

Australian spelling and grammar: alphabetical

Australian English generally follows British English, however the influence of USA on Australia is powerful. Mistakes and poor decisions are rife in style guides all over Australia. We are all reading books and articles from the USA, so our brains are used to US grammar, spelling and punctuation. Even our education system sometimes chooses US punctuation and grammar over that more commonly found in British English (eg. the use of double quotation marks for speech).

American spelling is so ubiquitous on the internet that many Australian institutions choose to follow US-English rules for simplicity. There is often more to the story when you start to delve into the reasons for each aspect of grammar or spelling, and all the rules have a tendency to change over time. Below is my attempt to keep it simple, so while I am presenting the below in short, black and white terms, I acknowledge both the gray areas and the room for improvement.

This grammar list should be read along with the rest of the Editor Australia Style Guide available at editoraustralia.com. Mistakes are my own (Amanda Greenslade).

A

Aboriginals: Australian (or other country) natives

Aboriginal (singular noun) (not Aborigine). Adjective = capital 'A' if Australian Aboriginal, otherwise aboriginal. Aborigines (plural noun)—always capital 'A'. Note: plural form is never Aboriginals.

Abovementioned or above mentioned?

Abovementioned (one word).

Acknowledgment or Acknowledgement?

Acknowledgment (no 'e' after the 'g')

Adviser or advisor?

Adviser (but either are acceptable, so just be consistent).

Air: aeroplane, airplane, air crew etc.

Aeroplane. Either is acceptable, but Editor Australia prefers **aeroplane** for consistency. Also, **aircrew** not air crew. **Air force** not airforce (E.g. Australian Air Force), unless part of a proper noun which is written by the institution as one word. **Air-condition/air-conditioner** (hyphenate), not air condition nor airconditioner nor air conditioner.

All right or alright?

All right (two words).

Ameba, amoeba or amæba?

Ameba (not 'æ') and capitalisation is not needed: **ameba**.

Ampersand: when is it OK to use the symbol &?

Ampersand (&) means 'and'. Avoid using the symbol (&) in normal writing. Use 'and' except in company names, multiple author lists, or when it is actually part of the title of a publication (e.g. Fann, Roberts & Co., Part & Parcel). Also Fann & Roberts—but Fann, U. and Roberts, H.

Any: anymore or any more, any time, anyhow?

Any more (two words), any time (two words), anyhow (one word).

ANZAC

Written in capitals because it is an acronym for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.

Ape man or apeman?

Apeman (one word) and capitalisation is not needed: **apeman**.

Apostles: when to capitalise 'apostles'

Apostles (cap. 'A'), the **Apostles** Peter, Barnabas, etc., but **apostles** (l.c.) when not referring to the Apostles of Scripture (e.g. apostles of denial, apostles of humanism).

Archeology or archaeology?

Either is acceptable, but Editor Australia prefers **archaeology** and **archaeologist** with the 'a'.

Archaeological artifacts and religious articles

When to capitalise the names of archaeological/historical artifacts. Ark, the Ark, Noah's Ark, but lower case for 'an ark' (generic). Eg. He told Noah to build an ark. The Ark of the Covenant. The Crucifix.

Arm's length

Not arms length.

Army: does it need to be capitalised?

Only when it is being used as part of a proper noun. E.g. I love the **army**. I joined the **Australian Army** in 1999.

Artifact or artefact?

Artefact

Australian Government: when to capitalise

Capitalise **Australian Government**, but if referring to the **government** generally, use lower case. The **government** of another country will have its own way of doing things. Also capitalise **Commonwealth Government**. Likewise the **Federal Government** and the **Federal Police**.

A while or awhile?

A while (one word).

B

Back date, back-date or backdate?

Backdate

Bank card or bankcard?

Bankcard

Baited v bated

'Bated breath' is short for breath that is held in abatement. The action of abating or being abated means ending or subsiding. To **bait** something or someone is to lay a trap using an enticement of some kind.

Bar code or barcode?

Barcode

Biased or biassed?

Biased (not biassed).

Bible: should I always capitalise Bible?

Depends on the readership, but generally **Bible** is capitalised. **Bible** should be upper case when referring to the **Word of God** and lower case in colloquial use, eg. the handyman's bible). Do not capitalise **biblical** or **unbiblical**.

Big Bang: should it be capitalised?

It depends on readership, but Editor Australia prefers upper case **Big Bang**.

Bla bla bla or blah blah

Blah blah blah

Bloodstain or blood stain?

Bloodstain

Book keeper or bookkeeper?

Bookkeeper

Bulk head or bulkhead?

The **bulkhead** is the internal walls of a ship, a retaining wall or partition.

By the by or by-the-by

By the by

C

Car park or carpark?

Car park

Carbon-14: should I capitalise carbon-14?

Yes, in carbon-14 dating. Also radiocarbon dating, carbon dating, 14C dating. c-decay (hyphenated).

CAT scan, catscan or Catscan

CAT scan

Cave man, cave-man or caveman?

Caveman (one word) and capitalisation is not needed: **caveman**. Also see '[apeman](#)'.

CCd or cc'd, CCs, CC's, ccs or cc's

You are **CC'd** (carbon copied) on an email, but you eat **CC's** at a party.

CD-rom, CD-ROM, cd, cd rom

CD-ROM is short for compact disk read-only memory.

Cesium or caesium

Either is correct, but Editor Australia prefers cesium (not caesium).

Cheque book or chequebook?

Chequebook

Childcare or child care?

Child care

Chose in action or chose-in-action?

Chose in action

Christmasses or Christmases (plural)?

Christmases

Church: when to capitalise 'church'

Use a capital when the word **church** appears in the name of an organisation (e.g. Flockson Baptist **Church**), but lower case **church** for the building, a local **church** group or the **church** universal.

Collarbone or collar bone?

Collarbone

Colosseum or Coliseum?

Editor Australia prefers **Colosseum**

Convention/constitution: do we capitalise constitution?

Yes, you should capitalise these words when referring to a proper noun. E.g. the **Australian Constitution** or The **Convention** on the Rights of the Child etc. The Australian **Constitution** is the legal framework for how Australia is governed. This paper explores the history of the **Constitution**, its key features and the High Court's role in interpreting it.

Co-operate or cooperate?

Cooperate is preferable because it looks better and most people don't need the hyphen to know how to read this word.

Co-ordinate or coordinate?

Coordinate is preferable because it looks better and most people don't need the hyphen to know how to read this word.

Courthouse or court house, courtroom or court room, courtyard or court yard?

Courthouse, courtroom and courtyard (one word).

Crown: when to capitalise

There are specific rules about whether to capitalise the word 'crown' or not. In general speech it is not capitalised, but in a legal framework it will be referring to a legal entity, therefore The Crown is capitalised. Whether it is preceded by the word 'the' or not depends on the institution's own style guide, so you will need to check.

Criteria or criterion?

Criteria is plural. **Criterion** is singular.

Cross: when to capitalise 'cross'

Lower case **cross** for the 'x' mark or the grumpy feeling. Upper case for the name of the religious article. For the **Cross**, on which Christ died. L.c.—Christ died on a **cross**. Upper case: Christ died on the **Cross**. When referring to doctrine use a capital C. See [archaeological artifacts and religious articles](#).

D

Data, database

Which is correct? 'The data are verifiable' or 'The data is verifiable?' Lower case **data** is in wide use as both singular and plural, so the context must decide the appropriate verb (is/are). In most cases, Editor Australia prefers, 'The data is verifiable.' And, of course, **database** is one word not two.

Day to day v day-to-day

The way you write this depends on context. E.g. I went from **day to day**. We are happy with the **day-to-day** operations of the business.

Defence

The **Department of Defence** and the **Australian Defence Force** are capitalised, but in more general terms the **defence force** is not capitalised. Likewise the **navy** is not capitalised but the **Australian Navy** is.

Demarcation, demark

This is self-explanatory.

Direction: how to write north, south, east and west

Do not use a capital letter for north, south, east, or west (the points of the compass) unless the word forms part of a name. For example: Head north then south. I live in Western Australia, I love South Hampton, South-East Queensland is great.

Disinterested v uninterested

Does **disinterested** mean the same thing as **uninterested**? No. **Disinterested** is sometimes mistakenly used as a synonym for **uninterested**. **Disinterested** means unbiased, impartial; **uninterested** means bored or indifferent.

Disk or disc

Disc (computer disc and spinal disc)

Despatch or dispatch

Despatch is British English whereas **dispatch** is US.

DNA or D.N.A.?

DNA—no full stops. **DNA** is the abbreviation of deoxyribonucleic acid, but it is in such common use that it does not need the periods.

E

Earth: when to capitalise earth

Earth/earth. Use lower case 'e' (**earth**) except where it's the actual planet's name—i.e. where another planet's name (say, Saturn or Mercury) could be substituted, and it would still make sense. E.g. 'As far as we can tell, this terrain is unique to **Earth**.'

E.g.

E.g. comes from the Latin words *exempli gratia*. How should I write **e.g.**, which is short for 'For example'? e.g. lower case, not italic. There should be a comma or dash before 'e.g.', but not usually after it in British English unless the context requires it (see first sentence in this entry).

There were many reasons why the parrot did not like the cat, for example it felt unsafe while the cat was around.

There were many reasons why the parrot did not like the cat, e.g. it felt unsafe while the cat was around.

Email, ecommerce etc.

Even though it is short for 'electronic mail', the word 'email' should not have a hyphen. It is so common that it has its own meaning without people needing to consider what it is short for. It is, however, better to use **e-commerce**, **e-court** and **e-ticket** so as to avoid confusion.

Encyclopedia or encyclopaedia?

Encyclopedia (unless the actual title uses the 'ae', as in Encyclopaedia Britannica). Capitalise it when writing about a specific encyclopedia, in which case it is a proper noun.

Enquiry v inquiry

Enquiry means to ask a question, and an **inquiry** is a formal investigation.

Etc. How to write etcetera

etc. Full stop at end. Use a comma before 'etc.' if more than one item precedes it (e.g. cats, dogs, etc.).

Et al. How to write et al

et al. is always italicised with a full stop at the end.

F

Fetus, foetus or foetus?

fetus is more common and simpler

Fifty-fifty

(hyphenated)

Fingerprint

(one word)

Flak or flack?

flak—as in 'He copped a lot of flak as a result of his mistake'. Not 'flack', which means someone who provides publicity. ([Source](#))

Flyer or flier

A **flyer** is a piece of paper with an advertisement on it, whereas a **flier** is something that flies.

Focused or focussed?

focused (not focussed). Focusing.

Forbear and forebear: what's the difference?

Forbear means refrain from. Forebear means ancestor.

Forgo and forego: what's the difference?

Forgo means give up, relinquish. **Forego** means go before, to precede in time.

Foreword and forward: what's the difference between

A **foreword** often appears at the beginning of a book. **Forward** is a direction of travel, ahead.

Full time: should full-time be hyphenated?

Yes. Full-time, part-time.

G

Gases or gasses?

gases

Genealogy or geneology?

genealogy (not geneology).

Google or google

To **Google** something means to search for it online and you would also capitalise **Google** the search engine. This is a trademarked term so even though it is commonly used as an everyday verb, it should be capitalised as long as the trademark stands.

H

Half life, halflife or half-life?

Editor Australia's preference is to hyphenate half-life

Heaven and Hell: when should I capitalise heaven and hell?

Heaven. Capital when referring to the place where God dwells. But, the **heavens**, for something non-specific (lower case). God will make a new heaven and a new **Earth.** **Hell** is usually capitalised as it is the name of a place. If it appeared in a made-up colloquial phrase like 'By the five **hells** of Halcyon!', it could be lower case.

High Court: should high court be capitalised?

Yes. The Australian Constitution is the legal framework for how Australia is governed. This paper explores the history of the Constitution, its key features and the **High Court's** role in interpreting it.

Historial: a or an

A historical or an historical? Use **a historical**, not **an historical**. This follows normal English pronunciation—when the h is pronounced, use ‘a’ (e.g. a hammer, a hill); when ‘h’ is silent, use ‘an’ (e.g. an hour).

I

i.e. how to format i.e. (ie.)

i.e. means ‘that is’ and should be formatted in lower case, not italic. Like with ‘e.g.’ there can be a comma or dash before but not after it unless the context requires it.

Ill

Ill feeling, ill health, ill will but ill-treat

Imply or infer

When to use imply and when to use infer. The speaker **implies** something; the hearer **infers** something from what he or she has heard.

In as much or inasmuch?

inasmuch/insomuch/insofar (one word), but the following ‘as’ will have a space. E.g. inasmuch as, insomuch as, insofar as.

Instalment

(not installment)

Internet

Should **internet** be capitalised? What about net, web and World Wide Web?

Do not capitalise **internet**, **net** or **web**, e.g. you would write **the internet**, **the net** or **the web**. Because it’s an abbreviation, you would capitalise **World Wide Web**. The rest are all common everyday nouns, not proper nouns, so they do not need capitals. You should also write the following as single words: **website** or **webpage**, not web site or web page (one word, all lower case).

Iridescent or iridescent?

iridescent (one ‘r’)

J

Jail

(not gaol)

Judgement or judgment?

Judgment (no ‘e’ after the ‘g’)

K

Know-how

It was her know-how that made her successful. Do you know how to tie your shoelaces?

L

Law/theory: when to capitalise law, theory, act, tribunal etc.

Only as part of proper nouns do these words need to be capitalised. This is best illuminated by specific examples:

- Einstein proposed his relativity **theory** when...
Einstein's **Theory** of Relativity
People who use the **Theory** of Relativity
- The **laws** of motion
Newton's First **Law** of Motion
- The **laws** of thermodynamics
The First **Law** of Thermodynamics
- Kepler prepared his **laws** of planetary motion...
Kepler's First **Law** of Planetary Motion
- The gap **theory** And there is string **theory**
- The **laws** which God ordained
God's **Law** is perfect
God's **laws** are eternal
- The **acts** in our **law** are detailed
- **Native Title Act** states that...
- The **Native Title Tribunal** is intended...

Life

When to hyphenate words with **life** in them. Editor Australia bases their proofreading decisions on the most common use. Some words are so common that they are no longer hyphenated, but are generally accepted as a single word. So you would write: **life-form, life-force, lifeline, life-size, lifespan, lifestyle** and **lifetime**.

Light years, lightyears or light-years

We do hyphenate **light-years**.

Lunchtime

(one word)

M

Martian: should martian be capitalised?

Yes, because it is a (hypothetical) person from Mars. A Martian.

McDonald's: should it have an apostrophe?

Yes, because McDonald owns the restaurant.

Medivac/medivacced

(one word)

Middle-East

Should **Middle-Eastern** be hyphenated and capitalised? Yes. Middle-Eastern

Minuscule or miniscule?

Minuscule (not miniscule).

MM, mill etc.

Mil is short for millimetre, however you should write it as mm to avoid ambiguity.

Mill is short for million

Monies or moneys

Monies

Moon and sun

Should the **moon** or **sun** be capitalised? No.

Mr, Mrs, Ms, Messrs, Master, Mx

Mr is the honorific for a man. Mrs is the honorific for a married woman. Ms is the honorific for a woman (whether married or unmarried). Messrs is the plural of Mr. Master is the honorific for a child. Mx (pronounced *mux*) is one of the honorifics available for non-binary people.

Mucus or mucous

Mucus is the noun; mucous is the adjective

N

Nevertheless or never the less

Write it as **nevertheless** (one word).

New Age: should New Age be capitalised?

New age, new-age or New Age? Yes, **New Age** should be capitalised but does not need hyphenation.

New Year's Day and New Year's Eve

These should be written in title case with an apostrophe between the 'R' and the 'S' because the new year owns the day.

No.

This is short for the word 'number', which is why it has a period at the end, signifying the missing letters.

Noone, no-one or no one?

No one

Northern Hemisphere: should northern hemisphere be capitalised?

No. northern hemisphere (all lower case)

O

OK or okay

Best written as **okay**.

Old and New Testament: should old testatment be capitalised?

Yes. New Testament and Old Testament. These are proper nouns as they are the names of religious texts (parts of the Bible).

Onto vs on to

These have different meanings. Onto is about the position of something. It's time to move **on to** a new subject. She jumped **onto** the sofa.

P

Percent: when is it OK to use the % sign?

percentage might be used in a sentence, but otherwise, you would normally use % e.g. 52%

Pharoah: when do I capitalise Pharoah?

As with king and queen, the word **pharaoh** should be [capitalised](#) when it is used as part of a name, e.g. the **Pharaoh** Rameses II, but Egypt had a succession of **pharaohs**. The king of France is King George.

Phenomenon vs phenomena

Phenomena is plural, so takes a plural verb. **Phenomenon** is the singular.

Political movements: should I capitalise political movements?

Only when based on a name. So communism, fascism and socialism are lower case whereas Marxism has a capital 'M'. An exception is Nazism (short for National Socialism) which should have a capital 'N'. Also see [Capitals](#) on the Editor Australia style guide.

Post-modern: should post-modernism be hyphenated?

Which is correct, post modernism, postmodernism or post-modernism? As it is in common use, Editor Australia prefers one word: **postmodernism**.

Professor: when to capitalise professor

Upper case when part of a title or when describing a specific position, otherwise lower case.

Examples:

- The professor lit his pipe
- Professor Van Winkel lit his pipe
- Ian Van Winkel, Professor of English at
- Ian Van Winkel, the Professor of English at
- Ian Van Winkel, a professor of English

Program or programme?

Program, not programme. But **programmed**, **programming**, **programmer**.

Publicly or publically?

Publicly, not publically

R

Religions: should religious figures and religions be capitalised?

Yes. Eg. Buddha, Gautama, Buddhism, Buddhist, Christ, Christianity, Christian, Satan, Lucifer, Freemasonry, Gnosticism. But use a lower case first letter in ordinary nouns like deity and devil and in adjectives like godly.

Red shift or redshift?

Redshift (one word), and it does not need to be capitalised.

Right hand, left handed etc.

The **right-hand** side, she was **right-handed**, but she held her **right hand** at an odd angle.

S

Scientific names of animals: when to capitalise, hyphenate and use italics

'The genus and species form the definitive name of a plant or animal. By convention: the genus is in italics and takes an initial capital.' ([Source](#)) The species is in italics and is lower case. *Apatosaurus* (cap. 'A'), but apatosaurs, dinosaurs, etc. (l.c.). *Archaeopteryx* (italic). *Australopithecus* (italic), *Australopithecus afarensis*, *Australopithecus robustus*, etc. But australopithecine(s) (not italic or cap.). Cro-Magnon man. *T. rex* not T-rex.

When do you italicise *ornithorhynchus*? *Ornithorhynchus* is the genus of a platypus, so it should be italicised. But, ornithorhynchous is also a word that means having a beak like a bird.

Shareholders, shareholder's or shareholders'

Technically the shareholders' agreement should have an apostrophe after the 'S', but you could just write it however the document refers to itself. A lot of organisations drop these plural possessive apostrophes because they are so commonly omitted, or because the agreement is 'of the shareholders' and not belonging to it.

Skeptic or sceptic?

Skeptic(ism/al), not **sceptic**(ism/al)

Solar system capitalisation

Should **solar system** or **universe** be capitalised? No.

Southern hemisphere

Should **southern hemisphere** be capitalised? No.

Stars: how to write the names of stars

Alpha Centauri C (or abbreviate to 'α Cen c'). If unsure, check Wikipedia.

State: when should state be capitalised?

State (capitalise when referring to a political division).

Straight jacket spelling

Strait-jacket has a hyphen and is spelled with no 'G', i.e. not straight.

Straightaway

(one word)

Straight-out

(hyphenated)

Subclause, subparagraph, subpoint, subrule, subset, subsection

(one word)

What's the difference between strata and stratum?

Strata is plural, so takes a plural verb. **Stratum** is the singular.

Sulfur or sulphur?

sulfur/sulfuric (not sulphur)

Supersede or supercede?

Supercede (with a 'C')

T

Temperature: how do I write the temperature?

Temperatures should be shown like 25°C, 3 K (kelvin). The HTML entity code for degrees is °

'Til, till

To **till** the soil, this word is also an old fashioned shortening of the word until. The shorter form 'til (with an apostrophe) is more common in modern English. It's all nonsense if you think too deeply about it.

Time: do I hyphenate any words with time in them?

Timespan, timescale, timeframe, timeline, but **time sheet**.

How should I refer to twelve o'clock, the difference between 12 am and 12 pm. It is more meaningful if twelve o'clock is referred to as midnight, midday, or noon because some people get confused about 12 am (midnight) and 12 pm (midday).

Toing and froing: any apostrophes needed?

No, most people know to pronounce this as *to-ing* and *fro-ing*.

Tonne vs ton

A tonne (or metric ton) is equal to 1,000 kg whereas the word **ton** has various meanings in different countries. See [Wikipedia](#).

Tranquility or tranquillity?

Tranquility (single 'l'). Tranquiliser.

Trust: when to capitalise

Capitalise when it is part of a proper noun. The Robertson Family **Trust**, but my family **trust**.

U-V

UFO

UFO becomes UFOs not UFO's. See more info. on [abbreviations](#) (most do not have apostrophes before a plural S).

Unbiased or unbiassed?

Unbiased (one 'S').

Video: do I hyphenate any words with video in them?

Videotape, but video conference, video link, video call.

W-Z

Watch-house

(hyphenated)

Well-known vs well known

This depends on context. well-known, e.g. a well-known scientist; but this scientist is well known.

West: when to capitalise the West

West and **Western** should be capitalised when referring to Western civilization. Also to place names such as **Western** Australia.

World

Lower case as it is not a proper noun. Our **world** is a beautiful place. One word: **worldview**, **worldwide**.

World Wars: how to write the world wars

These are capitalised. **World War** I, II, or **First World War**, **Second World War**, **WWI**, **WWII**.

How to write x-ray

X-ray is hyphenated and lower case.

Yadda, yadda, yadda

(not yada yada)

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