alternatives. Examples:

> Bachelor of Engineering/Diploma in Engineering
>
> yes/no
>
> male/female

Note that there is no space on either side of a slash.

Do not use a slash to replace "or" in general text.

Hyphenation

The general rules are:

— Hyphenate compound adjectives:
long-term plan, first-year student, half-hour meeting, four-year-old girl, well-known organisation, full-time work, government-owned facility, disability-related requirements, heritage-listed building, 230-seat lecture theatre, cutting-edge design (see *Preferred Spelling*s below for more examples)

When the expression does not form a compound adjective, no hyphen is used:
a plan for the long term; the first year of the course; she is four years old; this doctor is well known within the community; at the cutting edge of technology

— Compounds comprising adverbs (words that describe the verb, often ending in "ly") are not hyphenated:
highly qualified applicant, finely honed argument, newly renovated premises

Use hyphens:

— For some compound nouns:
Vice-Chancellor, make-up. Note that words such as these are not hyphenated: postdisciplinary, radioactive, macroeconomics. See *Preferred Spellings and Terminology* below, or consult the Macquarie Dictionary.

— After a prefix to distinguish from well-known words:
resigned, re-signed

— To separate identical letters or two vowel sounds:
re-evaluation, anti-aircraft. Exceptions are "cooperation" and "coordination" which are no longer hyphenated.

— For points of the compass:
north-east

— In prefixes followed by a capital letter:
pre-Christian era

— With "co" ("joint") and "ex" ("former"):
co-tenant; ex-president

See *Preferred Spellings* for more examples.

Avoid word breaks and automatic hyphenation in all printed text.

Quotations

Use double quotation marks for quoted speech, except in headings and in quotes within quotes which take single quotation marks. Example:

> "When people ask 'Is this important?', I tell them it's vital," he said.

Use double quotation marks for quoted words:

> He described the new technique as "a winner".

Spacing

In web writing and publications, add only one space after a full stop, colon or semicolon. In emails, Word documents and other communications, spacing between sentences is optional (two spaces are acceptable).

Plurals and Apostrophes

Plural nouns

In most cases, the plural form of nouns is formed by adding "s" at the end of the singular form of the noun. Example:

1 photo
2 photos

Plurals are never formed by using apostrophes (i.e. by adding " 's ").

Some nouns require "es" for a plural, and some nouns have a plural form that does not take an "s", but an apostrophe is never used.

Examples – plural nouns:

managers, pizzas, children, women, lunches, princesses, potatoes, campuses, PhDs, FAQs, Pro Vice-Chancellors, the Smiths (i.e. family), 1990s, "a"s (i.e. the letter "a" in plural)

Note that "s" without an apostrophe is added to a noun *only for a plural*. An "s" is never added to a noun to indicate possession *without an apostrophe also being added*.

Possessive nouns

Apostrophes are added to indicate the possessive case, i.e. to show "ownership". The placement of the apostrophe depends on whether the noun is singular (one person or entity) or plural (multiple persons or entities), and whether the noun already ends in "s".

For singular nouns, insert the apostrophe before an "s" at the end of the word:

— 's:
John's car, the child's shoes, NTEU's policies, the student's essays, one week's salary, this year's trends

This also applies to singular nouns ending in "s", and to plural nouns that do not end in "s",

— 's:
the lens's range, children's shoes, men's clothing, the people's choice

For **plural** nouns that end in "s", insert the apostrophe after the "s":

— s':
the MPs' speeches (referring to speeches given by multiple MPs), the students' essays (referring to multiple students), previous years' results, two weeks' leave, the Smiths' house

For personal names ending in "s", the best rule is to add " 's " or put the apostrophe after the final "s" according to the way you would say it:
Sir Robert Menzies' speeches, Mark Jones's car.

Contractions

Apostrophes are added to show that letters have been omitted in combined word forms. Examples:

she's (she is), we're (we are), you'll (you will), it's (it is), you're (you are), who's (who is), isn't (is not), can't (can not), don't (do not), Andrew's gone out to lunch (Andrew has ...).

Summary

Apostrophes are added for possession and contractions, and not for any other reason (never for plural nouns or verbs). Remember:

> **Apostrophes for possession and contraction, no apostrophe for plurals or verbs.**

Its, it's, and other commonly confused words

— "Its" is a possessive pronoun:
A mind of its own.

— "It's" is a contraction of "it is":
It's nearly time to go

The correct use is: **It's time the dog went out for its walk.**

— "Your", "whose" and "their" are possessive pronouns:
your iPhone, Whose pen is this?, their car.

— "You're" is a contraction of "you are":
You're not the one to blame.

— "Who's" is a contraction of "who is" or "who has":
Who's going to volunteer?

— "They're" is a contraction of "they are":
They're in a meeting.

— "There" is an adverb meaning "in that place":
Look over there!

— "Yours", "hers" and "his" are possessive pronouns:
Yours sincerely. It's my word against hers.

Capitalisation

As a general rule, initial capitals are used to distinguish the particular from the general.

Particular	General
I saw Professor Jane Smith	I saw one of the professors
School of Accounting	RMIT has 24 schools across three colleges
The University is the biggest provider of offshore programs	RMIT is a global university of technology and design
The Victorian Government's policy …	It's up to the state governments to decide
Swanston Academic Building	The building is in Bowen Street
She is a Fellow of the Royal Society	How many honorary fellows are there at RMIT?
See Page 6 for further details	It is on the first page
As discussed in Chapter 10	There are six chapters in the book
The meeting is in Courtroom 2	We will need to book one of the courtrooms
In Semester 1 we will study …	Next semester we will study …

In headings, it is important to choose a style for capitalisation and apply it consistently throughout the one document.

Minimal capitalisation

With minimal capitalisation, an initial capital is used only for the first word and any proper names. This style applies to the headings of articles and to RMIT News stories. Example:

Marketing students receive Australia Post internships

Minimal capitalisation is often used in headings (such as on the RMIT website), and is used for the names of RMIT forms and policies:

Latest news

Key industry sectors

Application for leave of absence

Equitable assessment arrangements policy

Maximal capitalisation

With maximal capitalisation, every word is capitalised except articles ("the", "an" etc.), prepositions and conjunctions. This convention generally applies to the titles of books, songs, films, events and publications, and is also often used in headings. Examples:

War and Peace

The Devil Wears Prada

People and the Planet: Transforming the Future

Health, Safety and Wellbeing

If unsure which style to use for headings in a particular document or publication, refer to the current RMIT Brand guidelines or choose a style and apply it consistently throughout.

Formatting

Group paragraphs under headings so that readers can find what they need easily. Aim for consistency in heading hierarchy, paragraph and text formatting, document spacing and word treatment.

Italics are used for the titles of books, publications, reports, RMIT forms and policies, events, songs, films etc. Example:

She has had 10 years' experience at *The Australian Financial Review*.

Do you know the words to *Advance Australia Fair*?

Italics are also used for foreign words and for some technical terms or phrases. (Do not use foreign words unless there is no suitable word in English.)

Bold should be used sparingly. It makes the text harder to read, and if it is used repeatedly, nothing stands out.

Avoid use of underlining for any reason.

ALL CAPITALS should not be used in paragraphs and should only be used in titles when this is the correct style.

Bulleted and Numbered Lists

Bulleted lists consist of a series of bullet (or dot) points or numbered items. They can be easier to read than a block of text and can help the reader digest complex or important information quickly. In print, be careful not to overuse this device or to have very long lists of bullet points (generally there should be no more than 10 items in a list).

Each series of bullet points should have an introduction – usually a short sentence ending in a colon.

There are two types of bulleted lists:

Type 1: The series begins with a sentence fragment, from which the dot points flow to form one complete sentence. Each dot point starts in lower case (as they are part of a sentence). No comma, semi-colon or other punctuation is necessary at the end of each dot point (including the final dot point). There is no need to add "and" at the end of the second last bullet point unless it's essential to avoid ambiguity between "and" and "or" (such as in legalistic writing). Example:

> The survey concluded that people living in Brunswick are:
> — environmentally conscious
> — creative
> — intelligent

Type 2: Each dot point forms a complete sentence or paragraph. In this case, the bullet points start with a capital letter and end with a full stop. Individual points can include two complete sentences (but lengthy text in bulleted lists should be avoided). Example:

> The following factors emerged from the study:
> — Many people in Melbourne wear black clothes in winter.
> — Melburnians are more likely to travel abroad than people from Sydney. However, they are less likely to travel interstate.
> — The cost of buying a house in Victoria is 30 per cent less than in NSW on average.

The meaning in each of the items should follow logically from its opening sentence or sentence fragment, and the opening of each dot point should be in a parallel format (i.e. have the same grammatical structure). Punctuation and capitalisation need to be consistent throughout the listing.

Example:

> I was responsible for:
> — preparing new project presentations
> — processing orders
> — evaluating financial performance against budget
> — managing the approvals process within required timeframes
> — liaising with suppliers
> — supervising six staff members

The following example is *not* in parallel format so is grammatically incorrect:

> Importance of effective recruitment strategies:
> — Knowing your audience
> — Discover RMIT stats and facts
> — Awareness of code of conduct when representing RMIT
> — Gain a better understanding of the current services, types of activities and events attended

Use numbered lists only where the order of content is important, or where individual points need to be identified for later reference. Use nested lists if necessary to define a particular point in a series.

Resources

Dictionaries and style guides

— *Macquarie Dictionary*

— *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers, 6th edition*

RMIT

— Brand (visual identity) policy
www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=uhkn3tlskhrvz

— Web Presence (web policy suite including accessibility, content and social media)
www.rmit.edu.au/policies/webpresence

— Glossary of terms
www.rmit.edu.au/policies/glossary

— Library referencing guides (2006)
www.rmit.edu.au/library/referencing-guides

— Academic and Research policies and procedures (including award abbreviations, copyright, plagiarism and research practice
www.rmit.edu.au/policies/academic

— Management and Organisation policies and procedures (including document records management, compliance and surveys)
www.rmit.edu.au/policies/management

— Fairness and Values policies and procedures
www.rmit.edu.au/policies/fairness

— Ngarara Willim Centre (including advice on Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country)
www.rmit.edu.au/ngarara

— Telephone and voicemail information
www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=pibcg1p2ub

Words and Phrases – Common Problems

advice/ advise	"Advice" – noun: The advice she gave proved useful. "Advise" – verb: I advised him to wait until after the holidays. Tip: "Ice" is a noun so "advice" is also a noun. "Is" is a verb so "advise" is a verb. The same rule applies to licence/license and practice/practise.
affect/ effect	"Affect" is a verb meaning to influence or to produce an effect: The screen resolution affects the appearance of graphics. "Effect" is usually a noun meaning result or consequence: His efforts had little effect on the outcome. "To effect" can also be used as a verb meaning to bring about, to accomplish: The government effected great changes during its term.
alternate/ alternative	"Alternate" means "every second": You can water your garden on alternate days. "Alternative" means "other" (a choice of two): Take an alternative route.
among/ between	"Between" indicates a choice from two options. Use "among" when there are more than two options. (Use "among" rather than "amongst".)
below	"Below" is not an adjective. Use "following" instead: We offer the following options: (*not* "below options")
censor/ censure	"Censor" as a verb means to suppress or ban. "Censure" means to criticise or rebuke.
compliment/ complement	"Compliment" is a verb or noun meaning to praise. "Complement" is a verb or noun meaning to balance or supplement.

complimentary/ complementary	"Complimentary" means praising or free of charge. "Complementary" means corresponding or matching (e.g. complementary DNA).
comprises	The correct usage is: The house comprises five main rooms. (NOT: The house is comprised of ...") Or: The Soviet Union comprised several socialist republics. (NOT: The Soviet Union was comprised of…) Alternatively, use "contains", "consists of" or "includes".
continual/ continuous	"Continual" means over and over again. "Continuous" means uninterrupted.
council/ counsel	A council is a body of people. "Counsel" means "advise" (verb), "advice" (noun) or a barrister.
councillor/ counsellor	A councillor is a person on a council. A counsellor is one who provides advice.
dependent/ dependant	"Dependent" is an adjective meaning reliant. "Dependant" is a noun meaning one who relies on another for financial support.
discreet/ discrete	"Discreet" means prudent or diplomatic. "Discrete" means distinct or individual.
disinterested/ uninterested	"Disinterested" means neutral or with no vested interest: We should let a disinterested party decide. "Uninterested" means lacking in interest: He was uninterested in her hobbies.
enquire/ inquire	Use "enquire" for asking for information etc, and "inquire" and "inquiry" for more formal investigations: She enquired about her final results. The Royal Commission will conduct an inquiry into police corruption.
exemplar	Do not use unless you mean "model" or "typical instance". Otherwise use "example".

historic/ historical	"Historic" means historically important or influential: Areas of architectural or historic interest should be preserved. We were there during the President's historic visit to Vietnam. "Historical" means relating to the past or to history: The painting depicts an historical event. Most people's historical perspective begins with the day of their birth.
impact	"Impact" is a noun meaning "effect" or "influence": Hurricane Sandy had a huge impact on the New York City subway system. It is also an intransitive verb meaning to strike. Note that "It could impact our way of life" is grammatically incorrect. It's better to use "affect", influence" or "have an impact on". Examples of correct usage: The new laws could affect our way of life. That has influenced our way of thinking. Can the physical environment have an impact on learning outcomes?
imply/infer	"Imply" means to suggest indirectly or to insinuate. "Infer" means to draw a conclusion.
innovate	"Innovate" is an intransitive verb meaning to be inventive or to bring in new methods/ideas: We must continually innovate to meet our customers' evolving needs. "He innovates products" is grammatically incorrect.
less/fewer	Use "less" for general quantities and "fewer" for specific quantities: Less sugar, fewer sugar lumps.
licence/license	"Licence" – noun: Victorian driving licence: "License" – verb: He is licensed to drive a commercial vehicle.

loose/lose	"Loose" is an adjective meaning slack or unfastened. "Lose" is a verb meaning to misplace or be defeated.
method/ methodology	"Method" means a procedure or way of doing something. "Methodology" refers to the theory behind the choice of methods – not the method itself.
practice/ practise	"Practice" – noun, "practise" – verb: He began practising as a doctor last year and has already built up a large practice.
prescribe/ proscribe	"Prescribe" means to recommend or authorise. "Proscribe" means to forbid (almost the opposite of prescribe).
principal/ principle	"Principal" means the head of a school or a capital sum. "Principle" means a rule or standard: The principal outlined the school's ethical principles.
select/selected	"Select" as an adjective means exclusive/ elite/specially chosen: A select few were invited to the event. "Selected" as an adjective means chosen/ approved, without any sense of privilege: Selected students will be notified. It is available in selected stores.
stationary/ stationery	"Stationary" means not moving, still. "Stationery" is a noun meaning writing materials etc. Tip: Stationers sell stationery (or "e" for envelope)
that/which/who	Use "who" when referring to people (not "that"): The person who designed the building deserves a special mention. Use "that" if what comes after it defines the noun. Use "which" when what comes after it is incidental: Elective courses that introduce project management can be studied over the summer. Elective courses, which are offered over summer, include project management and project analysis.

Expressions

Take care to ensure you are using the correct expression, e.g.

toe the line (NOT tow)
crux of the issue (NOT crust)
champing at the bit (NOT chomping)
rein in/free rein (NOT reign in/free reign)
too much to bear (NOT too much to bare)
pore over the textbooks (NOT pour)
much sought-after comic book (NOT sort after)
augurs well for (NOT argues or all goes)

Consult a dictionary if in doubt.

Word Usage

Incorrectly used word	Replace with
irregardless	regardless
agreeance	agreement
problematical	problematic
impactful	influential, effective, dynamic
acclimate	acclimatise
overexaggerate	exaggerate
socialise (a document)	circulate, release, disseminate, distribute, publish
transition (verb)	move, transfer, switch, change
leverage (verb)	use, draw on, exploit, utilise, promote
evidence (verb)	show, prove
try and	try to
the reason why	why

Cliches, buzzwords and overused words*	Try instead
roll out	introduce, release, launch
predominant	main
iconic	famous, celebrated
utilisation	use
linkages	links, partnerships

Cliches, buzzwords and overused words*	Try instead
enabler	catalyst, mechanism, instigator, priority
drill down	investigate, look into
synergy	relationship, cooperation, energy, effectiveness
robust	healthy, strong, vigorous
real-world problem	business problem, practical issue
innovative	creative, advanced, inventive
be in bed with	deal, liaise, cooperate, collaborate (with)
partner (verb)	collaborate, liaise, be in partnership
state-of-the-art	latest
cutting-edge	leading
flagship	core, leading
look and feel	appearance, usability, functionality
key learnings	lessons learned
dialogue	discussion
conversation	discussion, interaction
townhall meeting	meeting, briefing, forum
conceptualise	design, conceive, imagine, invent
contextualise	place in context, make relevant
orientate	adjust, position, locate, place
resonate with	appeal to, be relevant to
overarching	comprehensive, important
paradigm	model, formula, way of thinking
paradigm shift	fundamental change
capability	capacity, competence, resources
disseminate	circulate, distribute, broadcast, spread
window of opportunity	opportunity
going forward/ moving forward	often redundant and can be omitted

Note that some of these words are OK if they're used for the right reasons and are not overused.

Archaisms	Replace with
heretofore	before now
hereunder	below
shall	will
whilst	while
telephony	telephone

Verbose phrases	Try instead
the vast majority of	most
a number of	some, several
a variety of	many, different
a wide range of	many, different
at regular intervals	regularly
on a weekly basis	weekly
on a regular basis	regularly
during the course of	during
for the purpose of	for, to
for the reason that	because
give due consideration to	consider
in many cases	often
make every effort to	try to
prior to	before

Verbose phrases	Try instead
currently	now
at this point in time	at present, now
located in	in
located at	at
was of the opinion	thought, believed
do not hesitate to	please
in order that	so that
at the end of the day	finally, in the end
in view of the fact that	because, as
without a shadow of doubt	definitely
collaborative partnership	partnership
strategic alliance	partnership
absolutely essential	essential
completely destroyed	destroyed
absolutely unique	unique
successfully passed	passed
actively engaged	engaged
future plans	plans
new acquisition	acquisition
linked together	linked

Preferred Spellings and Terminology

Use English or Australian spelling, not US:
colour (*not* color), **honour** (*not* honor),
neighbour (*not* neighbor), **organise** (*not* organize),
organisation (*not* organization), **centre** (*not* center),
enrol (*not* enroll), **cancelled** (*not* canceled).

NB: These are examples – the same rule applies to all similar words, e.g. globalisation, standardise, flavour etc.

However, retain actual spellings in organisation names, book titles etc.: World Health Organization, US Center of Military History, *The Color of Money*, UN Global Compact Cities Programme.

Do not rely on Spellcheck! Many words have the same spelling but different meanings, and Spellcheck defaults to US spelling. (You can change the default in Google and MS Word to English (UK) to avoid American spellings being selected.)

A

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (not ATSI)

Aborigines – noun, u.c. when referring to Australian, lower case when referring to the aborigines (original inhabitants) of a country.

Aboriginal – adjective, u.c. when referring to Australian

accessible toilet (or disability access toilet) – not disabled toilet or ambulant toilet

advisor

advisory

ageing

air conditioning

alumni – plural

alumnus – singular (do not use alum, alumna or alumnae)

an RMIT student

Asia-Pacific region

audiovisual technology

Australian Government (not Federal Government)

B

benchmark

benefited

budgeted, budgeting

C

cafe

CD-ROM

checklist

convenor (not convener)

cooperate, cooperative

coordinate, coordination, coordinator

co-requisite

counterproductive

coursework

co-worker

criterion (plural – criteria)

cross-cultural

cross-disciplinary

curriculum vitae, CV

cut-off date

D

data (plural and singular – not datum)

database

daytime

day-to-day activities

decision-makers

deregulation

desktop

disk

domestic student (not, local student)

downturn

drop-in lab

dual sector university

E

Eastern religions (cap on "Eastern")

ecosystem

e-book, e-commerce, e-learning, e-resources

e.g. or eg – not eg. (be consistent)

electrotechnology

email

end-user

enrol, enrolment, enrolled, enrolling

entry-level English

everyday (as an adjective, otherwise two words)

F

facade (not façade)

face-to-face teaching

fee-based membership

fee-for-service basis

FEE-HELP

feedback

first-hand knowledge

Flickr

flyer (meaning brochure – not flier)

focused, focusing

focuses (plural – not foci)

formula (plural: formulas, except use "formulae" if referring to sets of scientific symbols)

form (not proforma/pro forma)

forum (plural – forums)

fulfil, fulfilment, fulfilled, fulfilling

full-time and part-time students

G

go-live date (but "will go live …")

Grade Point Average

ground-level office (adjective)

guidelines

Graduation Ceremony (then "the ceremony")

H

handbook

hand-delivered

HECS-HELP

helpdesk (but IT Service Desk)

Higher Degree by Research

Higher Education (noun)

higher education sector (adjective)

high-quality provider

high-profile building

homepage

hotline

I

i.e. or ie – not ie. (be consistent)

in-depth (adjective – in-depth examination)

indigenous

Info Corner (not "the Info Corner")

information-literate students

in-house

intake

interdepartmental

interdisciplinary

internet, intranet

IT Service Desk

iTunes U

J-K

judgement

kilometre, km

Koori

L

labour (but Australian Labor Party)

large-scale renovation

La Trobe Street

La Trobe University (but Latrobe Valley, Victoria)

learning and teaching – not, teaching and learning (capitalised as "Learning and Teaching" for specific organisational names and position titles only)

Library – use RMIT University Library, then "the Library"

lifelong learning

lifespan

life skills

LinkedIn

login – noun/adjective ("login details")

log in – verb ("you can log in via your smartphone")

low-energy lighting (adjective)

low-income families (adjective)

M

mailbox

Management (capitalised in a specific reference "the policy was approved by Management in June"), otherwise l.c.

masters degree (general reference)

megabyte, MB

Melbourne City campus

memorandum (plural: memoranda)

microeconomics

mid-air

midday

mid-July etc.

mid-semester

mid-year

mobility-impaired

MOU (Memorandum of Understanding – not MoU)

Ms, Mrs – no full stop
(use Mrs or Miss only in the case of individual preference)

multidisciplinary

multifunctional, multipurpose

multimedia

multiskilling, multiskilled

myRMIT

N

nanotechnology

nano-materials

National Parks

the Netherlands (lower case "the")

night-time (but, daytime)

non-compliance

non-existent, non-existence

non-profit organisation

non-verbal communication

no one

O

-odd (150-odd guests)

off-campus (see on-campus, below)

offshore

offsite

OHS (not OH&S)

on-campus – adjective (on-campus housing). Otherwise "she works on campus"

online

onshore

onsite

OS-HELP

over-emphasise

P

Page 1 (capitalise first letter), or p1

Pages 3–26

paper-based enrolment

paraprofessional

part-time

passers-by

per cent

person with a disability (not disabled person)

phenomenon (plural: phenomena)

the Philippines (lower case "the")

postdoctoral

postgraduate

pre-clinical

pre-departure

pre-empt

pre-eminent

prerequisite

preselection

proactive

Pro Vice-Chancellor

program (not programme – for all audiences, domestic and international)

pro rata

Q–R

re-allocate

redevelop

re-enrol

re-establish

re-evaluate

re-issue

renegotiate

reorganise

re-sit

resumé (to avoid confusion with "resume")

S

school-based

sizeable

short-term funding

smartphone

socioeconomic

state-of-the-art facilities

Strategic Plan
(RMIT Strategic Plan: Transforming the Future)

stand-alone course

stimulus (plural: stimuli)

student-advising staff

student-centred learning

student number (not student ID)

syllabuses (not syllabi)

T

teammate

teamwork

term – use semester instead

textbook

thesis (plural: theses)

timeframe, timeline, timescale, timetable

totalled, totalling

transdisciplinary

transferable

transnational

travellers cheques

T-shirt

tweet, Twitter

U

undergraduate

upgrade

up-to-date (adjective – but, "keep up to date with the latest …")

usable

the US (no full stops and not "the USA")

University (when referring to RMIT)

V

VET FEE-HELP

value-added benefits

Vice-Chancellor

Vice-President

Victorian Government (not State Government)

Vocational Education (noun) – do not abbreviate to VE

vocational education sector (adjective)

W

web-based directory

webpage (individual page)

website (overall site)

wellbeing

the western region of Melbourne

Western society (u.c. on "Western")

WiFi

workforce

work-based learning, industry-based learning

work-integrated learning

workplan

workplace

world-class institution

worldwide (adjective)

World War I, World War II (roman numerals)

workplan

X–Z

Yahoo!

Year 11, Year 12 (capitalise first letter)

year-long

YouTube

20-year career, 24-hour access, 128-year history