

Style,  
Vocabulary  
and  
Grammar  
Guide



## RSPCA style

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# 10 commandments of writing

1. Think about the reader's experience with your material. Empathy helps enhance understanding.
2. Take time to structure your message properly to ensure a logical flow and avoid repetition.
3. Don't try to impress the reader. Short words are better than long words. The reader will be more easily impressed if the item is short and to the point. It often helps if you imagine you are speaking directly to the person.
4. Paragraphs are a unit of thought. One subject to one paragraph. Long paragraphs turn readers off.
5. Adjectives are to be used to specify something (e.g., the friendly dog). Extra words sometimes simply add length, not meaning.
6. If you're in need of inspiration, looking at recent posters, newsletters, etc., will help.
7. Keep verb constructions simple. So don't use the passive where you can use the active and try to limit the use of continuous tense verbs (-ing).
8. Avoid trendy words. Times change, and you may be the only one who thinks they are cool.
9. Read your writing out loud. If you stumble when reading a phrase or sentence, your reader will also stumble.
10. To ensure consistency, please refer to – and continue to update – the RSPCA NSW Vocabulary and Grammar Guide. This is intended to be a growing point of reference, so please add any words to the Vocabulary section you feel are used frequently but can be used variably in order to establish consistency. When in doubt, try Grammar Girl. She's incredible (and don't be put off by the suggestive sounding link): [quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl](http://quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl)

## Adoptapet

Remember the main aim of this copy is to get someone to contact you about the animal, not to describe every aspect of their personality. Try to limit your copy to five facts:

1. Breed
2. Age
3. Sex
4. Personality
5. Suitable owner



# Numbered steps

**1.** Introduce numbered steps with a clear heading and a colon (not a semicolon or a colon plus a dash).

**2.** Number steps as follows:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**3.** Start steps with a capital letter, use full sentences (or infinitive sentences), and use a full stop.

**4.** Do NOT use semicolons at the end of numbered steps to separate one line from the next.

**5.** Keep steps easy to follow and in a logical order.

*How to make your Guardian Angel Animal Wish:*

1. Write your name or your family's name in the 'from' section.
2. Write your special wish or message of hope in the space provided.
3. Pop out your Animal Wish.
4. Return it to the RSPCA with your Christmas donation in the envelope provided.

# Lists

**1.** Introduce all list items with a **colon** (not a semicolon or a colon plus a dash). If the list items are comprised of single words, sentence fragments or complete sentences, introduce them with a **capital letter**. However, if the list items complete the heading, then do NOT use a capital letter.

*Primary tasks:*

- *Assisting with grooming*
- *Preparing feeds*

*Please contact your local council if:*

- *your pet is lost*
- *a barking dog is annoying you*

**2.** If the list items are single words or sentence fragments (even if they complete the heading), do NOT use a full stop.

*Terms and Conditions:*

- *No rainchecks*

*Please contact your local council concerning:*

- *lost pets*
- *a barking dog which is annoying you*

**3.** If the list item is a **complete sentence** in itself or is a sentence fragment followed by a complete sentence, use a full stop.

*Times when you should contact your local council:*

- *You have lost your pet.*
- *A barking dog is annoying you.*

*Terms and Conditions:*

- *No holds. We're not able to arrange adoptions over the phone.*

**4.** Do NOT use semicolons at the end of list items to separate one line from the next.

**5.** For lists online e.g., blog posts, use the **bullet** or a **pawprint** to introduce list items, NOT a hyphen or dash.

**6.** Try to give all of the items in a list the **same structure** when possible e.g., all comprised of sentence fragments, NOT a mixture of single words, sentence fragments and full sentences.

**7.** If you use multiple lists in one document, newsletter, poster, etc., try to use the same style of list e.g., all list items completing the heading or all sentence fragments.

**8.** List items in copy should be **alphabetised**.



# Recipes

1. Ingredients should be given in order of use.
2. All numbers in the list of ingredients should be given as **NUMERALS** not words, including numbers under 10 e.g., 2 cups, 3-4 medium bananas NOTE no space between 3-4.
3. Measurements should be given in teaspoons, tablespoons, millilitres and cups in words, not abbreviations except where space makes it impossible. In this case, they are abbreviated as follows (without capital letters or full stops):
  - teaspoons = tbsps*
  - tablespoons = tsp*
  - millimetres = ml*
  - cups = cups (it's already short enough)*
4. The list of ingredients should NOT contain full stops.
5. Temperature should be given in °C e.g., 200°C (no space).
6. 12-cup cupcake tray (hyphen)
7. Style is:  $\frac{3}{4}$  NOT 3/4. Exceptions can be made when the font does not contain this text.
8. Percentages given as: 70% cacao NOT 70 per cent
9. Numbers under (but not including) 10 in copy are given in WORDS not numerals.
10. preheat NOT pre-heat
11. pupcakes

# Surveys

1. Questions are numbered as follows. Note the single space after the numeral:
  1. *Do you have any pets?*
  2. *Are you interested in fostering an animal?*
2. Suggested answers should begin with a **capital letter**, even if they are only composed of one word or are sentence fragments. However, if the suggested answers complete the question, do NOT use a capital letter.
3. If the suggested answers are single words, sentence fragments or complete the question, do NOT use a full stop.
  6. *How old is your child?*
    - Five*
    - Six*
    - Seven*
4. If the suggested answer is a complete sentence, or is a sentence fragment followed by a complete sentence, use a full stop.
  9. *Tick any that apply to you:*
    - I'm interested in adopting an animal.*
    - I'd like to find out more about fostering.*
5. No semicolons to be used at the end of suggested answers to separate one line from the next.
  10. *What do you and your child know about the RSPCA?*
    - How they rescue animals. However, we'd like to find out more.*
    - How they get their funding*
6. In a question, numbers under 10 appear as words not numerals. So the phrase would be written as: 'On a scale of one to 10...' NOT: 'On a scale of 1 to 10...' However, the gauge is given in NUMERALS, not as words:
  12. *On a scale of one to five, how important is this to you?*
    - 1 2 3 4 5
7. Try to give all of the suggested items for each question the same structure whenever possible e.g., all comprised of sentence fragments, NOT a mixture of single words, sentence fragments and full sentences.



# General rules

1. Use Australian spelling and vocabulary.
  2. **-our** endings NOT **-or** endings e.g., favour, colour NOTE: the Australian Labor Party
  3. **-re** endings NOT **-er** endings e.g., centre, theatre
  4. Generally, **-ise** endings are used NOT **-ize**.
  5. Generally, double consonant constructions are used e.g., cancelled NOT canceled.
  6. Note that phrasal verbs (a verb followed by an adverb, a preposition or a combination of both e.g., pick up) do not generally use hyphens.
  7. Note the use of hyphens before and after the noun. For more information, see Hyphens section.
    - *Do you have any pet-related questions? (hyphenated as appears before the noun)*
  - *Are your questions pet related? (NOT hyphenated as appears after the noun)*
- However, if there is a compound adjective (i.e., more than one word) before a noun and the first word ends in **-ly**, you don't need a hyphen.
- *The rabbit required around-the-clock support.*
  - *We have specially designed programs to assist the community.*

8. Compass points are as follows: **northwest**, southeast, **south-eastern**, north-western NOT north-west, southeastern. These are NOT capitalised unless part of the actual name, so Southeast Asia, south-eastern Tasmania. Note you DO capitalise for Inner West, Northern Beaches, etc. and also CAWS SWS.

Please continue to update this section with commonly used RSPCA words and phrases to ensure consistency.



# Admin and technology

**1.** When giving **website addresses**, do NOT include http:// or https://

**2.** When giving website addresses, www. can be used when the link does not work without it. But if you use www. in one instance, use it throughout the entire poster, newsletter, etc.

**3.** Ensure you do NOT include any phrases such as 'Click here for more info' on printed material.

**4.** call me **on** NOT call me at

**5.** email me **at** NOT email me on

## Note use of capital letters and hyphens:

- eCard
- EDM
- eNews
- eNewsletter
- email (one word, lower case)
- eSignature
- eTicket
- internet NOT Internet
- intranet NOT Intranet
- NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act
- online (one word, lower case)
- over-the-phone support
- PO Box
- the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act
- reply paid envelope NOT reply-paid envelope
- Report a Rescue form
- RSPCA Approved food
- RSPCA Approved products
- RSPCA Standards e.g., regarding welfare for layer hens
- tax-deductable (hyphenated before a noun, but not afterwards)
- Terms and Conditions NOT Terms & Conditions or T's and C's or Ts + Cs
- toll-free
- TV
- webpage NOT web page
- website



# Animals

1. Capitalise breed names e.g., Boxer but NOT species e.g., two-toed sloth.
2. If writing the scientific name for an animal, the genus name is upper case and the species is lower case, even if it appears in the middle of a sentence. These should be introduced with a colon and italicised.
  - Chimpanzee: *Pan* (genus)  
*troglodytes* (species)
  - Ringtail possum: *Pseudocheirus peregrinus*
3. Hyphenate if using 'type' e.g., Terrier-type.
4. Don't use 'x' between breeds e.g., Labrador Kelpie crossbreed NOT Labrador x Kelpie or Labrador cross or Labrador Kelpie x. If you are unsure of what an animal is crossed with, use, e.g., Labrador crossbreed.
5. In copy, use lower case for farm/companion/wild/exotic animals.
6. For working dogs referred to specifically (by name) e.g., Guide Dog Bertie, use a capital letter. Otherwise, use lower case. This applies to the following: guide dogs, police dogs, assistance dogs, bomb detection dogs, drug dogs and arson dogs.
7. For the organisation, Guide Dogs is capitalised
8. service dog is always uncapitalised
9. Diseases, viruses, etc. are not generally capitalised unless they are an eponym e.g. feline calicivirus, kennel cough, Lyme disease, parvovirus, etc.
10. Also see RSPCA Vocabulary and Phrases section.

## Note use of capital letters and hyphens:

- barn-laid
- cage-free
- cat-choo kitty
- desexed (no hyphen, NOT spayed or neutred), undesexed (no hyphen, NOT unspayed)
- euthanasia (n)
- euthanise (v)
- forever home, forever family
- flying fox
- fur ball
- fur family
- furever home, furever family
- golden oldies, goldie oldies
- high-intensity breeding
- facility
- hind leg
- hippopotamuses NOT hippopotami
- house-train (also house-trained, house-training)
- long-eared
- lop-eared
- microchip, microchipped, microchipping
- parvovirus, parvo
- pawfect
- puppy farming, puppy factory NOT puppy farm
- purrfect
- purr-y
- service dog
- shelter animal
- short-haired
- Special Commission of Inquiry into the Greyhound Racing Industry
- squashed-in face
- Staffy NOT Staffie. Plural is 'Staffies'
- Tufts Animal Care and Condition scales. Can be shortened to 'Tufts'
- two-toed sloth
- undesexed (no hyphen, NOT unspayed)
- well-groomed dog / the dog was well groomed





# People

**1. Mr, Mrs, Ms,** etc. NOT Mr., Mrs., Ms., etc.  
Mr John Smith

**2.** People are referred to by their honorific and full name in first instance in copy, then honorific and surname subsequently:

Mr John Smith, then Mr Smith subsequently  
NOT Mr. Smith or John or Smith

HOWEVER, in **press releases**, people who have been convicted lose their honorific:

*McRae was fined \$1,000.*

**3.** Dr **P** Wright NOT Dr **P.** Wright

**4.** ONLY capitalise a job title if it precedes the name of a particular person and is used as part of the name:

*Branch Manager Lola Emmett NOT branch manager Lola Emmett*

*Luke Arolla is the chairman. NOT Luke Arolla is the Chairman.*

HOWEVER: Board Members are an exception e.g., in the Annual Report.

**5.** Do NOT capitalise job titles UNLESS they are used with a name e.g., an RSPCA veterinarian, an animal care attendant, kennel hands, an RSPCA inspector, foster carers, etc. Exceptions are Animal Advocate, Board Member, Guardian Angel, Regular Giver and Workplace Giving supporter. Also, job titles of **Members of the Board** are always capitalised e.g., in the Annual Report. **Appeals** are also an exception, as these can capitalise Inspector and Veterinarian to add emphasis.

**6.** Use **surnames** only e.g., Inspector OShannessy. The only exception is Animania where first name only is used). Note that OShannessy does NOT have an apostrophe in his name.

**7. an RSPCA employee** NOT a RSPCA employee (as 'R' has a vowel sound)

**8. RSPCA NSW CEO** NOT CEO RSPCA NSW

## Note use of capital letters:

- Animal Advocate (always capitalised)
- Animal Ambassador
- Animal Attendant Alicia Smith (if not mentioned by name, just: an animal attendant)
- barrister-at-law (lower case unless followed by the name of the person)
- Board Member, or just Member (capitalised even without name of the person)
- corporate partner
- eyewitness
- Guardian Angel (always capitalised)
- inspector (lower case unless followed by the name of the person)
- Paw Box holder
- Paw Box fundraiser
- Regular Giver (always capitalised)
- the RSPCA Academy Team
- an RSPCA inspector
- an RSPCA foster carer
- an RSPCA vet
- shelter staff (not capitalised)
- volunteer branch member
- volunteers
- Workplace Giving supporter (always capitalised)



# Places and departments

**1.** Capitalise names of departments when using the name of a particular one but NOT when used generally:

*The Education Team invites you to join us tomorrow.*

*BUT Building a successful sales team is an art.*

**2.** Only capitalise places e.g., shelters, branches, veterinary hospitals, volunteer branches etc. when using the name of a **particular** shelter, branch, etc.

*There are 10 RSPCA shelters in New South Wales. Visit our Sydney Shelter today!*

**3.** the RSPCA, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NOTE: lower case 'the'), RSPCA NSW (no 'the')

**4.** When referring to the RSCPA: the Society (capitalised)

**5.** Using 'we' instead of 'RSPCA NSW' in fundraising letters makes the reader feel more included in the problem and solution.

## Note use of capital letters:

- Animal Emergency Hospital
- the Australian Charities Fund
- Blue Mountains Shelter (NOT Katoomba)
- Broken Hill Shelter
- Care Centre
- Centre for Social Impact (CSI)
- Education Team
- Events Team
- Fire and Rescue NSW
- Guide Dogs Australia
- Hunter Shelter (NOT Rutherford)
- Illawarra Shelter (NOT Wollongong or Unanderra)
- member society
- New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)
- Petbarn stores
- RSPCA Animal Ambulance
- RSPCA Approved Farm
- RSPCA Care Centre Rouse Hill NOT Care Centre Rouse Hill
- RSPCA Care Centre Tuggerah
- RSPCA Cat Legacy House
- RSPCA Hunter
- RSPCA Hunter Shelter and Veterinary Hospital
- RSPCA Member Society
- RSPCA NSW Inspectorate
- RSPCA shelters (lower case)
- RSPCA Tighes Hill Veterinary Hospital (capitalised because it refers to a particular veterinary hospital)
- RSPCA Volunteer Branches
- saleyards (one word, no caps)
- Shoalhaven Shelter (NOT Nowra)
- Sydney Shelter OR Sydney Shelter in Yagoona (not just Yagoona)
- Tamworth Volunteer Branch
- veterinary hospital BUT Tighes Hill Veterinary Hospital
- volunteer branch BUT Nowra Volunteer Branch



# Programs and education

**1.** full-day program, half-day session, two-day course (hyphenated as comes before the noun)

**2.** summer/winter school holidays (NOT capitalised) except for the School Holiday Program

**3.** primary/secondary education (NOT capitalised)

**4.** classroom-based (hyphenated)

**5.** If the word 'program' is **part** of the proper name of the program, it should be capitalised. Otherwise, it should be lower case e.g., the Living Ruff program.

## Note use of capital letters:

- Adoptapet
- Aged Care program
- Animal Advocates program
- Animal Emergency Fund
- April School Holiday Program
- Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities (AMRRIC)
- Animal Welfare Advisory Council
- Certificate II in Animal Studies
- Community Animal Welfare Scheme (CAWS)
- Community program
- community service
- Corporate Support Day
- Corporate Support Day program
- Dog Rehabilitation program
- Domestic Violence program
- Drives For Lives
- education program
- First Aid for Companion Animals (capitalised when referring to the course)
- Foster Care program
- Home Ever After program
- Homelessness program
- Living Ruff (or the Living Ruff program)
- Microchip Implantation in NSW (capitalised when referring to the course)
- Paw Box program
- Pets in Need
- Pets in Need programs
- Pets Of Older Persons program (POOPs)
- program (NOT programme)
- Registered Training Organisation (RTO)
- Rescue and Immediate Care Course (RICC)
- RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme
- RSPCA Australia Knowledgebase OR RSPCA Knowledgebase
- RSPCA community outreach programs (used generally)
- RSPCA fundraising pack
- RSPCA NSW Education Team
- RSPCA Pet Insurance
- Safe Beds for Pets program (BUT the safe beds program)
- School Community Service Volunteering
- School Holiday Program
- School Work Experience week
- Tertiary School Placements
- Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service (WIRES)
- work experience
- Workplace Giving



# Mailing addresses and telephone numbers

**1.** Use complete words for Street, Road, etc. NOT St, Rd, etc. However, this rule may be broken due to layout restrictions, so may be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

**2.** PO Box NOT Po Box, PO BOX, etc.

**3.** On envelope fronts, state acronyms and countries should be capitalised:

*PO Box 34, Yagoona, NSW, 2199, AUSTRALIA*

**4.** When appearing on the same line, each part of the address should be separated out by commas:

*PO Box 34, Yagoona, NSW, 2199*

**5.** ACT, Qld, NSW, NT, SA, Tas, WA, Vic

**6.** Telephone numbers are written as:  
(02) 9770 7555

# Vocabulary and phrases

Note use of capital letters:

- barking mad
- book meow
- cat-choo cat
- cat-choo kitty
- cat-pacity
- catmosphere
- cat-tastic
- claws for celebration
- fur-dad
- fur-mum
- fur family
- furever
- furever family
- furever home
- Howlloween
- pawfect
- pawrents
- paws for thought
- pawsitively
- pawsonalise
- pupcake
- purrfect
- purrlease
- spooktacular
- suppawt
- suppawters



# General vocabulary

**1.** Note the use of **hyphens, spacing, capital letters** and **apostrophes**.

**2.** Youse is NOT a word.

**3.** Up-to-date is hyphenated when it **precedes** a noun, but NOT when it's used after or when it's used as an adverb (i.e., when it modifies a verb rather than a noun):

- *Keeping an up-to-date record of your animal's vaccinations is a good idea.*
- *Make sure your animal's vaccinations are up to date.*
- *Keeping up to date on animal welfare is very important.*

## Note use of capital letters and hyphens:

- a lot NOT alot
- advice (n)
- advise (v)
- aeroplane NOT airplane
- alright NOT allright or all right
- animal lover
- automatic teller machine/ ATM NOT cash machine
- band-aid
- behaviourist NOT behaviouralist, which is not a word
- beetroot NOT beet
- bottle shop NOT off-licence
- cat lover
- catnap
- catnip
- catch-22 situation
- check-up (n)
- check up (v)
- cruelty charge (no caps)
- cruelty-free
- Cupcake Kit (capitalised)
- desex (no hyphen)
- different to
- dog lover
- dos and don'ts
- drought-stricken
- enrol, enrolled, enrolment NOT enroll, enroled, enrollment
- eTicket
- euthanasia (n)
- euthanise (v)
- face-to-face
- fact sheet
- fairy floss NOT candy floss or cotton candy
- Father's Day
- first-aid (adj)
- first aid (n)
- firsthand
- follow-up (adj, n)
- follow up (v)
- free-range
- front-line (adj)
- fundraising
- garbage truck NOT rubbish truck
- rubbish bin NOT dustbin or garbage bin
- get-together (n)
- get together (v)
- giveaway (n)
- go-ahead (n)
- go ahead (v)
- go-between (n)
- go between (v)
- grassroots NOT grass roots



# General vocabulary continued

**4.** Government is NOT capitalised unless referring to a specific **government** AND using the full name:

- *We must partner with the government for the betterment of animals.*
- *The NSW Government is reviewing the case today.*

**5.** 'enquiry' is used for questions, whereas 'inquiry' is for a formal investigation.

*The woman over there can help you with your enquiry.*

*The Inspectorate launched an inquiry following the death of three horses.*

## Note use of capital letters and hyphens:

- hardworking
- healthcare (adj)
- health care (n)
- heartbreaking
- heat stroke NOT heatstroke
- heavy-duty (adj)
- a horrific NOT an horrific
- independently-certified
- in keeping with (no hyphen)
- kind-hearted
- life-saving
- jail NOT gaol
- Last Will and Testament (or just Will)
- lead-up (n)
- lead up (v)
- lifesaving
- like-minded
- live-baiting
- lollies NOT sweets or candy
- man-made
- memorandum of understanding (MOU)
- money order NOT Money Order
- Mother's Day
- nationwide
- New Year's Day
- New Year's Eve
- non-accredited
- non-critical
- nonstop
- non-threatening
- no one NOT no-one
- okay NOT ok or OK
- once-over (n)
- on holidays (Animania only)
- one-bedroom unit
- on-screen (adv)
- on-site (adj)
- on the weekend NOT at the weekend
- overwhelm
- part-time (adj)
- passerby
- passersby
- peace of mind NOT piece of mind
- pet sitter
- pleaded NOT plead or pled
- practice (n)
- practise (v)
- pram NOT pushchair or stroller
- premises inspection
- public holiday NOT bank holiday or vacation
- raincheck
- rehome (no hyphen)
- revisit
- reward-based
- risk taker
- school-age (adj)
- semi-trailer
- statewide
- statewide program
- thank you NOT thankyou
- truck NOT lorry
- veterinarian NOT vet (except Animania and social)
- vomiting NOT vomitting
- a well-cared-for animal
- wellbeing (no hyphen)
- Will NOT will
- wish list
- worldwide
- X-ray (capitalised)



# Ordering adjectives

Generally, three are an absolute maximum when preceding nouns:

**Opinion** (e.g., nice), **size** (e.g., big), **shape** (e.g., thin), **condition** (e.g., dirty), **age** (e.g., old), **colour** (e.g., black), **pattern** (e.g., striped), **nationality/origin** (e.g., French), **material** (e.g., cotton), **purpose** (e.g., sleeping) **noun** (e.g., bag)

# Words with accents

- café

# Abbreviations

**1.** Plurals of abbreviations: Add an 's' (lower case) to an abbreviation to make it plural. Does not require an apostrophe e.g., FAQs NOT FAQ's, VIPs NOT VIP's, etc.

**2.** Terms and Conditions is NOT abbreviated: NOT T's and C's, Ts + Cs, Ts & Cs, etc.

**3.** See Frequency section for rules about numeric contractions.

- ASAP
- CEO
- EDM

• e.g., NOTE: ALWAYS followed by a comma and not followed by a capital letter unless it is a proper noun e.g., the name of a person.

• etc. (preceded by a comma if finishing a list and always with a full stop, even if it's not at the end of a sentence. Note that if 'etc.' is followed by ellipsis '...', you will need to put four full stops without spaces: etc....)

- EU
- FAQs NOT FAQ's
- P.P.S.
- P.S.
- FYI
- i.e., NOTE: ALWAYS followed by a comma and not followed by a capital letter unless it is a proper noun e.g., the name of a place.
- MOU
- n/a
- POOPs
- RTO
- UK NOT U.K.
- UN
- US NOT U.S.
- vs.



# Time

1. Times are always given using **NUMERALS** not words.
2. Format is: **6:25 p.m.** (NOTE: colon, 12-hour format and spacing before a.m. or p.m.) NOT 6.25 pm, 6:25, 6:25p.m. or 18:25.
3. If on the hour, format is **6 a.m.** NOT six a.m. or 6:00 a.m.
4. For times used in copy in the middle of a sentence, use 'to' to link times:  
*The event will run from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m.*
5. For all other instances, use an **en dash ' – '** to link times: **10 a.m. – 8:30 p.m.** (WITH spaces either side of the dash).
6. If linking times which are both a.m. or both p.m., repeat the use of a.m. or p.m. respectively: 8 a.m. – 10 a.m. NOT 8 – 10 a.m. However, **headings** can be exceptions.

# Dates

1. Dates and years are always given as **NUMERALS** not words.
2. Format is: Day date month year:  
**Sunday 17 May 2015**  
*NOTE: no comma after day, 17 NOT 17th*
3. If not including the day, format is: date month year e.g., 17 May 2015.
4. If not including the day or month, format is: date month e.g., 17 May.
5. If not including the year, format is: day date month e.g., Sunday 17 May.
6. If date is preceded by 'by', do NOT add 'the' or 'of':  
*by Sunday 17 May 2015*  
*NOT by the 17th of May 2015*  
*NOT by Sunday 17th of May 2015 etc.*
7. If date is preceded by 'on', do not add 'the' or 'of':  
*on 17 May*  
*NOT on the 17 May*  
*NOT on the 17th of May' etc.*
8. When linking dates or years, use a **hyphen ' - '** with no spaces either side.  
*3-4 October*  
*2010-2015*
9. When linking months; dates and months; or combined dates, months and years, use an en dash ' – ' (WITH spaces either side of the dash). To do an en dash, hold ALT and use your keypad to type 0150.  
*June – July*  
*6 June – 6 July*  
*6 June 2015 – 6 July 2015*
10. NOTE: Please do not use formats such as: May 17; 17th May; May 17th; May 17, 2015, 17th of May.
11. the **third Sunday in May** NOT the 3rd Sunday in May
12. the tenth, eleventh, twelfth month NOT the 10th, 11th, 12th month
13. Note that seasons are uncapitalised. This includes summer/winter school holidays EXCEPT for the title of programs e.g., the Summer School Program.





# Numbers

1. In copy, spell out all numbers under 10 as **WORDS** (one, two, three...) NOTE: See Surveys, Recipes, Dates and Time, Money, Percentage and Temperature sections for exceptions.
2. In headlines, poster headlines, envelope fronts and memes, numbers under 10 can be written as **NUMERALS** (but this exception does NOT include email subject lines):
  - *Meet Alfie, abandoned at 2 weeks old*
  - *Are you aged 8-17 years?*
3. Use commas to separate out numbers to mark out every **three** decimal places e.g., 1,000.
4. When the first number is 10 or greater, use a **hyphen** '-' NOT an en dash '—' to link numbers e.g., **35-40** (NOTE: no spaces either side).
5. In copy, use the word '**to**' to link numbers when the first number is nine or under e.g., four to five, seven to 15.
6. Note the use of hyphens:
  - *a three-month-old kitten*
  - *The cat is 11 years old. Or the cat is three years old*
  - *a 14-month sentence*
  - *a two-year sentence*
  - *The man was jailed for four months.*
7. When giving children's ages in Animanian, use NUMERALS: Carl, aged 11
8. Telephone numbers are written as: (02) 9770 7555

# Money

1. In copy, given in Australian dollars using the word 'dollars' e.g., 13.1 million dollars. However, **appeals** can be exceptions as the symbol can add emphasis.
2. In copy, amounts of nine and under given in words e.g., eight dollars, 15 dollars
3. When giving prices of e.g., tickets, use the symbol **\$** and **NUMERALS**
4. Use a **hyphen** '-' NOT an en dash '—' to link amounts e.g., **\$2-\$5** (NOTE: no spaces either side of '-', repetition of the \$ symbol)
5. For **posters**, use the symbol **\$** and NUMERALS

# Frequency

1. If nine or under, represented in **WORDS** e.g., third pregnancy NOT 3rd pregnancy.
2. If 10 or over, represented in **NUMERALS** e.g., 21st time. NOTE use of superscript.
3. See Dates section for exceptions.



## Percentage

1. For headlines, posters, envelope fronts, vouchers, email subject lines and memes, use the **symbol %** e.g., 25% (NOTE: no space). However, **appeals** can be exceptions as the symbol can add emphasis.
2. In copy for whole numbers, use the word **per cent** (two words) e.g., 80 per cent NOT 80% or 80 percent.
3. In copy, if not whole numbers, use the symbol % NOT per cent e.g., 16.5% (NOTE: no space).
4. In copy, numbers under 10 given as words e.g., six per cent NOT 6 per cent or 6 percent.
5. Use a **hyphen '-'** NOT an en dash '–' to link percentages when the first percentage is 10 or over e.g., **70-80 per cent** (NOTE: no spaces either side of the '-').
6. Use the word **'to'** to link percentages when the first percentage is nine or under e.g., four to five per cent, seven to 15 per cent.
7. See Recipes section for exceptions.

## Weight

1. Given in kilograms and grams, using the words **'kilograms'** and **'grams'** respectively NOT kg/g e.g., 11 kilograms, 150 grams (NOTE space between numeral and measurement).
2. In the interests of space ONLY e.g., headlines, can be given as **kg** and **g** WITH a **space** e.g., 11 kg, 150 g and no full stop.
3. Numbers under 10 given as words e.g., five kilograms.
4. Use a **hyphen '-'** NOT an en dash '–' to link weights when the first weight is 10 or over e.g., **15-20 kilograms** OR 110-115 g (NOTE: no spaces either side of the hyphen but a space before the unit of measurement. Also, the unit of measurement is NOT repeated i.e., NOT 15 kilograms – 20 kilograms, NOT 110g – 115g).
5. Use the word **'to'** to link percentages when the first weight is nine or under e.g., **four to five kilograms**, seven to 15 kilograms.

## Temperature

1. All temperatures given in **NUMERALS** not words, including numbers under 10.
2. Given in Celsius, represented as °C e.g., 40°C NOT 40°, 40 degrees or forty degrees (NOTE: No space)
3. NOTE: See Recipes section
4. Use a **hyphen '-'** NOT an en dash '–' to link numbers e.g., 15-20°C (NOTE: no spaces either side of the -, °C not repeated)



## Distance

1. Given in **centimetres, metres** and **kilometres** using the words 'centimetres', 'metres' and 'kilometres' e.g., **60 kilometres**.
2. In the interest of space ONLY e.g., in a headline, can be given as **cm, m** or **km** WITH a **space** e.g., 60 km NOT 60km and no full stop.
3. Numbers under 10 are given as words e.g., five kilometres.
4. Use a hyphen '-' NOT an en dash '–' to link distances of 10 and over e.g., 20-30 kilometres, 78-80 m (NOTE: no spaces either side of the hyphen but a space before the unit of measurement. Also, the unit of measurement is NOT repeated i.e., NOT 20 kilometres – 30 kilometres, NOT 78 m – 80 m).
5. Use the word 'to' to link distances when the first distance is nine or under e.g., four to five metres, seven to 15 metres.

## Area

1. Given in **square metres** and **square kilometres** using the words 'square metres' and 'square kilometres' e.g., **60 square kilometres**.
2. In the interest of space ONLY e.g., in a headline, can be given as **m<sup>2</sup>** or **km<sup>2</sup>** WITH a **space** and use of superscript e.g., 60 km<sup>2</sup>, five km<sup>2</sup>.
3. Numbers under 10 given as words e.g., five square kilometres.
4. Use a **hyphen '-'** NOT an en dash '–' to link areas of 10 and over e.g., 20-30 square kilometres, 78-80 m<sup>2</sup> (NOTE: no spaces either side of the hyphen but a space before the unit of measurement. Also, the unit of measurement is NOT repeated i.e., NOT 20 square kilometres to 30 square kilometres, NOT 78 m<sup>2</sup> – 80 m<sup>2</sup>).
5. Use the word 'to' to link distances when the first distance is nine or under e.g., four to five square metres, seven to 15 square metres.

## Speed

1. Given in **kilometres per hour**, using the unit symbol '**km/h**' e.g., 50 km/h WITH a space between the number and the unit of measurement.
2. Numbers under 10 given in words e.g., five km/h.
3. Use a **hyphen '-'** NOT an en dash '–' to link speeds when the first speed is 10 or over e.g., 20-30 km/h (NOTE: no spaces either side of the hyphen but a space before the unit of measurement. Also, the unit of measurement is NOT repeated i.e., NOT 20 km/h – 30 km/h).
4. Use the word '**to**' to link distances when the first speed is nine or under e.g., four to five km/h, seven to 15 km/h.



# Hyphens

**1.** Phrasal verbs do not generally use hyphens '-'. If it is in the noun or adjectival form, then check to see if it is commonly used with a hyphen e.g., to check up; the check-up. See the Vocabulary section.

**2.** Where the word appears will often affect whether you use a hyphen or not:

- *It was a work-related incident. (Hyphenated as appears **before the noun**)*
- *The incident was work related. (NOT hyphenated as appears **after the noun**)*
- *a 16-month-old puppy*
- *The dog is three years old.*
- *a six-month sentence*
- *a 12-year sentence*
- *a full-time position*
- *the position is full time*

However, if there is a compound adjective (i.e., more than one word) before a noun and the first word ends in **-ly**, you don't need a hyphen.

- *The rabbit required around-the-clock support.*
- *We have specially designed programs to assist the community.*

**3.** mid-February NOT mid February

**4.** See Vocabulary section for individual words which may or may not take hyphens esp. Animals.

**5.** See Dates and time, and Numbers, weights and measurements sections for rules about using hyphens to link numbers, money, etc.

# Full stops

**1.** No full stops should be used in **headings, headlines or email subject lines**. However, question marks and exclamation marks can be used.

**2.** No full stops should be used at the end of list components or suggested answers for surveys unless the sentence is a complete sentence in itself. See Lists and Surveys sections.

# Ellipsis

**1.** Include a space after using an ellipsis '...':  
*Two were adopted... leaving just one.*

**2.** Use an ellipsis with a space either side to indicate something from a quote has been omitted:

*"The puppies were found on Monday afternoon ... by Wednesday, they had all been adopted."*

*Original quote: "The puppies were found on Monday afternoon by a woman who was jogging in the area. Luckily, by Wednesday, they had all been adopted."*

**3.** If using etc. followed by an ellipsis, you need to do four full stops (no spaces): one as part of the etc. and three for the ellipsis: etc....



# Speech and quotation marks

**1.** Always use **double quotation marks** to quote speech. If a quote is used within the speech, use **single quotation marks** within the double quotation text.

- *"You should do more to help animals," the woman said.*
- *"Can you tell me when this 'promise' was made?" the politician said.*

**2.** For other reference purposes that are not direct speech, these are given in **single quotation marks**:

- *Irresponsible breeders may use a different house as a 'shop front'.*

**3.** Unless they are part of the direct speech, place full stops, commas, question marks, exclamation marks, etc. **outside** of the quotation marks.

- *The inspector said, "We saved three cats today."*
- *The man said that he didn't take his dog to the vet because he "couldn't afford it", but he lied.*  
*Did she tell you that the man said "no comment"?*

# Brackets and parenthesis

**1.** Unless they are part of the sentence being contained by the brackets or parenthesis, place full stops, commas, question marks, exclamation marks, etc. **outside** of the parenthesis:

- *We need an answer by tomorrow (or earlier, if possible).*

**2.** If, for any reason, you want to use brackets within a set of parenthesis, use double parenthesis: (( )) to indicate the second set.

**3.** Use square brackets in a quote around words which are added that are not part of the original quote.

*"I found [the kittens] outside the train station."*

*Original quote: "I found them outside the train station."*

# En dashes

**1.** Please note the difference between an en dash '–' and a hyphen '-'. To do an en dash, hold ALT and use your keypad to type 0150.

**2.** Use en dashes rather than parenthesis or commas to add emotion and weight. This particularly applies to appeals.

*I want to share the current strategic priorities of RSPCA NSW – the ones which address the issues most critically affecting animals across the state.*

**3.** See Dates, Time and Numbers sections regarding using en dashes for linking.



# Commas

**1.** Do NOT use the serial or Oxford comma. Put commas between elements for a series but not before the final conjunction unless it is to avoid confusion or because the last element contains a conjunction. Reword or create shorter sentences if possible.

- *This cat likes chicken, beef and fish.*
- *Today, the dog played with a chew toy, a squeaky bone, and a blue and yellow ball.*

**2.** Use a comma before **'etc.'** in a list: a, b, etc.

- *We need blankets, toys, food, etc.*

**3.** Use commas to set off words, phrases and parenthetical elements that retain a close logical relationship to the rest of the sentence.

- *Allison, you must take your dog to the vet.*
- *Lana, my rabbit, needs to go to the vet.*

**4.** Use commas to set off modifying words, phrases or clauses, or titles that do not restrict the main idea of the sentence.

- *His owner, whom we saw yesterday, was not home today.*
- *Robert Brown, president of the company, will attend the event.*
- *She said, "I'm going to be late for the appointment."*

**5.** Use commas **before** coordinating conjunctions ('and', 'but', 'or', 'for', 'nor', 'yet' and 'so') which join together two independent clauses. Independent clauses are those that could stand alone as separate sentences. All of the following sentence are correct:

- *The dog played with a ball, and then she slept on the bed. NOTE: COMMA*
- *The dog played with a ball and slept on the bed. NOTE: NO COMMA*
- *I know we're low on staff, but we need to rescue the animals today. NOTE: COMMA*

**6.** Use commas to separate out numbers to mark out every **three** decimal places e.g., 1,000.

**7.** Do NOT use a comma before **'too'** or **'though'** at the end of a sentence.

- *I like cats too. NOT I like cats, too.*
- *She likes dogs though. NOT She likes dogs, though.*

**8.** Do NOT use a comma before and after **'too'**, **'however'** and **'therefore'** in the middle of a sentence unless you want to add emphasis.

- *I too like cats.*
- *He, however, prefers dogs.*

# Colons

**1.** In copy (excluding Lists in which each list item appears on a separate line), do NOT capitalise after a colon.

**2.** Use a colon to introduce a list, an example, an amplification or an explanation directly related to something just mentioned e.g., Luis the dog has two favourite hobbies: long walks and playing with a ball.

**3.** Use a single space after a colon, and no space before it.

**4.** In general, do NOT use colons to introduce websites or email addresses e.g., For more information, visit [rspcansw.org.au](http://rspcansw.org.au). NOT For more information, visit: [rspcansw.org.au](http://rspcansw.org.au). HOWEVER, in social media and website design, always use a colon, as this encourages people to click on the link.



# Semicolons

1. Use a semicolon between two independent clauses without a conjunction: Bert's owner was late; this was typical.
2. In copy, use a semicolon to separate out listed items which contain commas:
  - *The animals rescued today were as follows: one dog, two cats and five rabbits from a house; a chicken from a truck; and a horse from a farm.*
3. Use a single space after a semicolon, and no space before it.

# Ampersand

1. The ampersand '&' should never be used in copy, and only sparingly otherwise e.g., envelope fronts, poster headlines, etc. if space requires it. This should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Note that social media is an exception to this.

# Slashes

1. Use 'or' rather than '/'  
*hiding or hanging food NOT hiding/hanging food*  
*An exception is: bedding and/or crate*



# Grammar 101

An **adverb** describes and modifies an adjective, another adverb, a verb or a whole sentence (e.g., always, here, obviously, quickly, very, etc.).

A **conjunction** connects words (e.g., and, because, etc.).

A **determiner** accompanies a noun and determines its quantity, who it belongs to, whether it is general or specific, etc. There are different types of determiners: **articles** (e.g., a, an, the), **demonstrative** (e.g. this, that, etc.), **interrogative** (e.g., what, which), **numerical** (e.g., first, second, etc.), **quantifiers** (e.g., few, many, etc.), **possessive** (e.g., her, his, etc.) and **relative** (e.g., which, whatever, etc.).

A **noun** names an abstract idea (e.g., hope, love, etc.), animal (e.g., kitten, rabbit, etc.), place (e.g., Sydney, Paris, etc.), person (e.g., adopter, inspector, etc.) or thing (e.g., bowl, toy, etc.).

A **phrasal verb** is a verb followed by an adverb, a preposition or a combination of both (e.g., pick up, settle in).

A **preposition** shows relationships between words. There are different types of prepositions and these show **direction** (e.g., away from, into, etc.), **time** (e.g. at, in, etc.) and **place** (e.g. between, under, etc.).

A **pronoun** replaces or refers to a noun (e.g., I, each other, everyone, herself, these, who, your, etc.).

A **verb** expresses an action (e.g., to jump, to hide, etc.), occurrence (e.g., to happen, to recognise, etc.) or state of being (e.g., to appear, be, etc.).

An adjective describes and modifies a noun or pronoun (e.g., friendly, shy, etc.).





# General rules

**1.** Grammar Girl knows pretty much everything: [quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl](http://quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl)

**2.** I have got NOT I have gotten e.g., The farm has got a good reputation, and really seems to care about the wellbeing of their animals.

**3.** Use irregular past forms: dreamt, learnt, spelt, spoilt, smelt.

**4.** 'earnt' is something that happens quickly, 'earned' happens over a long period of time.

**5.** Collective nouns e.g., the community, the department, the government, the organisation, the pair, RSPCA NSW, the RSPCA, the staff, the state, etc. are almost always **singular** in construction e.g., The government is responsible for this problem. NOT The government are responsible for this problem.

**6.** Each of them, everybody, anyone, etc., is treated as third person singular NOT plural  
*Each of them deserves a loving home. NOT Each of them deserve a loving home.*

**7.** 'have seen' not 'seen'. The simple past is 'saw'.  

- *have seen some great work by the RSPCA over the past year. NOT I seen some great work...*
- *I saw that she fell in love with the dog immediately.*

**8.** Be aware of singular/plural noun form. This sentence is grammatically incorrect:

• *If your dog sleeps outdoors, make sure **they** **have** a kennel to protect them from the heat.*

This is because 'your dog' is singular.

It should be:

• *If your dog sleeps outdoors, make sure **he** **or she** has a kennel to protect them from the heat.*

Alternatively, you could just choose a gender for the dog: he has/she has. Be consistent within the paragraph and take turns with male and female animals. 'It' is the most grammatical here, but sounds very impersonal!

**9.** Use the relative pronoun 'who' instead of 'which' or 'that' when referring to animals, as this helps personalise them:

• *Become a foster care and take care of kittens who are waiting to go to their forever homes.*

Grammatically should be:

• *Become a foster care and take care of kittens that are waiting to go to their forever homes.*

But both are fine!

**10.** We have **more than** 1,000 volunteers. NOT We have over 1,000 volunteers.

**11.** '**fewer**' is for plural nouns, '**less**' is for singular nouns (including mass nouns that you can't count, like bread, water, etc.).

*There are fewer kittens in our shelters this year. NOT There are less kittens in our shelters this year. We have less money than last year. NOT We have fewer money than last year.*

**12.** It's okay to begin sentences in copy with 'and', particularly in appeals letters.



# Affect and effect

**1.** 'Affect' is a VERB and means 'to influence' or 'to act in a way that you don't feel', whereas 'effect' is a NOUN and means 'a result'.

- *Your cat's diet will have an effect on her health.*
- *The dog was affected by the change in his diet.*
- *The man affected an air of superiority, but he didn't know how to look after his pet.*

However, 'effect' can also be used as a verb meaning 'to bring about' or 'to accomplish':

- *The rabbit hoped to effect change within the burrow.*

# Plurals

**1.** Add 's' to an **abbreviation** to make it plural. They do NOT require an apostrophe e.g., FAQs NOT FAQ's

**2.** Use apostrophes for plurals formed from single letters e.g., Mind your p's and q's.

**3. Proper nouns** e.g., the name of a person which end in -s are pluralised by adding -es NOT ' or 's e.g., The Joneses recently adopted a dog from an RSPCA shelter.

# Possessives

**1.** When writing a possessive with **single common nouns** ending -s, add 's NOT ': the platypus's home (where there is only one platypus) NOT the platypus' home.

**2.** When writing a possessive with **plural common nouns** ending -s, add ' NOT 's: the boys' dog (where there is MORE than one dog) NOT the boys's dog, the budgies' cage (where there is MORE than one budgie) NOT the budgies's cage.

**3.** When writing a possessive with **single proper nouns** e.g., the name of a person which ends -s, add ' NOT 's: Mr Jones' cat NOT Mr Jones's cat.

**4.** When writing a possessive with **plural proper nouns** ending -s (which will in fact end -ses because the -es indicates that the noun is plural), add ' NOT 's e.g., the Joneses' dog (the dog that belongs to the Jones family).

**5.** 'Its' NOT 'it's' for a **possessive** e.g., the dog played with its chew toy. Yours, hers, ours and theirs (used for possession) also does not take an apostrophe.

# I, me and myself

**1.** The correct structure is:

*"Bring the flyers to Lola and **me**," she said.*  
NOT *"Bring the flyers to Lola and **I**," she said.*

**2.** Please don't hesitate to contact **me** NOT Please don't hesitate to contact myself.

**3.** Luke and I visited the clinic today NOT Luke and myself visited the clinic today.

**4.** 'Myself' (and 'himself', 'herself', 'itself', etc.) can never be the subject of a sentence. These reflexive pronouns can only be the **object** of a sentence e.g., I can see myself fostering in the future. NOT *Myself loves cats* OR *Lola and myself love cats.*

**5.** You can also use 'myself' to add **emphasis** e.g., I fed all the dogs myself. Note that the sentence is still grammatical if you remove 'myself' and the meaning doesn't change dramatically.



## It's and its

1. ONLY use an apostrophe when 'it's' is short for **'it is'** or **'it has'**.
2. **'Its'** is used for possessives NOT it's e.g., The cat ate **its** dinner. Think of it like: yours, hers, ours and theirs, which don't take an apostrophe.

## Than and then

1. 'Than' indicates a comparison and 'then' means 'next' or 'at that time':
  - *This dog is happier than that dog.*
  - *We'll visit the cats and then the dogs.*
  - *Microchipping cats wasn't as common back then.*

## Their, there and they're

1. 'Their' is used for possession:
  - *I went to Luke and Lola's house yesterday.*
  - *Their dog is very friendly.*
  - *The dog belonging to Luke and Lola is friendly.*
2. 'There' is the opposite of 'here':
  - *This couple is interested in the dog over there.*
3. 'They're' is a contraction of **'they are'**:
  - *I spoke to Luke and Lola yesterday. They're coming to meet Charlie the cat tomorrow.*
  - *They are coming to meet Charlie the cat tomorrow.*
  - *Luke and Lola are coming to meet Charlie the cat tomorrow.*

## To and too

1. 'To' is a preposition e.g., She gave the toy mouse to the cat, or used as part of a full infinitive verb e.g., The rabbit wants to sleep.
2. 'Too' is an adverb and is used to mean also or in addition e.g., The dog likes playing in the park, and he likes playing in the garden too.
3. 'Too' also means 'in excess' e.g., The puppy ate too many treats, and now he feels sick.
4. Don't use a comma before too at the end of a sentence e.g., That dog has a ball too. NOT That dog has a ball, too.



## While and whilst

1. 'while' and 'whilst' are fairly interchangeable (when used as prepositions), although 'whilst' is sometimes considered a little outdated and formal. Some grammarians say that 'whilst' should be used for a short period of time and 'while' for a longer period of time. If you do choose to use 'whilst', just remember it will make your copy sound more formal.

## Who's and whose

1. 'Who's' is short for **'who is'**:

*"Who's going to take responsibility for this?" (Who is going to take responsibility...)*

2. **'Whose'** is a possessive:

*"Whose dog is this?" NOT "Who's dog is this?", which would mean: "Who is dog is this?", which is ungrammatical.*

## Who and whom

1. 'Who' means **he, she**, etc.

2. 'Whom' means **him, her**, etc.

- *Who phoned the RSPCA about a missing cat? She phoned the RSPCA about a missing cat. NOT Whom phoned the RSCPA about a missing cat? This means: Her phoned the RSPCA...*
- *We wondered whom the complaint was about. The complaint was about her. NOT We wondered who the complaint was about. This means: The phone call was about she.*

## You're and your

1. 'You're' is short for **'you are'** whereas 'your' is a possessive.

- *You're invited to the RSPCA Kitten Shower! (i.e., you are invited...)*
- *"Get your cupcakes here!" ("Get you're cupcakes here!" would mean: "Get you are cupcakes here!" which is ungrammatical)*



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