

# Briefing and Correspondence Guide

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Prepared by Briefings and Correspondence Unit

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Premier  
& Cabinet

**Amendments register**

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# Introduction

## How to use this guide

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This guide will help you prepare briefings and letters of consistently high quality.

It is based on the principles of plain English, which means these documents should have:

- clear **content** and a logical **structure** to help readers find what they want
- clean **design** so the content is easy to scan and navigate
- clear **expression** so text is easy to read and understand
- consistent **style** to maximise clarity and avoid errors.

This guide has four main sections:

1. **Briefings** sets out the processes and principles for effective briefings, and discusses the content of each section of the template.
2. **Correspondence** sets out the processes and principles for effective letters, and discusses correspondence style issues and special cases.
3. **Plain English** outlines the key principles of structure, content and expression, then lists some words and phrases to avoid, with plain English alternatives.
4. **Style** sets out departmental practice to promote consistent language. Here you will find advice on issues from how to punctuate an abbreviation and how to set out a list.

The **Appendixes** then provide examples of the templates and letters and the roles and responsibilities for preparing them.

The guide does not apply to briefings and correspondence that the department prepares for other ministers, who have their own letterhead and guidelines.

## Sources and references

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This guide draws on three main resources:

- Snooks & Co, *Style Manual: for authors, editors and printers*. 6th edition, John Wiley & Sons, Australia, 2002.
- *Macquarie Dictionary*, 5th edition, Macquarie Dictionary, Sydney, 2009.
- Plain English Foundation, ***Getting to the point Policy and Ministerial Writing: Baseline***. Plain English Foundation, Sydney, 2013.
- Neil James, *Writing at Work*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2007.

The department acknowledges the help of several agencies, including the NSW Ministry of Health, Department of Attorney General and Justice and the NSW Department of Education and Communities, in developing earlier versions of this guide. The guide was also revised by the Plain English Foundation.

You can download copies of this guide from the BCU section of the DPC intranet.

If you need help to prepare correspondence or briefings or to use this guide, please call BCU on ext. 3129, or email [BCUMail@dpc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:BCUMail@dpc.nsw.gov.au).

We hope you find this guide helpful and we welcome your feedback.

# 1 Briefings

Briefings are integral to communication and decision-making within our department and across government.

They provide advice, information and recommendations to key departmental figures, including the Premier, often with far-reaching effects for programs and people.

This chapter gives guidance on how to write successful briefings by:

- outlining the **process** you should follow
- highlighting the key **principles** that will make your writing more effective
- discussing **content** requirements and the template's main features.

It applies to most briefings, including the Premier's 'pinks'.

## Process

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### Types of briefing

There are many types of briefing, with the most common scenarios relating to:

- emerging or contentious issues
- correspondence, usually with draft responses
- community visits
- meetings that the Premier or Director General will attend
- events or functions, often with speech notes.

The department now has three main templates:

Template	Purpose
For approval	To advise the reader about an issue, discuss the available options and recommend the preferred course of action
For information	To advise or update the reader on an issue where no action is needed (for information only)
Protocol or event	To advise the reader about an upcoming visit or event, often with recommendations

Other briefings have special formats, such as Questions on Notice and House Folder notes.

 For general DPC briefings, please use the 2013 template (see Appendix B: Briefing templates).

### Initiation

A range of people can ask for a briefing. These include the Premier, ministers, Director General or senior DPC officers. Your primary reader will likely be the Premier, the Director General, a deputy director general or an assistant director general, depending on the issue.

Other officers can also initiate briefings if they need approval for a particular action or wish to alert senior management about an issue.

## Research and consultation

When preparing your briefings, please make sure you:

- check previous files to see if the department has already commented on the issue
- consult within the department for any expertise you need, and make sure these officers agree with the final advice you give
- consult all relevant stakeholders, such as other departments, and discuss their views as part of your analysis
- review government and departmental policies that might be relevant, and consider potential risks or legal problems
- identify the resources needed to implement your recommendation and comment on their availability.

As you assess this information, you generally then need to recommend a course of action for the final reader to decide on.

## Timing and approval

The Premier's Office and Office of the Director General set deadlines for briefings. Some issues will be urgent.

As it is essential that these deadlines are met, you should allow enough time to:

- prepare the briefing, consulting with stakeholders where needed
- have the briefing approved
- ensure the Premier or Director General can fully consider the briefing and seek more information if they want to.

Please note that the responsible director, and in some circumstances the deputy director general, must approve all briefings before they are submitted.

You should always leave space at the end of the briefing so your readers can add comments.

## Principles

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### Make your advice transparent

The department must maintain an accurate and transparent record of advice given to the Premier and Director General, especially in briefings.

This advice may become open to public scrutiny so it is vital that you follow the correct approvals process.

When you are writing, try to make it clear who is responsible for different opinions and information. Use the active voice, wherever possible:

- ✓ DPC proposes
- ✗ It is proposed that

 For more on active voice, see [Make your verbs clear and active](#).



## Analyse the issue, bearing in mind government policy

All briefings must present a logical analysis of what is happening and what should happen.

Readers need to be confident that your briefing:

- analyses the issue, including any risks, accurately and comprehensively
- recommends the best course of action
- is supported by clear reasons and evidence
- is strategic and in line with government policy
- is sensitive to both political developments and community interests.

This can be difficult, especially when an issue is complex. So when you are writing, carefully assess what information is essential for your reader to be able to make a decision. Identify the heart of the issue and work out the best way to proceed.

If possible, limit your briefing to one or two pages. Remember that your readers are likely to see many briefings every day. Succinct analysis will help them to understand your recommendations and respond to the briefing quickly.

However, it is important that you do not leave out vital information and that you address any ambiguities or tensions. The reader should not be left in any doubt about why you have recommended an option.

## Format your briefing in the template styles

The template sets the formatting for briefings. Please use the built-in styles and do not adjust the page layout in any way. Do not, for instance, make the font or margins smaller to fit more text on the page.


Body text should be Arial, 11 point. Top and bottom margins are 2 cm. Left and right margins are 2.5 cm. Please also make sure you print your briefings on the correct paper stock:

Briefing type	Paper stock
Premier	A4 pink (Staples product 86826311)
Director General	A4 yellow (Reflex product 62604608)
Other	A4 standard white
Attachments	A4 standard white

Please print your briefings in black and white rather than colour.

## Write in plain English

Although briefings often deal with complex matters, always use plain English. This means having a clear core message and reasoning. It also means using the simplest language possible to convey that content. Plain English will make your writing persuasive and effective.

 For more information, see [Chapter 3 Plain English](#). Also refer to [Chapter 4 Style](#), for up-to-date advice on punctuation, grammar and language.

All DPC staff must follow this guide so our documents are consistent and free from errors.

Remember to proofread your briefing before finalising it.

## Parts of the briefing

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 In most cases, please use the 2013 briefing template (see Appendix B: Briefing templates).

Note that each part of the briefing template calls for specific content. Please follow this guidance to make sure your reader can find the information they need quickly and easily.

The template has a ‘telescoping’ structure, in line with plain English best practice, which foregrounds the key information.

### Title

Capture the subject in a short title. Use key words that will succinctly convey what the briefing is about. Retype this title in the header on the second page.

### Topic

Outline the issue in one or two sentences and no more than three lines. Be clear and concise, focusing on the core of the issue. Limit the amount of detail you give here.

### Analysis

Summarise DPC’s conclusions about the issue using one or two sentences at most. Capture the key reasons that support your recommendation, which you will expand on below.

### Recommendations

Outline the action/s you are seeking to have approved. If you have more than one recommendation, use a numbered list.

Start each recommendation with the word ‘Approve’, ‘Oppose’, ‘Note’ or ‘Sign’. Avoid other variations.

You will need to copy your recommendations so they also appear under the second ‘Recommendations’ heading, just before the approvals box.

If your briefing is **for information** only, the template will not include this heading. Do not add it. If you need to make a recommendation, you should use the template **for approval** instead.

Equally, if you are not recommending any action and want your reader to simply ‘note’ your advice, you should use the template **for information**.

All briefings referred **for approval** must include a recommendation.

### Key reasons

This section should consist mostly of analysis (conclusions, opinion, reasons, evidence, explanation) rather than description (context, process, history, consultation). Place the traditional background narrative in the ‘Background’ section.

## Structure by reasoning

Structure this section by the reasoning that supports your recommendation rather than by the narrative of your research. Consider why the Premier or Director General should support the recommendation. The reasons would follow a 'because...' statement. Use these to structure your content.

As part of your reasoning, consider how the recommendation relates to NSW 2021 objectives.

## Use analytical headings to capture each reason

Summarise each reason in the subheadings of this section. The text under each heading will then provide the evidence supporting each reason, along with any concessions.

This approach means the Premier or Director General can read the topic, the analysis and the recommendation above, then scan the headings to overview the main points of the argument. They can navigate effectively to the details they need in priority order when making a decision.

## Keep the brief short and to the point

Consider your reader's needs rather than the level of detail you may prefer. How much will the Premier or Director General really need to understand and act on your recommendations?

As a guide, write so that the 'Key reasons' section does not go over the first page.

## Supporting analysis

If the topic calls for more extensive analysis, you should cover the most important points under the 'Key reasons' heading, and include the rest in this section.

You must always include the 'Financial impact' and 'Options' subheadings. You can delete 'Further reasons' if you have covered everything on the first page.

## Further reasons

Include this subheading where you need to detail some additional reasons and evidence supporting your recommendation. But do not repeat information from the first page.

## Financial impact

Discuss the resource implications of your recommendations. These might include an impact at the whole-of-government level, or to DPC's own budget, or to another cluster or agency.

Outline the approval process that would be needed, such as the Expenditure Review Committee, and include a timeline for that consideration.

## Options

Summarise the options you have considered, starting with the recommended option. Briefly explain why you have rejected other options. Consider the risks involved in each option.

Be succinct in your summary and include more detailed analysis in attachments if needed.

## Consultation

Summarise the organisations or divisions you have consulted, and their responses. Do not include your own group. If anyone disagreed with your recommendation, make sure you have addressed their concerns in the 'Key reasons' or 'Supporting analysis' section.

## Approvals box

A senior departmental officer must approve the content and accuracy of your briefing.

The approvals box generally includes space for the following names and signatures:

- Branch Head
- Deputy Director General
- Director General
- Premier.

If there is a financial impact on the DPC Cluster, include the advice and signature of the Chief Financial Officer in this box. Otherwise you can delete that row of the approvals box.

## Background

The 'Background' section should summarise the context if required. This section should contain descriptive content rather than analysis, such as:

- details of any correspondence (dates, addresses, copies)
- previous advice if this is a supplementary brief
- the policy or legal context.

If there is a simple chronology, consider using a short table to summarise the history.

## Attachments

You can use attachments (labelled consecutively Attachment A, Attachment B and so on) to add further background or evidence. But make sure you capture all the key information in the brief itself. Attachments will usually be previous briefs or copies of signed letters.

List them under this heading of the briefing, with a concise title.

## Contact information

There are two different footers, on the first and second pages, that give reference information about the document itself. Make sure you complete these fields:

- Objective reference number
- date due to Premier or Director General and date for approval
- contact name, extension and title
- date of writing.

 Example briefings using the templates are available from the BCU section of the DPC intranet.

## Checklist for briefings

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- You have used the right template and followed its instructions.
- Your briefing has a clear core message and focus.
- Your briefing is impartial and balanced.
- The action you recommend is appropriate and meaningful.
- Clear reasons and evidence support your recommendation.
- You have identified the different options that apply, and responded to risks.
- Any background gives useful context rather than the story of your research.
- Your advice supports government objectives and departmental policy.
- You have addressed any stakeholder expectations or strategic and political implications.
- You have used plain English expression, including short, simple and active sentences.
- Your text avoids jargon, repetition and obscure abbreviations.
- The content is accurate and free from errors.
- You would feel comfortable if your briefing faced public scrutiny.
- You have met your deadline, and allowed your reader enough time to consider the issue.

## 2 Correspondence

The quality of correspondence reveals the quality of an organisation. Sending prompt, clear and accurate replies communicates that we are an efficient and responsive organisation. If we send an evasive and bureaucratic response, we will seem defensive and disorganised.

People or community and industry groups write to the Premier, Director General and the department about many issues. Most letters and emails:

- express views about government policy
- seek information
- ask for the Premier's help to solve a problem.

We also receive correspondence from other government organisations, members of Parliament and ministers, or following on from Community Cabinet meetings.

This chapter gives guidance on how to write successful correspondence by:

- outlining the **process** you should follow
- highlighting the key **principles** that will make your letters more effective
- discussing **style** requirements specific to correspondence.

### Process

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The department registers and tracks correspondence in Objective, which is part of our electronic document and records management (EDRM) system.

### Timing

Our recommended time frame for completing responses to ministers, Members of Parliament and members of the public is **20 working days** from the day the department receives a letter or email.

However, it is not always possible to meet this time frame, especially if we need to seek information elsewhere. In these cases, we must send an interim letter to the correspondent.

For urgent matters, the Premier's Office or the Office of the Director General may specify an earlier time frame.

### Approval

Branches will draft briefings and responses and then submit them for approval and signature to one of the following:


- a director
- a deputy director general
- the Director General
- the Premier.

Authors, directors and deputy directors general must ensure that briefings and responses:

- are accurate and comprehensive
- address all industrial, financial and policy issues.

For all correspondence that requires approval from the Premier or Director General, use the briefing template for approval.

 See Chapter 1 Briefings.

 For how to assemble the documents when you submit them, see Appendix C: Correspondence documents.

## Privacy and confidentiality

By law, staff from all NSW Government agencies must follow the information protection principles that deal with all aspects of information handling. This includes collection, storage, security, use and disclosure.

You should not release people's private details or any internal working documents without referring to departmental policies and procedures and obtaining proper authorisation.

 See 'what are the information protection principles?' on the Information and Privacy Commission website.

## Difficult or repeat correspondents

All correspondents enjoy the right to have their concerns considered on merit. A few correspondents continue to raise the same issues or express dissatisfaction with responses or outcomes of investigations without raising any new information.

If a correspondent continues to write without raising new issues, prepare a briefing that outlines the history of correspondence. Then seek approval from the relevant deputy director general or the Director, BCU, to send no further replies. Include copies of all letters and responses, and any other information showing that no new issues have been raised and no further action can be taken. BCU keeps a register and a copy of these briefs.

With your briefing, include a draft letter that explains that the department will not respond further unless the correspondent gives new information.

## Principles

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### Concentrate on facts and resolutions

When preparing correspondence, you should remember that you are writing for the Premier or the Director General. You are asking that person to accept the background information and analysis in your briefing and to approve your draft response.

In the **response**, concentrate on factual statements, accurate information and resolution. In the **briefing**, you will need to explain why you are recommending the resolution.

If you promise that something will happen as a result of the correspondent's letter, make sure there are processes in place to ensure it will happen. If possible, give a time frame.

## Consider each letter or email carefully

Understand each letter or email before you decide on the best response:

- What concerns does the correspondent raise?
- What outcomes do they want?
- What are the key points they need to understand?
- How much do they already know about the subject?
- What communication has there been previously?
- Does the person have special needs in the way you communicate with them?

Ensure your draft response addresses all the issues raised in the letter or email.

If appropriate and only if approved by a senior manager, contact the writer of the letter or email to clarify issues raised or to resolve the matter. A phone call or meeting may produce a more positive result sooner.

## Ensure the response reflects government policy

Departmental officers who have direct knowledge of the issues raised in the correspondence should prepare the response.

Write the response so it clearly explains the position of the NSW Government or the department, ensuring it is consistent with those policies. Where needed, concisely outline the actions the department has taken. Ensure the response is sensitive to political developments and community attitudes.

In the briefing, you can refer to any anticipated changes in policy.

If a meeting or action that might affect the contents of a response is scheduled, it is best to provide an interim response rather than give out-of-date information.

Be aware that all correspondence and briefings are subject to the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPA) and the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*. A court can also subpoena briefings and responses.

## Structure the response for clarity

As the sequence of your writing affects whether people will understand your message when they first read it, follow these tips:

- Start by outlining the purpose of the letter, usually in one paragraph.
- State the result or conclusion as early as possible.
- Follow this with a succinct summary of your reasoning or explanation.
- Provide any essential background, context or history.
- Close with contact details.

Make your response brief and to the point, excluding too much detail about a situation. Provide a simple explanation of the circumstances and focus on a positive resolution. Avoid repeating what the writer already knows or has outlined in their correspondence and do not include any background information unless it is vital.

Make briefings that accompany correspondence concise and factual, using DPC's briefing template.

 For the briefing template for approval, see [Appendix B: Briefing templates](#).



## Format your briefing and letter using template styles

The templates set the formatting for correspondence documents and letters. Please use the built-in styles for margins, headings, bullet list styles, fonts and spacing. Do not adjust the page layout, for instance, to make the font or margins smaller to fit more text on the page.

**Briefings** for the Premier should be printed on pink paper, or for the Director General, on yellow paper. All other briefings should be printed on standard white paper.

**Letter templates** are available from the BCU section of the DPC intranet already formatted, and include the Premier's and department's letterheads.

Do not include any document tracking reference other than the Objective reference number anywhere in a letter, including the footer.

### Use consistent spacing

In letters, insert a minimum of:

- two lines between the letterhead and the reference number
- three lines between the reference number and the address block
- three lines between the address block and the salutation
- one line between the final sentence and 'Yours sincerely'
- four lines between 'Yours sincerely' and the Premier's or the Director General's name.

If your letter is short, insert line breaks after the address block to centre it vertically.

### Keep your letter to one page if possible

If just the signature block appears on the second page, try rewriting the text to remove any padding, repetition or unnecessary information. Do not change the margins, as they have been set so the address block is clearly seen in envelope windows.

If the letter is still too long, try spacing it over two pages. Make sure that there is at least one paragraph on the second page before the signature block. Avoid splitting a paragraph over two pages.

Only use **page numbers** if the letter is longer than two pages. Centre the page number at the bottom of the second and further pages, with no dashes on either side. Place the number in the footer a minimum of two spaces below the text.

 For templates, see Appendix C: Correspondence documents.

## Parts of the letter: style issues

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Using the correct letter template is the first step to creating consistent, high quality letters. The guidelines below will help you set out each section in department style.

### Address block

#### Members of the public

For **members of the public**, use their title, given name and family name. If the full name is not known, use initials. Follow with the full address.

Avoid punctuation (such as commas and full stops) in the address block. Put two spaces between the suburb and state, and state and postcode.

- ✓ Mr F Smith  
12/250 Fairfield Highway  
FAIRSTONE NSW 2999

If the correspondent's **gender** is unclear, use the abbreviation M/s.

- ✓ M/s F Smith

If **more than one person** is writing, use 'and', not the ampersand (&).

- ✓ Mr J F and Mrs P Jones

Where there are **two or more signatories** to a letter representing different organisations, reply to each person in a separate letter. Where there is a list of signatories, reply to the first signatory on the list.

 For advice on postnominals, see [Style/People, government and organisations/Position titles](#).

#### Members of Parliament and ministers

For a **Member of Parliament**, use the post office box number if one is given. Otherwise use the office street address.

- ✓ Mr J Jones MP  
Member for Jonesville  
PO Box 123  
JONESVILLE NSW 2888


For a minister writing on ministerial matters, use the office address.

- ✓ The Hon J P Smith MP  
Minister for the Environment (use the full ministerial title)  
Level 60 GMT  
1 Farrer Place  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

For a minister writing on electorate business, use the electorate address.

When writing to ministers in their capacity as local MP, do not use the ministerial title.

- ✓ The Hon J P Smith MP  
Member for Smithville  
PO Box 123  
SMITHVILLE NSW 2999

 For the addresses and phone numbers of state ministers and Members of Parliament, see [www.parliament.nsw.gov.au](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au).

The table below shows how to write the address for special cases.

Premier of any state or territory	Speaker of the Legislative Assembly	President of the Legislative Council
The Hon B F Jones MP Premier Minister for Citizenship Level 1 GMT 1 Farrer Place SYDNEY NSW 2000	The Hon B Smith MP Speaker Legislative Assembly Parliament House Macquarie Street SYDNEY NSW 2000	The Hon D Jones MLC President Legislative Council Parliament House Macquarie Street SYDNEY NSW 2000

### Federal Members of Parliament and ministers

Write the addresses of federal government ministers and federal members of Parliament in the same way as state members of Parliament.

For a minister who is also a senator, use this format:

- ✓ Senator the Hon R F Brown  
Minister for the Environment  
PO Box 100  
CANBERRA NSW 2600

 For the addresses and phone numbers of federal ministers and Members of Parliament, see [www.australia.gov.au/directories](http://www.australia.gov.au/directories).

## Salutation

### Members of the public

Use **Dear** plus title and family name.

- ✓ Dear Mr ...
- ✓ Dear Mrs ...
- ✓ Dear Ms ...
- ✓ Dear M/s ...

When a **female correspondent** does not indicate her title, the reply should address her as 'Dear Ms ...'

However, if the person has a different title, use it instead.

- ✓ Dear Dr ...
- ✓ Dear Professor ...
- ✓ Dear Councillor ...

Except for **Dr**, do not abbreviate these other titles.

## Members of Parliament and ministers

The following table shows examples of salutations.

Position	Salutation
Prime Minister	Dear Prime Minister
Premier of any state or territory	Dear Premier
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly	Dear Mr .../Dear Ms ...
President of the Legislative Council	Dear Mr .../Dear Ms ...
Attorney General	Dear Attorney
Treasurer	Dear Treasurer
Other minister from state or federal government	Dear Minister
Federal minister who is a senator	Dear Senator
Federal or state Member of Parliament who is a medical practitioner or has a PhD	Dear Dr ...
MPs who are not ministers	Dear Mr .../Dear Ms ... (etc.)

Some Members of the Opposition have titles such as 'Shadow Minister for Education'. You do not need to use these titles in responses.

## Opening paragraph

### Replying to a member of the public

When replying to a letter from a **member of the public**, begin with thank you.

- ✓ Thank you for your letter/email about ...

If the correspondent has written a letter of complaint, use a more formal opening paragraph:

- ✓ I am writing about your letter/email about ...

Where necessary, give the date of the letter or email.

- ✓ I am writing about your letters of 1 January and 25 January 2013 about ...

### Replying to a letter addressed to a minister

When responding to a letter addressed to a minister and referred to DPC for direct reply, use this form to open:

- ✓ I am writing about your letter to the Hon J P Smith MP, Minister for the Environment, about ... Your letter has been referred to me/the Premier/Director General for reply.

You do not need to say that the minister has asked the Premier or Director General to reply, as the correspondent will have been advised by the minister in an acknowledgement letter.

If the Premier or Director General does not have firsthand knowledge of the issue that the correspondent has raised, give the source for the advice you are providing.

- ✓ Ms Jones, Director, Office of Special Services, advises that ...

In departmental replies, initially use a noun rather than a pronoun to show clearly who is addressing the issues.

- ✓ The department is investigating ...
- ✗ We are investigating ...

But in later paragraphs, you can often use the pronoun 'we' to humanise the tone and promote readability.

If the **Director General** is responding on behalf of the **Premier**, use the following opening paragraph:

- ✓ Thank you for your representations to the Premier, the Hon Peter Smith MP, on behalf of ... , about ... . The Premier has asked that I reply on his/her behalf.

### Replying to a Member of Parliament

When responding to a letter from a **Member of Parliament** written on behalf of a **constituent**, include the original correspondent's full name (or initial) and address:

- ✓ Thank you for your representations on behalf of Mr Smith, 6 Oak Street, Harbourville NSW 2222. Mr Smith is concerned that ...

When responding to a letter from a **Member of Parliament** written on behalf of an **organisation**, use:

- ✓ Thank you for your representations on behalf of Mr J Smith, President (or other position), Concerned Citizens Association, PO Box 5, Harbourville NSW 2222. These concerned ...

If representations are received from more than one Member of Parliament on a particular matter, prepare a full reply for each Member.

### Apologies and delays

Where circumstances warrant it, we should apologise for and acknowledge oversights or errors by the department. Phrases you can use include:

- ✓ I apologise
- ✓ I regret

In most cases, a delayed response has been caused by a lengthy enquiry or investigation, which you should refer to in the letter.

- ✓ The Premier/Director General regrets the delay in replying to you. The department needed to liaise with several [government agencies/areas] to obtain all the information about the matter.

Occasionally, the Premier/Director General may regret that a response to a letter has taken an unacceptable time. In these cases, keep the wording short.

- ✓ I regret the delay in responding.
- ✓ I am sorry for the delay in replying.

### Condolences

Sometimes correspondents write about sad or distressing situations that require a tactful and sensitive reply, for example the death of a relative or friend. Keep condolences brief.


- ✓ Please accept my condolences for your sad loss.
- ✓ I wish to extend my condolences to you and your family for your sad loss.

## Body of the letter

In the body of letter, follow the principles of plain English, remembering to focus on and highlight key points, and only include details when they are necessary. Your language should be concise, active and positive, and your tone suited to your audience.

Follow these tips:

- Start a paragraph for each new idea (do not indent paragraphs).
- Get to the main point as soon as possible in the letter.
- If there are many topics to cover, use headings to help them navigate.
- Keep sentences to an average length of 15 to 20 words.
- Check you are using short words, and avoid officialese, jargon and redundancies.
- Use bullet points for lists, following DPC expression and punctuation style.

 For more on plain English, see Chapter 3 Plain English.

 For more on structure and content, see Principles.

 For more on general style, see Chapter 4 Style.

## Closing paragraph

The tone of the closing paragraph is very important.

To complete a letter, generally give a contact so that correspondents can follow up.

- ✓ If you would like to discuss this matter further/need further information, please contact Mr Brown, Principal Policy Officer, Office of Special Services, on (02) 9228 ... or email ...

For letters from Members of Parliament on behalf of a constituent or organisation, always give contact details.

- ✓ If Ms Marsh needs further information, please ask her to contact Jennifer Brown, Principal Policy Officer, Office of Special Services, on (02) 9228 ...

If you are providing information to another premier or minister for use by another department, always give contact details.

- ✓ If your department/the Department of ... would like to discuss this information or need more details, the best contact in the Department of Premier and Cabinet is Dr S Ash, Director, [Branch], on (02) 9228 ... or email ...

Add a polite and positive closing sentence where you can.

- ✓ Thank you for your interest and support in this matter.
- ✓ Thank you for taking the time to write to me.
- ✓ I hope this information clarifies the situation for you.

## Well wishes

Sometimes correspondents write about their own plans or endeavours. In these cases, you can respond with an acknowledgement or encouragement.

- ✓ I wish you every success in your studies and future endeavours.
- ✓ I wish you and XYZ organisation every success with the program.
- ✓ I wish you well in your chosen profession.

## Signature block

The signature block at the end of the letter is in the lower left hand corner. Use the template style, left justified and in the preferred font.

Do not put a comma after **Yours sincerely**.

Examples include:

Yours sincerely

Yours sincerely

Yours sincerely

(four lines)

(four lines)

(four lines)

**(Premier's name in bold)**  
Premier

(DG's name – not bold)  
Director General

(DDG's name – not bold)  
**Deputy Director General**

## Special cases

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### Coordinated replies

When information is needed from several branches for a draft response, the lead branch will generally coordinate information gathering and then prepare the response.

### Invitations and meeting requests

The Premier and Director General receive many invitations and meeting requests from organisations and people. The Premier's Office handles all invitations for the Premier.

### Party-political content

The Premier's Office is responsible for drafting party-political statements and correspondence.

### Interim letters

Generally, the branch responsible prepares an interim letter when a substantive reply cannot be delivered in the nominated time frame. For the Premier, they are typically sent with the signature of the Premier's Private Staff; for the Director General, with the signature of the Director, BCU. Letters are printed on the Premier's or the department's letterhead.

We use interim letters when:

- we need more time to make enquiries
- the matter is very complex
- there are other reasons for not meeting the response deadlines.

## Campaign letters

Standard letters are prepared when there has been a campaign of letters or emails to the Premier on the same issue. Either the Premier's Office or the relevant division or branch prepares the standard response. BCU processes responses to campaign correspondence using the approved standard reply.

If information for a standard reply changes, please notify BCU immediately.

## Referral letters

Much of the correspondence received by the Premier is referred to another minister or agency.

We use referral letters when the correspondence is about issues that fall clearly within the responsibility of other ministers and do not affect the government as a whole, or where the government's policy has been clearly determined.

BCU identifies and redirects correspondence that is the responsibility of another state or federal minister or jurisdiction. Where this is not possible, BCU will consult with a branch to determine the appropriate minister or government agency.

## Checklist for letters

- You have considered who will read this letter.
- You have used the right template and presented your letter well.
- The letter uses the template styles (12 point Arial, left justified).
- The address, titles and salutation are correct, with no punctuation.
- The outcome or conclusion is stated at the beginning of the letter.
- The letter addresses the correspondent's question or concerns.
- The body of the letter is accurate, concise and user friendly.
- If appropriate, you have included a contact name at the end.
- After 'Yours sincerely', there are four lines before the signatory's name.
- You would be satisfied if you received this letter.



## 3 Plain English

A document is in plain English if the structure, design and expression are so clear that the intended audience can readily find what they need, understand what they find and act on that information.

Plain English saves readers time and effort and avoids misunderstanding or the need for clarification. It also shows the department as open and willing to help.

Plain English can also save the department time and money, by reducing:

- the time it takes to write a briefing or letter
- management time reviewing a text
- the number of times documents are returned for correction
- the number of follow-up questions or correspondence.

This chapter gives guidance on how to write in plain English by:

- outlining key **principles of structure, content and expression** you should follow
- listing some **words and phrases to avoid**, with plain English alternatives.

### Principles

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#### Write for your audience

In preparing documents, first consider your different readers. Your primary audiences for briefings are the Premier, Director General or deputy directors general. But others will read the document through the approval process, and the intended recipient may be external to the department, such as members of the public, members of Parliament, the staff of other departments or stakeholder organisations.

All readers need to quickly find and understand information in our documents. Stick to the point and do not use complex terms or jargon where simple, everyday words will do.

Understanding your readers will help you to choose the best writing style and word choice. Ask yourself:

- What education, experience and attitude will readers bring?
- What do my readers need from the document?
- What do I want my readers to do in response?
- Will my readers easily understand what I am writing?

#### Have a clear core message and focus

With your audience in mind, decide what your purpose and main message is for those readers. You can define this by thinking about the topic, any action you are recommending in response to the topic, and the reasoning or analysis that justifies that action.

Make sure you convey this core message as early as you can, as that will help your readers comprehend the implications of the text as they read. Also think about the core message when deciding how much detail you should include. Limit it to what your readers **really** need to know to understand the core message.

## Plan your structure

Planning is important to communicating well. Think of how best to structure a document so that the information flow is logical. The core message or key points you want to convey should be prominent.

A **Telescoping** structure is often the most reader-friendly approach, as it arranges information in descending order of value. The briefing templates follow this structure, and will help you to present information to your reader efficiently. The advice in this guide for correspondence also follows the telescoping model.

By contrast, too many government documents use a **Narrative** structure, which sequences information by the chronology of the research process. This is logical, but it is not reader friendly. It tends to bury the core message and places more of the key information toward the end of the text. It is prone to repetition and readers have to work harder at sifting the core message from the detail.

## Use clear reasoning

Briefings and correspondence will most often need to persuade. This means securing support for a recommendation or your conclusions.

Be sure that you test your recommendations by thinking about the reasons that support them and the evidence that supports each reason. Try to structure the sections within your documents by the reasoning rather than by the chronology of your research. Don't start at the background and 'tell the story'. Start with your conclusion and justify it with clear reasons, each backed by evidence.

## Consider document design

Increasingly, the layout of a document is becoming just as important as the words on the page. While the font and overall page layout for briefings and correspondence is set by the templates, there are ways you can make your text easier to read using visual devices such as bullet lists, headings and tables.

In particular, turn to visual elements when you have a lot of descriptive information in part of a text. When you need to outline a chronology of events, for example, use a table format rather than write it out in paragraph form.

## Choose the right tone

Considering your reader will also help you choose the right tone. Our writing should vary in tone between 'official', and 'formal yet friendly'.

An official tone, which will suit most briefings, is neutral and direct, but not overly formal. Short sentences, active verbs and less complex vocabulary will establish a suitable tone.

Correspondence for the public should use a more personal tone to engage the reader. Make your letters clear, courteous and responsive, without being casual or overly familiar. Use 'welcome words' like **please** and **thank you**, and personal pronouns like **you**. As long as the context makes the meaning clear, you can also use **we** instead of **the department**.

Avoid condescension, a negative or defensive attitude, or suggestions of fault, by using a neutral tone to discuss the issues.

 For more on tone, see Plain English Foundation (2013) and *Style Manual* (2002, p. 51).

## Keep words and phrases short and simple

Your writing should be concise and clear, avoiding technical terms and jargon.

Always use the best word to suit your purpose, but if you have a choice, use a short, plain word in place of a longer and more complex one. Complicated words may obscure your meaning, and may not be understood by people without specialist knowledge, or for whom English is their second language.

After drafting a letter or briefing, put yourself in the position of the recipient and consider whether they would find it clear and easy to read. If you have to read a paragraph or the whole document more than once to understand it, you should simplify it.

 For ways to simplify words and phrases, see [Language to avoid](#).

## Make your verbs clear and active

### Active voice

Use the **active voice** wherever possible as it shows who is doing what and makes text sound more positive. Avoid overusing the **passive voice** as it rarely states who is responsible and makes documents sound impersonal and indirect.

Active voice takes the form of 'A **does** B' while passive voice is 'B **is done** (by A)'.

- ✓ **Active:** I **have raised** this issue with the Minister for ...
- ✗ **Passive:** The issue **has been raised** with the Minister for ... (by whom?)

Aim for less than 20% of your verbs to be in passive voice.

Also watch for 'hidden verbs', which express the action in a noun. When you can restore these to active verbs, actions become clearer and sentences shorter.

- ✓ **Active:** The Premier agreed to **meet** the delegation.
- ✗ **Hidden:** The Premier agreed to **hold a meeting** with the delegation

Active verbs make for shorter, more energetic sentences.

- ✓ **Active:** The director **approved** the new procedures.
- ✗ **Passive:** The new procedures **have been approved** by the director.
- ✗ **Hidden:** The director **has given approval for** the new procedures.

### Simple past tense

Writing can be in past, present or future tense. Write in a consistent tense, unless what you are writing about spans more than one period. For example, you will usually use future tense to write about an event still to happen, and past tense when referring to something that already has.

For departmental correspondence, however, generally use simple past tense, as it is straightforward and maintains consistency.

- ✓ The department **reviewed** ...
- ✓ The department **tried** to ...
- ✗ The department **has investigated** these claims and **has found** that ...

Simple past tense uses a single word, often ending in 'ed', to describe the action.

## Use short, clutter-free sentences

While sentences vary in length, aim for them to average no more than 20 words. Individual sentences should not generally be more than 35 words, unless they involve a bullet list. If your sentences are longer than that, see where you can break them into smaller parts, and remove any clutter in the expression.

Tell your readers what they want to know without wasting words, repeating ideas or including unnecessary detail.

- ✓ The department is examining the options and will report to the Premier on its preferred option.
- ✗ The department is currently undertaking an examination of the possible options and is intending to report back to the Premier on the preferred option considered feasible from the examination.


 For examples of officialese, see [Language to avoid](#).

## Be correct and consistent

Proofread a draft briefing or letter before submitting it, or ask a colleague to check it. A carefully edited document saves time for every future reviewer and reader. It wastes time when a poorly edited letter is returned from the Premier or Director General to correct a simple mistake in spelling, punctuation or grammar.

 Chapter 5 sets out common issues of style so the department has a consistent approach.

Use your computer's spell check program, but check first that its preferred spelling is set to **English/Australian**. Also read the text carefully in case the spell check program has accepted as accurate a word that is incorrect in your context.

 Refer to the *Macquarie Dictionary* if this guide does not give a preferred spelling. The *Style Manual for authors, editors and printers* is the standard government reference on style and covers issues beyond this guide.

## Language to avoid

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### Long words instead of short ones

For clarity and impact, substitute short words or phrases where you can.

Instead of ...	Use ...
commence	begin, start
consequently	so
deleterious	harmful
discontinue/terminate	stop, end, finish
endeavour	try
numerous	many, several
optimum	best
progeny	children

## Bureaucratic language (officialese)

Bureaucratic phrases usually add nothing to a reply and make information less accessible to the reader.

Instead of ...	Use ...
as you are no doubt aware	[avoid]
as you may be aware	[avoid]
as you would understand	[avoid]
attempting to redress	is redressing (be positive)
due to the fact that	because
for the purpose of	for
give due consideration to	consider
in due course	[avoid]
in the first instance	firstly
in the event that	if
in the course of	while/during
in order to	to
is underway	has begun, has started
necessitated	required
with respect to	about

## Technical language and jargon

Where you can, avoid technical language. Try to use straightforward words to explain complex terms and ideas.

Jargon may make sense to you because of your training or work, but it will often be meaningless to the person who receives your letter.

If you cannot avoid jargon, enclose the word or phrase in single quotation marks when you first use it and then give an explanation directly after.

This term ...	May mean this ...
interface (noun)	the point where two systems interact, e.g. in computing, a border, a boundary
interface (verb)	to communicate, to exchange ideas with
paradigm	a framework of ideas, a concept, a theory
parameter	a variable quality, factor, constraint
socio-economic	social and economic considerations

## Redundancies

Avoid words or phrases that say the same thing twice.

Instead of ...	Use ...
a number of examples	examples
actively pursuing	pursuing
appointed to the post of	appointed to
classified in groups	classified
current status	status
currently investigating	investigating
final completion	completion
future directions	directions
general public	public
in the process of addressing	addressing
new initiatives	initiatives
period of time	period
review again	review

## Outdated words

Avoid words or expressions that sound old-fashioned, insincere or patronising.

Instead of ...	Use ...
amongst	among
moreover	as well, also
nevertheless	but, however
nonetheless	although, despite
notwithstanding	although, despite
regrettably	[avoid]
thereby	[avoid]
whilst	while

## Poorly used words

### Etcetera

Avoid using **etcetera** (or **etc.**) as it is imprecise. Either list all the items in a group, or use a construction such as **including X, Y and Z**.

### Get and got

The verb **to get** is too colloquial for written communication.

- ✓ The department obtained the information.
- ✗ The department got the information.

### Myself, yourself

Do not use **myself**. You can generally simply use **me** or **I**.

- ✓ Please send the information to me.
- ✗ Please send the information to myself.
- ✓ The minister and I went to the meeting.
- ✗ The minister and myself went to the meeting.

Avoid **yourself** where you can use **you** instead.

- ✓ I will send a copy to you.
- ✗ I will send a copy to yourself.

## Checklist for plain English

- You have considered your readers' needs.
- The core message is clear, and given early in the text.
- You have removed unnecessary detail that would bury your main message.
- The logic supporting your conclusions is strong, including clear reasons and evidence.
- The text uses a telescoping structure rather than a narrative.
- You have thoughtfully used design elements, such as headings, tables and bullet lists.
- The tone is official, or formal yet friendly, depending on your audience.
- You have used short, familiar words wherever you can, avoiding officialese and jargon.
- Your verbs are active.
- Sentences average 15–20 words, and do not exceed 35 words.
- You have ruthlessly removed words and phrases that add little value.
- You have checked for errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.


# 4 Style

Our documents should always be professional. Following a consistent style means errors or variations will not distract the reader from the content. It will also save time when your draft is reviewed for approval.

This chapter covers most of the smaller style issues you will meet in briefings and letters. These are set out under seven headings:

- People, government and organisations
- Word use and spelling
- Acronyms and abbreviations
- Punctuation and capitals
- Lists and formatting
- Numbers and dates
- References, citations and quotations.

Please note it is not possible to explain all the complexities of English here, so the references and examples will not be comprehensive and you will at times need to exercise judgement.

 Refer to the *Macquarie Dictionary* if this guide does not give a preferred spelling. The *Style Manual for authors, editors and printers* is the standard government reference on style and covers issues beyond this guide.

## People, government and organisations

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### Inclusive (non-discriminatory) language

Avoid language that is culturally insensitive or likely to cause offence to groups in the community. Language that stereotypes or demeans, even unintentionally, works against government policy. Watch for expression that may exclude certain groups or make them appear invisible, insignificant or irrelevant.

Avoid any reference to ethnic background, age, sexuality, gender or a similar category, unless it is relevant to the subject of the letter.

### Avoid labelling

Do not refer to people who have a particular attribute (like a disability or a particular sexual orientation) by that attribute alone.

Instead of ...	Use ...
Aboriginals	Aboriginal people
aged persons/the aged	older people or elderly people
juveniles	young people, young offenders
the disabled	people with a disability
the handicapped	people with a disability



## Use neutral gender

Use language that is not gender-specific.

Instead of ...	Use ...
businessman	business executive
chairman	chairperson

## Capitals for proper nouns

Generally, using too many capitals puts distance between you and your readers. Capitals were more common in the age of the typewriter, which had few options for emphasising text. Research shows that using all capitals slows reading by up to 25%. And increasingly, we are using fewer capitals even for proper nouns in short titles.

In general, reserve capitals for:

- the names of people
- the full titles of organisations.

Use lower case for generic and plural forms of names and titles.

## Use capitals for names

- ✓ Mr Peter Forest
- ✓ the Reverend Jane Wood
- ✓ the Ministry of Health
- ✓ BHP Billiton

## Use capitals for formal full titles

Capitalise the names of people, and of organisations and positions when you refer to them by their **full title**. You will generally do this when you first refer to the person in a document.

- ✓ The Treasurer has commented on the report.
- ✓ We are pleased to welcome the President of Chile.
- ✓ We consulted the Strategic Policy and Coordination Group, and the Deputy Director General confirmed ...

## Use lower case for generic or plural terms

Do not capitalise names of job types, such as physiotherapist, director, nurse, cook, manager, nor of general types of programs or organisations.

- ✓ Ms Lime is a director of the company that manages human resources.
- ✓ She has been a member of the union since she started work.
- ✓ We are offering a work health and safety course.

When titles are used as plurals, they become general, and do not need capitals.

- ✓ Sales executives from every state attended the conference.
- ✓ Several directors general are meeting with chief executive officers from business.

Words used as adjectives are also general and use lower case.

- ✓ They sent their children to government schools.

### For second references, use capitals sparingly

When you have used a full title, try to avoid capitals in subsequent mentions by using:

- a pronoun
- a person's name
- a short form in lower case
- an acronym if it is well-known to your readers.

If the meaning is not clear from the context, using a capital is unlikely to clarify it.

- ✓ The Hon Henry Pine MP, Premier, met today with business representatives. He explained ...
- ✓ Jan Forest, Director General, Department of Attorney General and Justice, has asked us to comment. We have informed Ms Forest ...
- ✓ The Minister for Health is a supporter of this move. We have asked the minister to ...
- ✓ The Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Education and Communities have discussed the matter. DPC's position is ....
- ✗ Heads of the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Department of Education and Communities have discussed the matter. The Department's position is ....

### Government or government? State or state?

Use a capital for **government** and **state** only when the word is part of a full title.

- ✓ The Australian Government is a signatory to the treaty.
- ✓ The NSW Government issued a statement.
- ✓ Representatives from the state government attended.
- ✓ The government has yet to decide policy on this issue.

## Position titles

### Use a person's title in full at first reference

At first mention in a document, use the given name and family names, plus the job title.

- ✓ Councillor Peter Wood has raised the issue with Professor Jane Maple, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Indigenous Engagement.
- ✓ As the matter you raise is mainly the area of the Minister for Community Services, the Hon Maria Oakes MP, we are sending ...

Do not abbreviate terms like **Reverend**. The following abbreviations are acceptable.

Instead of ...	Use ...
Associate Professor	A/Professor
The Honourable	The Hon
Doctor	Dr

## Include honorifics in most cases

Generally, add postnominals such as awards and decorations, as they show the significance or position of the person. In letters, refer to the correspondent's own signature block for guidance on what to use.

There is no need to use academic qualifications or professional memberships, for example, BA, MA or CPA.

## Know the protocols for different state and federal houses

Ministers in both state and federal governments have the title **The Hon.**

Refer to a member of the NSW Legislative Assembly or the Australian House of Representatives as a Member of Parliament (MP).

A member of the Legislative Assembly may also use the term MLA.

A member of the NSW Legislative Council uses the initials MLC.

These initials follow any postnominals showing honours, rank or awards.

 See also [Correspondence/Parts of the letter: style issues](#).

## Government and other organisations

### Use the full and correct title for all bodies

Check that all documents use current names for other departments.

- ✓ NSW Ministry of Health
- ✗ the Health Department
- ✓ NSW Police Force
- ✗ the Police Department

Use **Australian Government** or, to contrast with our own or other state governments, **federal government**. Do not use 'Commonwealth'.

Write the name of any business as it does, keeping features like the ampersand (&) or a hyphenated word like 'Co-operative' as you find it. The organisation's website is a good place to check.

### Treat organisations as singular entities

Although you may sometimes write on behalf of DPC as 'we', use singular verbs to agree with the names of organisations.

- ✓ The department **is** happy to help.
- ✗ The Department of Education and Communities **have** requested a report.
- ✓ The committee **has** considered this matter.
- ✓ The association **has** a view on this.

## Word use and spelling

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### Preferred spelling

Some words have more than one possible spelling. Use the following:

- |              |              |                |
|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| ✓ appendixes | ✗ appendices | ✓ program      |
| ✓ jail       | ✗ gaol       | ✓ finalise     |
| ✓ realise    | ✓ organise   | ✓ organisation |

For other words, consult the *Macquarie Dictionary*. If there is more than one option, use the first one shown.

 See also [One word, two words or hyphenated?](#)

### Who, that or which?

These three words can introduce a clause that gives extra information.

Use **who** to refer to people, but use **that** and **which** for non-personal nouns.

- ✓ We must consult the people **who** are affected by the move.
- ✗ We must consult the people **that** are affected by the move.
- ✓ We must refer the issue to the committee **that** will deal with it.
- ✗ We must refer the issue to the committee **who** will deal with it.

Use **that** when a phrase defines what precedes it:

- ✓ Any organisation **that** does not comply with these conditions will be in breach of the law.

Reserve the use of **which** to introduce a clause of parenthetical information. This means that it can be removed from the sentence without changing the main meaning. Enclose this clause within commas (or introduce it with a comma and close with a full stop).

- ✓ The committee, **which** consisted of industry representatives, made recommendations.
- ✓ We recommend you refer the issue to the council, **which** has experience in this area.

### Singular and plural

Match a singular subject with a singular verb, a plural subject with a plural verb. The subject of the verb is the main noun, even if other words follow.

- ✓ The **operation** of specialist units **is** not in jeopardy.
- ✓ The **Premier**, as well as the Treasurer, **is** attending.
- ✓ Your **skill** and **effort** **are** appreciated.
- ✓ The **points** you raised **have** been considered.

If you are unsure whether a subject is singular or plural, recast the sentence.

- ✗ A **number** of objections **has** been raised.
- ✓ Several **objections** **have** been raised.

Treat the name of an organisation as a singular.

 See also [People, government and organisations](#).

Other plural forms that may cause confusion are:

Incorrect	Use ...
director generals	directors general
governor generals	governors general
attorney generals	attorneys general
persons	people

### Data singular or plural?

**Data** can be a plural form of the rarely used word **datum**. But in most cases it is a singular collective noun, like **information**.

- ✓ The **data has** proved difficult to obtain.

### Medium or media?

**Media** is a plural form of the rarely used word **medium**. Although sometimes used as a collective noun, generally use it as a plural.

- ✓ The **media have** reported the incident widely.

### Criterion or criteria?

**Criterion** is singular, **criteria** is plural.

### Phenomenon or phenomena?

**Phenomenon** is singular, **phenomena** is plural. But try to use another word, such as **event**.

### One word, two words or hyphenated?

Compound words are formed from combining two separate words, or a prefix and a word. Sometimes the parts are linked with a hyphen, but over time they move towards becoming a single word.

Hyphenation can also depend on word placement. If two closely linked words appear as an adjective before a noun, they may be hyphenated, but after a verb the same words do not need hyphenating.

- ✓ The program has created more than a thousand **part-time** jobs.
- ✓ Since the injury, he has only worked **part time**.

### Note DPC style for these words

Consult the *Macquarie Dictionary* if in doubt whether to use a hyphen, using the first option if there is more than one listed.

- |               |             |             |             |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| ✓ time frame  | BUT         |             |             |
| ✓ website     | ✓ email     | ✓ checklist | ✓ flowchart |
| ✓ benchmark   | ✓ outsource | ✓ database  | ✓ printout  |
| ✓ noticeboard | ✓ ensuite   |             |             |

Hyphenate these more complex compounds.

- ✓ cost-effective
- ✓ old-fashioned

Note that although we use **email**, we keep the hyphen in these other words.

- ✓ e-business
- ✓ e-commerce

Do not hyphenate the title of **Director General**.

### Do not hyphenate words beginning with 'co' or 'multi'

Generally treat words beginning with 'co' as one word.

- ✓ coordinate
- ✓ cooperate

However, if such a word occurs within an organisation's title, spell it as you find it.

- ✓ XYZ Credit Union Co-operative Ltd

Generally, spell other words formed with a prefix as one word.

- ✓ multidisciplinary
- ✓ multipurpose

## Commonly confused words

### Advise or advice?

**Advise** is a verb, while **advice** is a noun.

- ✓ Can you advise me of the fee?
- ✓ She has given good advice.

### Alternate or alternative?

**Alternate** can be a verb, noun or adjective. It has the sense of 'taking turns'.

- ✓ Day and night alternate.
- ✓ He is an alternate to the committee, authorised to take Mr Smith's place.
- ✓ The two states are hosting the convention in alternate years.

**Alternative** is a noun or adjective, with the sense of 'choice between two options'.

- ✓ An alternative to the bridge is to build a tunnel under the river.
- ✓ Alternative medicine for this condition is becoming more popular.

### Affect or effect?

**Affect** is a verb. Use it when you mean 'to influence' rather than 'to cause'.

- ✓ The heavy rains did not affect transport.

**Effect** can be a verb or a noun. Use it as a verb to mean 'to bring about' or 'to cause'.

- ✓ Unless we can effect change with a new approach, we should ....

More commonly, the word **effect** is a noun, meaning 'a result' or 'an impact'. It is often preceded by **a**, **any**, **the** or **no**. We also use it in phrases like **take effect** or **into effect**.

- ✓ The findings had no effect on the program, which comes into effect next year.

### Complementary or complimentary?

**Complementary** means 'completing'.

- ✓ The complementary strategies will ensure that all stakeholders are satisfied.

**Complimentary** means either 'politely flattering' or 'free'.

- ✓ The commissioner made several complimentary remarks.
- ✓ We will be issuing 50 complimentary tickets.

### Discrete or discreet?

**Discrete** is an adjective meaning 'distinct' or 'separate'.

- ✓ The work is in two discrete parts.

**Discreet** is also an adjective, meaning 'circumspect' or 'restrained'.

- ✓ Doctors need to be discreet.

### Disinterested or uninterested?

**Uninterested** means 'indifferent' or 'lacking interest'.

- ✓ The group seems uninterested in discussing productivity improvements.

**Disinterested** is sometimes used in the same way, but avoid this usage. Instead reserve the word to mean 'unbiased' or 'having no vested interest or gain'.

- ✓ His decision about the property is disinterested, as he has nothing to gain by its development.

### Enquiry or inquiry?

**Enquiry** is a noun meaning 'a question'. We generally use this in informal contexts.

- ✓ Thank you for your enquiry.

**Inquiry** is an alternative spelling, which we use for 'a formal investigation'.

- ✓ The commission is conducting an inquiry into the incident.

**Enquire** is a verb.

- ✓ The authority is enquiring into the incident.

### Licence or license?

**Licence** is a noun while **license** is a verb.

- ✓ His driver's licence was not suspended.
- ✓ The service is licensed for 29 children.

### Practice or practise?

**Practice** is a noun while **practise** is a verb.

- ✓ It will take staff some time to reach best practice.
- ✓ We should practise what we preach.

 See also **Numbers and dates** for how to use **fewer**, **less** and **over**.

## Acronyms and abbreviations

### Acronyms and initialisms

Acronyms and initialisms are words formed from the initial (or other) letters of a string of words. Acronyms can be pronounced as a word (TAFE), while initialisms are pronounced one letter at a time (IPC). Increasingly, both kinds are being referred to as acronyms.

#### Use acronyms sparingly and carefully

Acronyms familiar to readers, like NSW and COAG, can be useful. But too many make your briefing or letter less readable.

If you are going to use an acronym that is not very well known, place it in brackets following the first use of the full name.

- ✓ The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) states ...

Do not use full stops in acronyms.

Do not add an apostrophe to a plural acronym.

- ✓ There were 23 MPs present.

#### New South Wales or NSW?

In general, use the abbreviation **NSW** unless the full name is used in the organisation's name, for example, Ambulance Service of New South Wales.

### Short forms of reference

Refer to an organisation's name in full the first time you write it. You can then refer to it by using the key part of the name.

- ✓ The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority oversees child care issues. The authority advises ...

Legal documents use brackets and capital letters to define a term they will use later, but this is not necessary in briefings or letters.

- ✗ The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (the Authority) states ...

Treat positions and programs in the same way as organisation names, for example:

Use this at first ...	Then use this ...
the Chief Executive Officer	the CEO
the Department of Premier and Cabinet	the department (or DPC) (or Premier and Cabinet)
the Public Sector Management Program	the program
the Industrial Staff Union	the union
the Australian Friendly Association (AFA)	the AFA

 See also [People, government and organisations/Capitals](#) for proper nouns.



## e.g., i.e., & and etc.

### Avoid shortened forms in correspondence

In correspondence, use **for example** and **that is**, rather than the shortened forms of **e.g.** and **i.e.** Use the abbreviations where space is limited, such as in tables, illustrations and notes.

In briefings, you may use **e.g.** and **i.e.**.

Spell out **and**, unless the ampersand (**&**) is used in an organisation's title.

Do not use **etc.**, **etc** or **etcetera**. The word is imprecise, and can sound offhand.

 For more on etcetera, see [Language to avoid/Poorly used words](#).

## Punctuation and capitals

### Apostrophes

 For apostrophes as quotation marks, see [References, citations and quotations](#).

Apostrophes can indicate possession or the contraction of words.

Do not use an apostrophe just because a word ends in 's'. It may simply be plural.

- ✓ The PCs need to be replaced.

### Avoid contractions in briefings and correspondence

Contractions are an informal element, more suited to speech than writing.

Instead of ...	Use ...
don't	do not
can't	cannot
it's	it is
aren't	are not

### Use apostrophes to show possession

Use an apostrophe to show possession, whether for a singular or plural noun.

- ✓ Beatrice's sister (singular noun)
- ✓ nurses' entitlements (plural noun)

### Remember the apostrophe varies with singular and plural

For the possessive form of singular nouns, generally add an apostrophe, then 's'.

- ✓ the government's policies (one government)
- ✓ the teacher's car (one teacher)

For the possessive form of plural nouns, place the apostrophe after the 's'.

- ✓ the governments' policies (more than one government)
- ✓ the teachers' car (more than one teacher)

When a singular name happens to already end in 's', add an apostrophe but no extra 's'.

- ✓ James' books

When plural possessive nouns end in 's', also add an apostrophe, but no extra 's'.

- ✓ The governments' budgets were identical. (multiple governments)
- ✓ Students' clothing is expensive. (multiple students)

For irregular plural possessive nouns that do not end in 's', add an apostrophe, then 's'.

- ✓ the children's services
- ✓ a women's refuge

### Attach apostrophes to the end of compound titles and phrases

For the possessive forms of multi-word titles, add an apostrophe and 's' to the last word only.

- ✓ the Leader of the Opposition's stance
- ✓ the Director of Finance's records

Treat possessive phrases or compound words the same way.

- ✓ someone else's books
- ✓ the editor-in-chief's responsibilities

In cases of joint ownership or association, add the apostrophe and 's' to the second of the two 'owners'.

- ✓ his mother and father's legacy

Where the ownership is not joint, add an apostrophe and 's' to each name.

- ✓ his mother's and father's voices

### Australian placenames do not use apostrophes

Leave apostrophes out of all Australian placenames.

- ✓ Kellys Creek
- ✓ Logans Crossing
- ✓ Batemans Bay

### Its or it's?

Note that possessive **its** has no apostrophe. It is a pronoun like **his** or **their**.

- ✓ The organisation takes its role seriously.
- ✗ The organisation takes it's role seriously.

**It's** is a contraction of the words **it is**, with the apostrophe marking the missing letter. Do not use **it's** in briefings or correspondence.

## Brackets

Use round brackets (parentheses) to enclose words such as definitions, comments, clarification or citations that are not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

- ✓ The specialist court is being trialled in Sydney (Campbelltown, Parramatta and Penrith) and Dubbo.
- ✓ The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) will investigate this incident.

Do not overuse brackets as you can often include the information in the main text.

## Capital letters

Generally, capitals slow down the reader, so avoid overusing them.

Capital letters are used mostly for names and full official titles.

 See **People, government and organisations** for more on capitals for titles.

Use them also:

- to start a sentence
- for geographic names
- for days and months
- for trademarks.

### Note DPC style for these words

- ✓ internet
- ✓ intranet

### Use sentence case for headings and subheadings

In headings and subheadings, capitalise only the first letter of the first word, and the first letter of any word that you would capitalise in body text.

- ✓ Key reasons
- ✓ Electoral allowance for a Member of Parliament

## Colons and semicolons

### Introduce material with a colon

A **colon** (:) can introduce a series or list in a sentence.

- ✓ Three portfolios were presented: finance, health and education.

A colon is also used to start a bullet list.

- ✓ Every staff member should be familiar with the:
  - Code of Conduct and Ethics
  - Occupational Health and Safety Policy
  - Employment Equity and Diversity Policy.

After a clause, a colon may also introduce extra explanatory information.

- ✓ There were four car spaces: not enough for the party of officials.

### Divide material with a semicolon

**Semicolons** (;) are used to separate distinct ideas within a sentence. But for easier reading, especially in letters, use two shorter sentences instead of a long complex one.

Reserve the semicolon to separate phrases that already contain commas.

- ✓ Participants come from Benalla, Victoria; Wellington, NSW; and Longford, Tasmania.

## Commas

Commas are used mainly to avoid ambiguity or misunderstanding. You will commonly use them to separate fragments of a sentence.

For instance, you can use a comma to separate an introductory phrase from the clause that follows.

- ✓ In the first 18 months, the hospital population increased by 6.7 per cent.

Or you can separate an aside, or parenthetical element, from the rest of the sentence.

- ✓ The person, although young, showed great maturity.

You can also use commas to divide items in lists in a sentence. Do not put a comma before the final **and** in a list unless it is needed to clarify the sense.

- ✓ The suspect was tall, slim, fair and about 30 years old.
- ✓ The framework covers the critical areas of education, development, and health and safety.

### Avoid extending sentences with commas

In longer sentences, use a comma after a conjunction such as **but**, especially when the subject of each clause is different.

- ✓ We wrote to the organisation, but its director decided not to respond.

If you have used many commas in a sentence, check whether the sentence is too long. Consider breaking it into two or more shorter sentences, or using a bullet list if there are three or more similar items.

Do not substitute a dash for a comma. Rewrite the sentence so it needs less punctuation.

## Full stops and question marks

Full stops and question marks show the end of a sentence. In a paragraph, follow the punctuation mark with a **single** space.

Follow these rules when using full stops:

- Do not put a full stop at the end of a heading.
- Do not use full stops in acronyms.
- Put full stops after items in a bullet list that each read as a whole sentence.

Use question marks for queries, including in headings.

- ✓ Was the policy applied correctly?

 See also [Lists and formatting/Bullet lists](#).

## Hyphens and dashes

Distinguish a hyphen (-), which is used to join two words to make one, from the longer en dash (–) and em dash (—), which link words or parts of a sentence that remain distinct.

Do not use dashes in DPC briefings or correspondence, unless you need an en dash for a number span like a date range.

 See [Word use and spelling/One word, two words or hyphenated?](#)

## Lists and formatting

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### Bullet lists (dot points)

Use bulleted lists to help the reader quickly understand a series of three or more items, options or concepts. Well used, they make the meaning clearer and break up blocks of text.

In correspondence, use them more sparingly, but do not avoid them either. In briefings, do not use bulleted sentences as a substitute for paragraphs.

For items that have no set order, use **bullet lists**. Use **numbered lists** only to show items in priority or time order, or when you will need to cross-refer to items, such as 'Option 2'. Do not use letters at the start of each item.

If you have more than six to eight items, divide the list so readers can more easily follow it.

### Make list items follow from the introductory wording

If possible, put the words or phrases that are common to all items into the introductory phrase or sentence. All items should then begin with different words, where possible with the same grammatical form.

- ✓ The correspondent has sent many letters containing:
  - complaints about trains running late
  - questions about overcrowded buses
  - suggestions about improving transport services.

### Punctuate lists consistently

Introduce the list with a colon (:).

Do not use semicolons (;) or commas (,) after each point. Do not add **and** to the second last point. This standard changed in Australia in 2002, as the bullets and line spaces in bulleted lists now do the punctuating that semi-colons do in a standard sentence list.

### When list items are full sentences, use capitals and full stops for each point

If points on a list are full sentences, follow standard punctuation for each sentence.

- ✓ Every staff member should be familiar with our key HR policies:
  - The Code of Conduct and Ethics is included in our induction package.
  - The Equal Employment Opportunity Policy has been recently updated.
  - The Occupational Health and Safety Policy is now on the intranet.

### When list items are sentence fragments, use lower case and final full stop only

If the points continue a lead-in sentence, start each with a lower-case letter. Only the final item takes a full stop.

- ✓ Every staff member should be familiar with:
  - purchasing and delegations
  - rules and regulations about leave
  - emergency procedures relevant to their building.

## Bold, italics and underlining

Italics, capitals and underlining are all harder to read than ordinary (roman) type. Do not use them for emphasis. Instead sparingly use **bold**.

Save *italics* for references to published works, including books, newspapers, periodicals and legislation. They are occasionally used for introduced (non-English) words, but you are unlikely to use these in briefings or letters.

Reserve underlining for hyperlinks, which Microsoft Word will automatically insert.

Use the heading styles set out in the templates. Do not create your own bold or italicised headings.

## Numbers and dates

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### Numbers in text and tables

#### In text, spell out zero to nine and use numerals for 10 on

When beginning a sentence with a small number, or when the number is approximate, spell it out.

- ✓ The minister welcomed 11 new residents to the home.
- ✓ Eleven new residents moved to the home.
- ✓ We have about thirty brochures left.

For large numbers, recast the sentence.

- ✓ We sent 16,500 copies to print.
- ✗ 16,500 copies were sent to print.

Never follow a number by a numeral in brackets, for example:

- ✗ We have nine (9) staff.

When two sets of numbers appear side by side, insert a comma between them, or spell out one of the numbers.

- ✓ In 2009, 200 people will be trained.
- ✓ They opened twenty \$100,000 term deposits.

#### Use commas in numbers 1,000 or above

With figures of four or more digits, use commas, not spaces, as this will keep them from splitting over a line.

- ✓ \$6,000
- ✗ 4 587 000

#### In tables or spreadsheets, use numerals

Use figures not words for all numbers in tables or other graphical elements.

## Money

### Write figures in full for numbers less than \$1,000,000

In text, do not use short forms for amounts less than a million dollars.

✓ \$600,000

✗ \$600K

You can use the following forms for larger amounts.

✓ \$1.5 million      ✓ \$1.5m

✓ \$1.5 billion      ✓ \$1.5b

Use the full stop for a decimal point.

### Do not use a space between \$ and amount

To show currency, keep the currency symbol next to the amount.

✓ \$10.50

✓ \$0.50

✓ A\$30,450

## Percentages

Spell out the word **per cent** (not 'percent') in letters. When space is short, for example in tables, lists or briefings, or in a financial context, use the symbol %.

✓ 60 per cent (in text)

✓ 60% (in tables or lists)

## Phone numbers

Write the area code for telephone numbers in brackets. Use the 4-3-3 format for mobile numbers.

✓ Please contact Mr Smith on (02) 9228 1234 or 0410 123 456.

Do not split numbers, including telephone numbers, at the end of a line. Try rewording the sentence to reposition the number, or use Microsoft Word to insert a non-breaking space.

## Dates and times

### Order dates as day month year

In all text, number the day, spell out the month, and number the year in full.

✓ 1 January 2009

✗ January 1, 2009

✗ 1 Jan 09

✗ 1/1/09

In letters, place the date in the right hand upper corner, two spaces below the Objective reference number.

### Use am and pm for time

Write the time in numerals, using the 12-hour system. Put a space before **am** or **pm**, but do not use full stops. Show the minutes only where needed, or for consistency.

✓ The shop opens at 8 am precisely and shuts at 6 pm.

- ✓ The train leaves Central at 11.20 am and arrives in Newcastle at 2.00 pm.

## Fewer, less and over

Use **fewer** for number and **less** for amount or volume.

- ✓ There have been fewer cases this year.
- ✓ I would like less milk in my coffee.

To describe numbers, prefer **more than** to **over**.

- ✓ more than 500 letters
- ✗ over 500 letters

## References, citations and quotations

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### Quotations

Use single quotation marks for quotations.

- ✓ In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare wrote 'To be or not to be, that is the question'.

If you use a quotation within a quotation, use double quotation marks.

- ✓ The drama critic, Bill Smith, said: 'In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare wrote "To be or not to be, that is the question"'.  
'

### Citations

Use formatting conventions to refer to different types of documents.

To refer to a **book**, use italics for the title.

- ✓ The recent publication *Caring for Public Services* makes several contentious claims.

To refer to a **journal**, use italics for the title and enclose the article name in single quote marks.

- ✓ This has been thoroughly examined in 'Immunisation against pertussis', published in the well-respected *New England Medical Journal*.

 For full information on referencing, see Chapter 12 of the *Style Manual* (2002).

### Inserting footnotes

In briefings, use footnotes to reference and acknowledge the sources of your information.

To create footnotes, place a **note identifier** (a consecutive number starting from 1) at the end of any quotes, paraphrases, summaries or copied tables. Note identifiers are written as superscripted numerals (slightly raised above the level of the text). Place the identifier before punctuation marks such as a comma or colon, but at the end of a sentence, place it after the full stop.

- ✓ Smith points out that the populations of country towns are declining.<sup>1</sup>

Footnotes list the bibliographic details for each note, using the identifier number. Set footnotes in a font size smaller than the briefing text (for example, 9 point when the standard text is 11 point).



✓ 1 J Smith, *Economics and Population*, McGraw-Hill, Sydney, 2005, p.87.

## Checklist for style

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- Your language is respectful and inclusive.
- You have checked the spelling of names and position titles.
- You have used the correct word for the context.
- Your nouns and verbs agree.
- Acronyms and other short forms are accurate and follow our style.
- You have used apostrophes correctly.
- Commas divide your sentences in the right places.
- List punctuation matches our style.
- You have written numbers from one to nine in words.
- You have put commas in numbers of four or more digits.
- Quotes and publications are correctly referenced.
- You have checked spelling and grammar by rereading as well as electronically.

# Appendix A: Roles and responsibilities

## Departmental divisions and branches

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Departmental divisions and branches:

- prepare briefings and draft responses to correspondence, including interim replies where necessary
- ensure that briefings and draft responses are timely, accurate, relevant and high quality
- approve briefings and draft responses for submission to the Premier, Director General and other ministers
- ensure briefings and draft responses are completed within the time frames prescribed
- liaise with BCU about emerging issues and significant matters.

**Deputy directors general** consider and sign correspondence for:

- significant matters from other government agency heads
- correspondence delegated by the Premier and Director General.

When branches prepare briefings and correspondence for other ministers, they use each minister's own letterhead and guidelines.

## Briefings and Correspondence Unit (BCU)

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BCU is part of the Government Group. It:

- handles correspondence for the Premier, ministers, Director General, departmental divisions and branches, to ensure high quality and timely responses
- receives, registers and allocates correspondence, and monitors and reviews responses
- manages a correspondence management system (CMS) for processing electronic correspondence
- manages an electronic mail alert system for significant or urgent mail
- manages campaign correspondence
- refers correspondence to relevant ministers for action and prepares interim acknowledgement letters when needed
- reports to the Premier and department about the quality and timeliness of responses, campaigns and contentious matters
- liaises with divisions and branches on emerging issues and significant matters.

**BCU staff** improve the quality of correspondence by making minor changes to responses so they meet the standards in this guide. They are available to discuss changes they make and they will liaise with the relevant officer(s) if the changes are significant to finalise the response.

# Appendix B: Briefing templates

This appendix contains the standard template for the three main briefing types.

You can access the Microsoft Word templates for these documents from the **BCU** tab. The templates shown here are for the Premier, and are identical to those for the Director General except for references to names.

Template	Purpose
For approval	To advise the reader about an issue, discuss the available options and recommend the preferred course of action
For information	To advise or update the reader on an issue where no action is needed (for information only)
Protocol or event	To advise the reader about an upcoming visit or event, often with recommendations

Please print briefings:

- for the Premier on pink paper
- for the Director General on yellow paper.
- for all other signatories on standard white paper.

## Premier – briefing template for approval

### Briefing for the Premier: for approval

#### Capture the subject in a brief title



**Topic:** Outline the issue in one or two sentences and no more than three lines.

**Analysis:** Summarise DPC's conclusions using one or two sentences at most. Capture the key reasons that support your recommendation, which you will expand on below.

#### Recommendations

1. Outline the action you are seeking to have approved.
2. Number your recommendations only if there is more than one.
3. Start each recommendation with the word 'Approve', 'Oppose', 'Note' or 'Sign'.

#### Key reasons

This section should consist mostly of analysis (conclusions, opinion, reasons, evidence, explanation) rather than description (context, process, history, consultation). Place the traditional background narrative in the 'Background' section over the page.

##### Structure by reasoning

Structure this section by the reasoning that supports your recommendation rather than by the narrative of your research. Consider **why** the Premier should support the recommendation. The reasons would follow a 'because...' statement. Use these to structure your content.

As part of your reasoning, consider how the recommendation relates to NSW 2021 objectives.

##### Use analytical headings to capture each reason

Summarise each reason in the subheadings of this section. The text under each heading will then provide the evidence supporting each reason, along with any concessions.

This approach means the Premier can read the topic, the analysis and the recommendation above, then scan the headings to overview the main points of the argument. He can navigate effectively to the details he needs in priority order when making a decision.

##### Foreground the most important reasons

If the topic calls for more extensive analysis, cover the most important reasons here and the rest in the 'Supporting analysis' section over the page.

You can also use attachments (labelled consecutively Attachment A, Attachment B and so on) to add further background or evidence. But make sure you capture all the key information in the brief itself. Attachments will usually be previous briefs or copies of signed letters.

##### Keep the brief short and to the point

Consider your reader's needs rather than the level of detail you may prefer. How much will the Premier **really** need to understand and act on your recommendations?

**As a guide, write so that the 'Key reasons' section does not go over the first page.**

If your brief is very short, you can delete the following page break. Generally, however, 'Supporting analysis' should begin on page 2.

Use the pre-set styles in the template and do not vary the formatting, such as the font or margins. Delete or overtype all the instructional text.

**Object:** YYYY-12345    **Date due to Premier:** DD/MM/YY    **Approval by:** DD/MM/YY    1 of 3

**Retype title from front page**

## Supporting analysis

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### Further reasons

Include this subheading where you need to detail some additional reasons and evidence supporting your recommendation. But do not repeat information from the first page.

### Financial impact

Discuss the resource implications of your recommendations. These might include an impact at the whole-of-government level, or to DPC’s own budget, or to another cluster or agency.

Outline the approval process that would be needed, such as the Expenditure Review Committee, and include a timeline for that consideration. If there is an impact on the DPC Cluster, you must include the advice and signature of the Chief Financial Officer below.

### Options

Summarise the options you have considered, starting with the recommended option. Briefly explain why you have rejected other options. Consider the risks involved in each option.

Be succinct in your summary and include more detailed analysis in attachments if needed.

Option	Analysis
1   Add a short description	Outline your conclusions for each option.
2	

### Consultation

Summarise the organisations or divisions you have consulted, and their responses. Do not include your own group. If anyone disagreed with your recommendation, make sure you have addressed their concerns in the ‘Key reasons’ or ‘Supporting analysis’ section.

## Recommendations

---

1. Repeat your recommendations from the first page.
2. Use the same wording.
3. Do not introduce any new points.

<b>Chief Financial Officer comment</b>		Delete this row unless there are resource implications for DPC or its cluster agencies	
<b>[Officer Name] [Branch Head – Title]</b>	<b>[Officer Name] [DDG – Title]</b>	<b>Director General</b>	<b>Premier</b>

**Retype title from front page****Background**

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The 'Background' section should summarise the context. This section should contain descriptive content rather than analysis, such as:

- details of any correspondence (dates, addresses, copies)
- previous advice if this is a supplementary brief
- the policy or legal context.

If there is a simple chronology, consider using a short table to summarise the history.

**Attachments**

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Attachment	Title
A	List any attachments with a clear title.
B	

## Premier – briefing template for information

---

### Briefing for the Premier: for information



### Capture the subject in a brief title

**Topic:** Outline the subject in one or two sentences and no more than three lines.

**Analysis:** Summarise DPC's conclusions using one or two sentences at most. Capture the key issues that the Premier should be aware of and explain why they are important.

### Key issues

---

#### Identify the issues

An information brief is not developing an argument to support a recommendation, but it should still have an analytical focus. Rather than telling the story, ask yourself:

- What issues does the situation present?
- What are the legal, financial or policy implications?
- What impact might these implications have?
- What actions might be needed in the future?

#### Structure by your conclusions

Structure this section by the conclusions you draw about the issues, rather than by the narrative of your research.

As part of your conclusions, consider how the issues relate to NSW 2021 objectives.

#### Use analytical headings to capture each conclusion

Summarise your major conclusions in the subheadings of this section. The text under each heading will then provide the evidence supporting each issue, along with any concessions.

This approach means the Premier can read the topic and the analysis and then scan the headings to overview the main points of the brief. The text under each heading should briefly justify those conclusions.

#### Foreground the most important conclusions

If the topic calls for more extensive analysis, cover the most important reasons here and the rest in the 'Supporting analysis' section over the page.

You can also use attachments (labelled consecutively Attachment A, Attachment B and so on) to add further background or evidence. But make sure you capture all the key information in the brief itself. Attachments will usually be previous briefs or copies of signed letters.

#### Keep the brief short and to the point

Consider your reader's needs rather than the level of detail you may prefer. How much will the Premier **really** need to understand the issues and your conclusions?

**As a guide, write so that the 'Key issues' section does not go over the first page.**

If your brief is very short, you can delete the following page break. Generally, however, 'Supporting analysis' should begin on page 2.

Use the pre-set styles in the template and do not vary the formatting, such as the font or margins. Delete or overwrite all the instructional text.

Retype title from front page

## Supporting analysis

---

### Further issues

Include this subheading only where you need to detail additional conclusions and evidence about the issues you have identified. But do not repeat information from the first page.

### Financial impact

Discuss the resource implications of the issues you are discussing. These might include an impact at the whole-of-government level, or to DPC's own budget, or to another cluster or agency. Outline any approval process that would be needed, such as the Expenditure Review Committee, and include a timeline for that consideration.

### Options

Summarise any options that might be relevant in this situation. If none apply, you can delete the 'Options' section.

Be succinct in your summary and include more detailed analysis in attachments if needed.

Option	Analysis
1   Add a short description	Outline your conclusions for each option.
2	

### Consultation

Summarise the organisations or divisions you have consulted, and their responses. Do not include your own group. If anyone disagreed with your conclusions, make sure you have addressed their concerns in the 'Key issues or 'Supporting analysis' section.

For information			
[Officer Name] [Branch Head – Title]	[Officer Name] [DDG – Title]	Director General	Premier

Contact: Name, ext

Title: Position title

Date: DD/MM/YY

2 of 3



**Retype title from front page****Background**

---

The 'Background' section should summarise the context. This section should contain descriptive content rather than analysis, such as:

- details of any correspondence (dates, addresses, copies)
- previous advice if this is a supplementary brief
- the policy or legal context.

If there is a simple chronology, consider using a short table to summarise the history.

**Attachments**

---

Attachment	Title
A	List any attachments with a clear title.
B	

## Premier – briefing template for protocol or event

### Briefing for the Premier: protocol or event



### Capture the subject in a brief title

**Visitor/event:** Add name

**Date(s):** Add date or date range

**Purpose of visit/event:** Outline why the visitor is coming to NSW (or Australia), or describe the event, in no more than two sentences.

### Recommendation

1. Confirm the Premier's preferred options for [add details of visit]:

Engagement	Recommended option
Add descriptions like:	Note each recommended option
Arrival and departure	
State hospitality	

### Key information

#### Briefly explain the visitor's purpose

If you need to, start by outlining the key context for the visit or event such as:

- why the visitor is coming to the state and what he/she hopes to achieve
- who is hosting the event, for instance an industry organisation.

Focus only on the most important points here. If you feel the Premier needs further background, put it in the attached 'Background' section.

#### Structure by reasoning

Structure this section by the reasons supporting the options you are recommending, such as:

- the Premier should send a representative because the timing does not suit his schedule
- this event would allow the Premier to meet key industry leaders from the region.

Save your discussion of any other options for the 'Options' section on the next page.

#### Use analytical headings to capture each reason

Summarise each reason in the subheadings of this section. The text under each heading will then provide the evidence supporting each reason, along with any concessions.

#### Foreground the most important reasons

If the topic calls for more extensive analysis, cover the most important reasons here and the rest in the 'Supporting analysis' section over the page. You can also use attachments (labelled consecutively Attachment A, Attachment B and so on) to add further background.

#### Keep the brief short and to the point

Consider your reader's needs rather than the level of detail you may prefer. How much will the Premier **really** need to understand and act on your recommended options?

**As a guide, write so that the 'Key information' section does not go over the first page.**

If your brief is very short, you can delete the following page break. Generally, however, 'Supporting analysis' should begin on page 2.

Use the pre-set styles in the template and do not vary the formatting, such as the font or margins. Delete or overwrite all the instructional text.

Object: YYYY-12345    Date due to Premier: DD/MM/YY    Approval by:    DD/MM/YY    1 of 3

**Retype title from front page****Supporting analysis****Further reasons**

Include this subheading where you need to detail some additional reasons and evidence supporting your recommendation. But do not repeat information from the first page.

**Financial impact**

Discuss the resource implications of your recommendations. If there is an impact on the DPC Cluster, you must include the advice and signature of the Chief Financial Officer below.

**Options**

Summarise the options you have considered, starting with the recommended option. Briefly explain why you have rejected other options. Consider the risks involved in each option.

Be succinct in your summary and include more detailed analysis in attachments if needed.

[Engagement]		Analysis
1	Add a short description	Outline your conclusions for each option.
2		

**Consultation**

Note the organisations or divisions you have consulted and any information they have provided or supported.

**Recommendation**

1. Confirm the Premier's preferred options for [add details of visit]:

Recommended option	Approved	Premier's preference
Repeat each option from the Recommendation	Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/>	
Do not introduce any new content here	Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/>	

Chief Financial Officer comment		Delete this row unless there are resource implications for DPC or its cluster agencies	
[Officer Name] [Branch Head – Title]	[Officer Name] [DDG – Title]	Director General	Premier

Contact: Name, ext

Title: Position title

Date: DD/MM/YY

2 of 3

**Retype title from front page****Background**

---

The 'Background' section is for background details that the Premier can turn to after reading the most important information.

This section should contain descriptive content rather than analysis, such as:

- a history of the state's relationship with the visitor
- information about trade, imports, exports or similar economic context.

**Attachments**

---

Attachment	Title
A	List any attachments with a clear title.
B	

# Appendix C: Correspondence documents

This appendix contains standard templates for the:

- Correspondence Action Sheet, which outlines how to deal with correspondence
- Premier letterhead
- Department letterhead
- compliments slip for referrals to other ministers.

You can access the Microsoft Word templates for each of these documents from the **BCU** templates tab.

For correspondence that requires approval from the Premier or Director General, use the briefing template for approval.

## Putting your documents in order

When submitting your correspondence for approval, use the following order:

1. the briefing (on pink paper for the Premier, yellow paper for the Director General, white paper for all others)
2. the draft response with a 'For Signature' tag
3. if needed, attachments that you have referred to in the briefing
4. the original correspondence.

# Correspondence Action Sheet

The Correspondence Action Sheet is printed on orange paper.



## NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet ACTION SHEET

Document Ref: \_\_\_\_\_

**TITLE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**AUTHOR:** \_\_\_\_\_

**RESPONSE TIME**

- Due date specified: \_\_\_\_\_
- Urgent (1 week)       Fast track (2 weeks)       Routine (4 weeks)

**Date Received:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date Final Action Due:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PREMIER'S OFFICE STAFF RESPONSIBLE**

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chief of Staff         | <input type="checkbox"/> Anastasia Krivenkova, Policy | <input type="checkbox"/> Natasha Luschwitz, Policy  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deputy Chief of Staff  | <input type="checkbox"/> Justin Mulder, Policy        | <input type="checkbox"/> Prue Gusmerini, Policy     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Head of Policy         | <input type="checkbox"/> Peta Seaton, Policy          | <input type="checkbox"/> Matt Cross, PLO            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Head of Media          | <input type="checkbox"/> Tim Hill, Policy             | <input type="checkbox"/> Department Liaison Officer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence Manager | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                 |   |

**RESPONDENT (Sign off)**

- Premier
- Parliamentary Secretary:  MF  RW
- Premier's Office: \_\_\_\_\_
- DPC\*: \_\_\_\_\_
- Public Service Commission: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*DPC RESPONSES (complete below)**

- Copy of response required through BCU for Premier's Office
- Copy of response NOT required but FILE NOTE describing action to be sent via email to BCU

**SUGGESTED ACTION REQUIRED**

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Formal Response (including Brief) | <input type="checkbox"/> Briefing Note Only        | <input type="checkbox"/> Briefing - Visit / Function / Meeting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speech Notes (including Brief)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum Only           | <input type="checkbox"/> Standard Acknowledgement              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Campaign / Standard Response      | <input type="checkbox"/> Interim Reply             | <input type="checkbox"/> For Consideration                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No Response Necessary / Info Only | <input type="checkbox"/> Refer to Minister/s _____ |  |

**COMMENTS / INSTRUCTIONS** *For detailed Premier's Office instructions please see over page.*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**NSW DEPARTMENT OF PREMIER AND CABINET - OFFICE USE**

**Referred To:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DPC Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE BRANCH ACTION DUE:**

**REDIRECTIONS:** Advise BCU immediately if this matter is to be redirected elsewhere. Email to [BCUMail@dpc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:BCUMail@dpc.nsw.gov.au) or contact the person listed below:

DPC File Ref: \_\_\_\_\_

**Completion (for BCU use only):**

- Action Complete / Objective Updated       Letter / Email Sent (copy in Objective)       Return to Branch for filing

Privacy notice: All personal information is protected by privacy law. The information should only be used for purposes directly related to preparing the necessary response. Care must be taken to protect the information from loss, misuse, unauthorised use and disclosure. For further information, refer to the DPC Privacy Management Plan or contact the DPC Privacy Coordinator on (02) 9228 5555

Action Barcode: \_\_\_\_\_

## Premier letterhead

---



GPO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001 ■ P: (02) 9228 5239 ■ F: (02) 9228 3935 ■ [www.premier.nsw.gov.au](http://www.premier.nsw.gov.au)

## Department letterhead

---



Governor Macquarie Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney NSW 2000 ■ GPO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001  
Tel: (02) 9228 5555 ■ F: (02) 9228 5249 ■ [www.dpc.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au)



## Compliments slip for referrals to other ministers

---



**With the Compliments  
of the  
Premier of New South Wales**

**THE HON. J M SMITH, MLC  
MINISTER FOR (INSERT PORTFOLIO)**

**For all necessary attention, please.**

LEVEL 39, GOVERNOR MACQUARIE TOWER, 1 FARRER PLACE, SYDNEY 2000 AUSTRALIA  
T: (02) 9228 5555 F: (02) 9228 5249 URL: [www.dpc.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au) GPO BOX 5341, SYDNEY NSW 2001

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