

NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS STYLE



Introduction

'Style' is a guide for all radio, television and online News and Current Affairs staff. It sets out the standards by which our work will be judged.

Creative **language** and correct **usage** are essential to the journalist's craft. Consistency and responsibility in **editorial procedure** are further hallmarks of our professionalism. Clear and polished **presentation techniques** enable successful communication.

Of course, no guide can cover all situations. Reporters and producers are expected to use common sense in applying these standards, and to 'refer up' to their editorial line managers for guidance if in doubt.

Sections in italics are specifically for online journalists.

Other references include:

ABC Editorial Policies

win.abc.net.au/corporate_affairs/corporate_documents/editorial_policies/index.htm;

ABC All-Media Law Handbook

win.abc.net.au/ff_and_ss/legal_services/lawbook/lawbook_default.htm;

ABC All-Media Court Reporting Handbook

win.abc.net.au/ff_and_ss/legal_services/court/court_default.htm;

ABC Copyright Handbook

win.abc.net.au/ff_and_ss/legal_services/copyright_default.htm;

AJA Code of Ethics, Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance,

www.alliance.org.au;

SCOSE

the ABC's Standing Committee on Spoken English provides guidance on pronunciation and usage at <http://nucdbo4/scose/>.



Abbreviations and Acronyms

Well-known abbreviations and acronyms (e.g. ANZAC, AIDS, QANTAS, RSPCA, etc.) are fine, but others can be too obscure. There's a tendency to use acronyms for brevity, but ask yourself whether the acronym, when spoken, will be easily understood. If listeners are left guessing they may miss the nub of the story.

Also consider regional usage. Most listeners would recognise 'ACTU', but few outside Queensland, for example, would know the QTC as the Queensland Turf Club. In copy, don't abbreviate words such as doctor, senator, professor, etc. The abbreviation 'e.g.' may be suitable for online, but say 'for example' on radio and television. The RAAF is read as 'R-double-A-F'.

For online: Spell out state names - New South Wales Premier, West Australian Government; not NSW Premier, WA Government.

[See: AIDS]

Aborigines

Aborigine is the noun, although some Aborigines prefer the usage 'Aboriginal people'. (Aboriginal is an adjective, so 'a group of Aboriginals' is not correct.) There are many regional names – take care not to misapply the better-known ones (e.g. Koori). Torres Strait Islanders are a distinct racial group and should not be described as 'Aboriginal' or 'TSIs'.

'Indigenous Australians' is the preferred collective term for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Avoid using 'blacks' for Indigenous people. It may be considered offensive when used by non-Indigenous Australians.

Not every Aborigine with a political thought is an 'activist', not every Aborigine over 50 is an 'elder'.

Sensitivity is required when naming dead Aborigines or showing their image.

[See: 'Editorial Policies', Section 10.11]

According to

Beginning a sentence with 'according to' may give some listeners the impression we don't believe what follows. But beginning with a sensational statement, then qualifying it with 'according to', is mischievous.

Wrong: 'Most Sydney Harbour ferries will probably sink within a month, according to a transport company'.

Better: 'A company seeking to replace Sydney's harbour ferries says most are in such disrepair they will probably sink within a month'.

[See: Claims; Attribution]

Accuracy

Our main concern. Check. Don't guess. You can never be too careful with facts and names.

Active

Sentences written in the active voice are crisper and force the writer to source every piece of information: 'Mrs Brown chose the team' is more emphatic than 'the team was chosen by Mrs Brown'.

'It's estimated', 'it's reported' and 'it's believed' are soggy, passive forms. Active voice requires the writer to specify **who** estimated, **who** believed, **who** said, etc. The listener is better informed.

[See: Conversational Language; Tense]

Actuality

Actuality adds impact and depth to both radio and television reports. It's a valuable tool, well used, but should never become tokenistic.

Very short bursts of actuality can confuse. Listeners need time to grasp a new speech pattern. Speakers who can't be easily understood should not be put to air, except in special cases (e.g. where the content of the actuality is explained, illustrates a historic event or is crucial to the authority and impact of a story).

For Radio News:

As a general rule, grabs in bulletins should be between 10 and 20 seconds long. Shorter grabs may work in some circumstances, but consider whether the listener will understand what's being said and whether the grab fairly represents the speaker's intentions.

For Radio News and Radio Current Affairs:

Rarely use spoken actuality before the speaker's identity has been established. Don't rely on actuality for the only mention of a fact vital to a story. Avoid using actuality for statistics that can be better explained in copy. Don't use actuality which depends for its sense on a link word. For example:

LINK: The Minister said he would...

[actuality]

NOT OPPOSE THE BILL WHEN IT COMES BEFORE PARLIAMENT.

Allow a speaker the benefit of his or her own words and don't edit out qualifications or hesitations important to the meaning.

For TV News:

Allow a story to breathe by bringing up natural sound. But actuality in the form of an interview grab should never be treated as atmosphere: it's there to convey information, and needs to satisfy the usual requirements of clarity and sense.

Rapid intercutting of actuality of short duration works only in rare cases. Grabs under five seconds are too short to super and the speaker needs to be identified in the link or voiceover.

Avoid file sound as actuality if it would falsify an event (e.g. added police sirens).

[See: Durations]

Address

Politicians, particularly, like to 'address' problems, issues, questions, etc. Journalists with a care for language 'examine' problems, 'discuss' issues, 'resolve' questions, etc.

[See: Conversational Language]

Admit(s)

There is a flavour of guilt about this word. For example, if you write 'the school admitted the curriculum would be changed', you're suggesting that either the curriculum was flawed or the school had resisted the change. Is that the case? When reporting a simple statement of intention usually 'say(s)' is better.

[See: Claims]

Advertising

Distinguish between what is news and what is advertising. It's obvious that in reporting commercial activities we must use company names and, where a story would be meaningless without it, the name of a product. But we need to be vigilant. Ask yourself whether the news value outweighs the advertising value and whether the advertising value can be further minimised by a more general reference. In any case, we must not extol the advantages of a particular product or compare it with another product.

[See: Commercial Names, Sponsors' Names]

Affect/Effect

Affect (verb) means 'to influence something or someone'. E.g. 'A person under the influence of liquor is **affected** by alcohol'.

Effect (noun) means 'something produced by a cause or agent'. E.g. 'Alcohol can have a surprising **effect**'.

Effect (verb) means 'to bring about'. E.g. 'Alcohol **effected** a change in his behaviour'. (Here, 'effect' is a weak verb, unsuitable for radio or television writing.)

After

'After' and 'following' are used with too little consideration.

A sentence like 'at least ten people were killed after a bus hit a wall' raises questions because it obscures the sense. Why were they killed after the bus hit the wall? Who or what killed them? But what happened when the bus hit the wall? Say 'at least ten people were killed **when** a bus hit a wall'.

Where one event leads to another, and the causal relationship is the point being emphasised, prefer 'because', over 'after' or 'following', as in 'the price of bread is to rise **because** of the drought'.

[See: Following]

Age

In Australia, anyone 18 years or older is regarded as an adult, by law. It is the voting age and the age at which a person can be bound by a legal contract.

In most jurisdictions, a person is treated as a child for criminal responsibility up to and including the age of 17. In Victoria and Queensland, the maximum age is 16 years.

In all jurisdictions, the law considers that a child cannot be held culpable for a crime if under 10 years of age, and a child (at least until the age of 14) cannot be convicted of a criminal offence unless it can be proven the child knew the act was seriously wrong.

The age of consent for sexual intercourse varies considerably around the country, and differs for boys and girls, and for same sex and opposite sex.

Generally, only people under 13 should be described as 'children'; then they become 'teenagers'. For those under 18, say 'boy' or 'girl' or 'teenager'. Avoid referring to someone as a 'youth'; its usage is now mostly limited to bureaucratic parlance. A person 18 years or older (in court or police reporting, and elsewhere) should be called a 'man' or 'woman'.

So, age is important in a formal sense – but a person's age can also add much to a story. If a priest hires a band to shake up his Sunday congregation, his age is relevant: is he a young newcomer trying to change the world or an older man trying to catch up with it?

Be aware that the generic descriptions 'middle-aged' and 'old' can cause offense, so leave those words to be said by the people concerned. However, 'elderly' is acceptable, used with care. (But 'a 70-year-old elderly woman' is a tautology.) When giving someone's age, the spoken form is '22-year-old John Smith'. The form 'John Smith, 22' is for newspapers, not broadcasters.

We still hear, 'the young 19-year-old...' or the like, often in a sports story. It amounts to a judgement on the subject's maturity.

[See: Tautology]

AIDS

The acronym for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Syndrome means 'a group of symptoms'. People whose blood carries the virus that can cause AIDS are 'HIV-positive', but they do not necessarily have AIDS. They can be described as 'carrying the AIDS virus'. Don't say 'HIV virus', because the 'V' stands for virus.

[See: Abbreviations and Acronyms]



Aircraft

Aircraft land – usually at airports. When an aircraft is forced to land we say that it (or the pilot) made an 'emergency landing'. When an aircraft crashes do not try to soften the impact by saying it 'crash-landed'.

Aircraft can normally be referred to as 'planes', and certainly not in the official jargon of 'fixed-wing aircraft'. ('Plane' is short for 'aeroplane' – don't say 'airplane'.)

Air Incidents

It is our practice to refrain from reporting aircraft 'in trouble' stories until after the plane has landed or a crash has been confirmed. This is to avoid causing unnecessary anxiety among the public, including a rush of people to the airport.

If a plane is reported missing or overdue, the information must be checked with the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, the police, or the airline.

[See: Bomb Hoaxes; Hostages and Sieges]

Alibi

Alibi means 'being in another place at the time'. It does not mean 'excuse'.

Alleged

An unproven claim is 'alleged', particularly in criminal matters. But when reporting matters not covered by privilege, don't assume that using the word 'alleged' in front of something automatically prevents defamation. It does not.

[See: Claims]

Alternate/Alternative

Alternate means 'occurring by turns'. For example: 'Alternate feelings of love and hate'; 'even numbers alternate with odd numbers'; 'night and day alternate'.

An 'alternative' has traditionally meant 'one of only two possibilities'. Another way of saying 'several possibilities' is 'several choices', although 'several alternatives' has now gained some acceptance.

[See: Among/Between]

American

Inhabitants of both North and South America are Americans. If you are referring just to the United States of America make sure, in your first reference, you specify that. Say, 'in the United States' or 'the U.S. Government' – not 'in America' or 'the American Government'.

Among/Between

Usage depends on the number of people or things you are referring to. For example, an argument is 'between' two people, but 'among' three or more; a competition is 'between' two teams, but 'among' three or more.

[See: Alternate/Alternative]

Analyst

The audience is much better off knowing who is saying something rather than being fobbed off with anonymous 'analysts'. If you're reporting what you believe is a generally-held view, then 'some financial market economists' or 'some political analysts' is acceptable.

[See: Experts]

Anticipate

There is a useful distinction to be drawn between 'expect' and 'anticipate'. We 'expect' many things, but we don't necessarily take a specific action, or 'anticipate', an event. For example: 'Many mothers expect (**think likely**) they will be able to anticipate (**take action in advance of**) their babies' needs'; 'He **anticipated** the punch by moving out of reach'; 'They **expected** the horse would win (but didn't bet on it)'.

When you use the word 'anticipate' it suggests you will also describe **how** something was anticipated.



Apostrophe

The apostrophe is used to indicate possession (e.g. David's computer) or abbreviation (e.g. There's new evidence).

Take note of the following rules for placing the possessive apostrophe.

When the subject to take the possessive apostrophe is singular, add the apostrophe and then an 's' (e.g. the company's profit; the Minister's promise).

When the subject is singular, but already ends in an 's', add the apostrophe and then another 's' (e.g. James's child; Jess's work). This is the rule if the subject word has only one syllable. If it has two or more syllables, add the apostrophe to the end **without** an extra 's' (e.g. Jesus' life; Menzies' kilt).

When the subject is plural, simply add an apostrophe to the end without an extra 's' (e.g. babies' nanny; hostesses' uniforms). A word with a plural form that doesn't end in 's' is an exception (e.g. women's club; oxen's harness).

For other situations, follow these examples: Tim and Mary's house (shared ownership); Tim's and Mary's noses (separate ownership).

'His', 'hers', 'its', 'ours', 'yours' and 'theirs' do not take an apostrophe, but one's and another's **do**.

It's is a contraction of 'it is'. **There's** means 'there is'. Therefore, 'there's new claims' is wrong. Say 'there **are** new claims'.

Drop apostrophes from names of organisations (e.g. Australian Workers Union) and place names (e.g. Coffs Harbour, Browns Plain), but retain them for certain events (e.g. the Admiral's Cup, the America's Cup).

[See: Punctuation]

Appeal

Usage such as 'he appealed the decision' is American. We say 'appealed **against**', 'protested **against**'. Also: 'was **granted** bail', not 'bailed'.

Approved

To give online and NewsRadio prompt access to Radio News stories, an ABCWIRE.RADIO-APPROVED Avstar queue exists in each State and Territory. This allows staff in any newsroom to see what has been approved in other places. Only stories that have been subbed and moved to the APPROVED queue are ready for broadcast.

Arabic Names

Usually only two names, with the surname last, e.g. 'Charbel Boustany'; then, 'Mr Boustany'.

Asian Names

Chinese: The surname is placed first in Chinese societies. For example, 'Chiang Chi-kwang', in a second reference, becomes 'Mr Chiang'. (For guidance, hyphens never appear in surnames.) Some Chinese adopt the Western style of surname last, though to avoid confusion they often use initials, e.g. 'C.K. Chiang'.

Indonesian: Some Indonesians have only one name; some two or more by which they wish to be known, e.g. 'Suharto', 'Deddy Iskandar Muda'.

Japanese: Among themselves, Japanese use the surname first, then the given name (only ever one), e.g. 'Sato Ichiro'; then 'Sato-san' (you should add the honorific 'san' when addressing him; he would not use it when referring to himself). When speaking with foreigners Japanese may adopt the Western order: 'Ichiro Sato'.

Korean: Similar to Japanese, except that three-part names are common. For example, 'Yi Yoon-kyung'; then 'Ms Yi'.

Vietnamese: Vietnamese have two-part or three-part names. Though the surname is placed first, the last name is the key to identification. Therefore, in a first reference say, 'Vo Van Kiet'; then 'Mr Kiet' (not 'Mr Vo').

As regards

Forms such as 'as regards', 'as of', 'as to', etc. do not beautify the language.

Assassin

An assassin is someone who kills a political or religious leader, or a similarly prominent person. Mere mortals are 'murdered'.

[See: Execute]

Asylum Seekers

We use the term 'asylum seekers' for people who arrive in Australia (or Australian waters) without travel documents, claiming (or apparently claiming) refugee status. If the Australian authorities decide they have a valid claim for protection, they would become 'refugees'.

We use the term 'illegal immigrant' for anyone arriving in Australia without proper papers who is not claiming refugee status or whose claim for protection has been rejected; or anyone whose visa has expired and who is therefore not legally entitled to stay in Australia.

We do not use the term 'boat people'.

Attribution

We use information from reliable sources – those who are in a position to know what they're talking about. Reliability may be assured by the person's official position, or it may not. These are judgements for each journalist to make, in consultation with his or her editor.

How we present a breaking story will depend upon the importance of the story and the source of our information.

When reporting foreign news, if the only source is the BBC or AFP, we quote the BBC or AFP, and if they are quoting someone else, we should say who that source is, e.g. 'The news agency AFP is quoting aid workers in Afghanistan as saying hundreds of people have been killed in an earthquake'. Once similar information is flowing from multiple sources, we can drop the specific attribution(s).

Our overseas correspondents carry the authority of the ABC. If a conflict of information should arise, advise the correspondent and be guided by his or her judgement.

When reporting domestic news, the onus is on us to confirm information independently. If we can quote a source, especially for breaking news of great moment, we should, e.g. 'The Prime Minister's office has announced the death of the Governor-General...' If we cannot name our source in a piece of original reportage, we rely on our journalist – and say so, e.g. 'The ABC's Finance Reporter says the Reserve Bank has a plan to support the dollar'.

Official announcements by governments, police forces, corporations, institutions and interest groups are a staple of information which can make news. There are no prizes for being first, and wrong – so check and attribute. However, we do seek to be a pace-setter in getting accurate breaking news to our audience.

[See: Breaking News; Credits; Editorialising; Experts; News Flashes; Rumours]

Average

Take care of inappropriately substituting the word 'normal' for 'average'. For example, say 'the **average** height of a four-year-old is 106 centimetres', rather than 'the normal height...'

Back Announcements

These are underutilised as a bulletin production technique in both radio and television. Big stories and breaking stories should be updated or summarised as bulletins/programs unfold, and/or at the end.

[See: Headlines]

Balance

We aim to provide news that Australians ought to know if they are to participate fully in a democratic society. We must be factual, objective, impartial and balanced – never sensational or gratuitously offensive. We preclude nothing, but evaluate everything.

It's not enough just to believe in impartiality – we must work at it. We should strive to reflect both sides of an issue within the one bulletin or program, although a 'mathematical' balance is not mandatory. When a reply cannot be obtained immediately, balance must be sought as soon as possible. It may be important to report if a response has been sought or a response has not been forthcoming.

During official election campaign periods we track the amount of time bulletins/programs give to Government and Opposition parties, and producers need to keep close to a strict balance of air time.

[See: Charter/Code; Election Campaigns]



Bankruptcy

Bankruptcy happens when a court orders an individual or enterprise to liquidate assets and distribute them to creditors. The petition may be voluntary (initiated by those seeking to enter into bankruptcy) or involuntary (initiated by unpaid creditors). A bankrupt person is constrained by law from borrowing money or starting a new business until discharged from bankruptcy. Bankruptcy is not a synonym for insolvency or those sloppy words 'broke' and 'bust'.

[See: Bust; Receiver]

Basically

This is basically a superfluous word in news writing.

Better/Best

'Better' is the comparative of 'good', and 'best' is the superlative. So, it's 'the better' of **two** choices; 'the best' of **three or more**.

Other examples: young/younger/youngest; old/elder/eldest; nice/nicer/nicest; bad/worse/worst.

Never 'double' the comparative when straining for emphasis, e.g. 'even more healthier'. And nothing can be 'more perfect', since perfection is the highest quality. Therefore, 'very perfectly' is a tautology.

[See: Alternate/Alternative; Among/Between; Tautology]

Billion

Now commonly understood to mean 'one thousand million', not 'one million million'. When reading, emphasise the 'b' to distinguish 'billion' from 'million'.

Blame

People or organisations may be 'blamed' for things, but we should not 'blame' the weather for a poor crop or 'blame' bad roads for accidents. They 'cause' or 'contribute to' these outcomes.

Bomb Hoaxes

In general, we do not report hoaxes, in case we encourage imitators. However, when a bomb threat causes serious disruption – a story in itself – that would be reported.

[See: Air Incidents; Hostages and Sieges]

Breaking News

Our reputation rests on our reporters' and producers' vigilance in chasing original material and in pushing the boundaries exploring fresh angles on stories.

Your curiosity and persistence will not come from a management edict. If we are lacking proper enthusiasm and direction in the basics of competitive journalism, the challenge must be taken up in every program area and newsroom.

[See: Copy; Disasters and Emergencies; News Flashes and Crawls; Rolling Coverage]

Breakthrough

Use sparingly – and never pair with its cliché-partner, 'dramatic'.

[See: Cliches]

Bug

There are eavesdropping 'bugs' and computer system 'bugs', but if you want to be taken seriously when reporting medical ailments don't refer to viruses, bacteria, parasites, etc. as 'bugs'. The term is hopelessly imprecise and implies a low-level risk, which may be completely inappropriate.

Don't use 'bug' when you mean 'insect'.

Bugs

News pictures, including interviews, which are exclusive to the ABC and which we want to protect should carry a 'bug' that identifies the program, together with the ABC logo. If the 'bug' is not rendered onto the original tapes, then the Library should keep a record that the 'bug' is to be used whenever the material is rebroadcast, at least while exclusivity needs to be protected.



Bulletin Times

All journalists must make themselves familiar with the news bulletin schedule. The bulletin every reporter should aim for is **the next one**. Be aware of time-zone differences. Is Adelaide coming up to the hour? Are Perth's main morning bulletins still to come?

NewsCAff programs are not displaced from their regular scheduled times, except on proper authority. Such requests are not agreed to lightly.

[See: Deadlines]

Bushfire

In Australia, it's 'bushfire' (Americans call them 'brushfires'). Vegetation is 'burnt out' – rarely 'destroyed'. And don't refer to things as 'partially' or 'completely' destroyed; they're either 'destroyed' or 'badly damaged'.

Bust

'Police bust' and 'drug bust' have no specialist cachet, they're just slang. The same goes for 'the company went bust'.

[See: Bankruptcy; Jargon]

Canberra

Canberra is **not** the name of the Federal Government of Australia. This shorthand has come across from foreign coverage (e.g. 'Brussels says'). But do we mean the Federal Government, Parliament or the bureaucracy? Or do we really mean the city? Because of the potential for confusion, we should be precise.

A possible exception is in the diplomatic context (e.g. 'Washington has appealed to Canberra').

Capitals

Proper names (people, places, etc.) take capitals. So do specific titles, e.g. 'the Royal Commission into Prostitution' – but then, 'the commission'.

Use the lower case for things such as 'brussels sprouts', 'caesarean operation'. Likewise, for animals or animal breeds (e.g. 'german shepherd').

Nationalities and languages take the upper case (e.g. 'Arab', 'French').

After the first use of capitals in a proper name or organisation name, revert to the lower case (e.g. 'the Murray River', then 'river'; 'the University of Queensland', then 'the university').

'Government' takes the upper case when referring to a particular and incumbent administration (e.g. 'the Curtin Government', 'the Tasmanian Government'); but, 'the former federal government').

Write 'Federal Budget', 'Act of Parliament' and 'Health Bill' (the generic 'parliamentary bill' takes the lower case).

[See: Abbreviations]

Carry Out

Prefer the active, direct verb form. It forces you to say **what** someone did. For example, 'He searched the undergrowth' (more information), rather than 'He carried out a search'.

[See: Active]

Celsius

The temperature scale we use. To convert to Celsius, subtract 32 from the Fahrenheit figure, multiply by five and divide by nine.

Censor/Censure

Documents may be 'censored', but people who are 'criticised severely' are 'censured'.

Centre

It is possible to 'centre on' an issue, but it is **not** possible to 'centre around'. Distinguish this from 'revolve around'.

Charter/Code

The **ABC Charter** is the term used for a section of the ABC Act that describes the functions of the Corporation. (See: 'Editorial Policies', 4.)

The **Charter of Editorial Practice** (in the ABC's 'Editorial Policies') sets standards for news and current affairs programs. It's an internal frame of reference for what we do. (See: 'Editorial Policies', 5.1.)

The ABC is also required under law to develop a **Code of Practice** and notify it to the Australian Broadcasting Authority. The Code is the measure the ABA would use to adjudicate a complaint against the ABC. The section relating specifically to news and current affairs says:

Every reasonable effort must be made to ensure that the factual content of programs is accurate. Demonstrable errors will be corrected in a timely manner and in a form most suited to the circumstances.

Every reasonable effort must be made to ensure that programs are balanced and impartial. The commitment requires that editorial staff present a wide range of perspectives and not unduly favour one over the others. But it does not require them to be unquestioning, nor to give all sides of an issue the same amount of time.

Balance will be sought through the presentation, as far as possible, of principal relevant viewpoints on matters of importance. This requirement may not always be reached within a single program or news bulletin but will be achieved as soon as possible.

Editorial staff will not be obliged to disclose confidential sources which they are entitled to protect at all times.

Re-enactments of events will be clearly identified as such and presented in a way which will not mislead audiences.

If reported at all, suicides will be reported in moderate terms and will usually avoid details of method.

Sensitivity will be exercised in broadcasting images of or interviews with bereaved relatives and survivors or witnesses of traumatic incidents.

News Flashes. Care will be exercised in the selection of sounds and images used in news flashes and consideration given to the likely composition of the audience.

News Updates and News Promotions. Television news updates and news promotions should not appear at inappropriate times, especially during programs directed at young children. They should include very little violent material and none at all in the late afternoon and early evening.

- ABC Editorial Policies, Appendix 6

[See: Accuracy; Balance; Editorial Practice; Editorialising; Editorial Responsibility and 'Upward Referral']

Chequebook Journalism

The ABC, as a matter of policy, will not enter into financial competition with other media for access to news items or stories.

[See: 'Editorial Policies', 6.6.1]

Children's Programs

News updates and news promotions normally will not appear during children's television programming. Because of the younger audience between 0700-1000 and 1500-1800, any news updates should omit violent content. Updates during these times will be exceptional, and will be preceded by a special announcement by TV Presentation.

[See: Charter/Code; Cruelty; News Flashes; Violence]

Chronic

It means 'lingering' or 'continuing', not 'acute' or 'bad'. 'Mr James suffers from chronic heart disease' means he's had it for a long time. It is an adjective and cannot stand alone, as in 'the chronic state of the roads', if you mean 'the chronically bad state of the roads'.



Claims

'Claims' carries a suspicion of incredulity (as do 'reputedly' and 'so-called'). If there is no reason to doubt the veracity of a statement, 'says' is better. For example, 'The party says it will field candidates in all electorates', rather than 'The party **claims** it will...'

The authority of the person or organisation making a claim (i.e. something not previously accepted, known or understood), and the nature of the claim, will determine whether we would report it without corroboration. A claim, therefore, must be attributed. 'Claims' implies the ABC is seeking further confirmation or reaction.

[See: According to; Admits; Attribution; Corroboration; Experts]

Cliches

Listen to the way you speak and recognise the worn-out, stock phrases you'll be prone to use in a story – and guard against them.

Using a metaphorical phrase is not creative if it's over-familiar or loosely applied. We constantly hear stories in which actions are 'given the green light' or people 'bite the bullet', and so on. Mixed metaphors abound, such as 'The committee did a u-turn and weathered the storm' or 'Australian swimmers have raised the bar to a new level'. Keep on the alert for cliches and clumsy phrasing.

'Back to back victories' (instead of 'consecutive victories') and 'bundled out' (instead of 'eliminated') are just some of the many cliches that have a sheltered existence in sports reporting.

[See: Conversational Language; Language; Meaning; Violence]

Closure

There is a touch of pop psychology about references to people 'finding closure' or 'obtaining closure'. It's become a cliché, so avoid using the word.

Collective Nouns

There are no iron-clad rules about whether collective nouns should be matched with singular or plural verbs. Both constructions are acceptable, if they pass muster as common usage and conversational. But they must never be mixed in the same sentence or story. Listeners are entitled to regard us as uneducated when we broadcast this kind of mess: 'The team **is** playing this afternoon. **They** say the game will be **their** best test yet'.

Generally, it's better to use singular verbs with collectives which express unanimity or the sense of a single entity: 'The Government **is** planning to increase defence spending'; 'the family **is** going back to Germany'; 'Brisbane **is** unbeaten this season'. We would never use 'are' in any of those examples. When the singular verb does sound awkward, there are ways to write around the problem without compromising your grammar.

Our style is for 'none' to take a singular verb: 'All of us **are** human. None of us **is** perfect'.

'Fewer' refers to numbers of things, 'less' refers to quantity, e.g. 'fewer people'; 'less butter'. 'Fewer' is followed by a plural noun ('fewer apples') and 'less' is followed by a singular noun ('less trouble').

[See: Number]

Collide

Only moving objects can 'collide'. Therefore, it's not possible for a car to collide with a tree.

Colour

Our job does not end with the accurate setting down of essential facts. From that mere beginning, we proceed to give the news a meaning and an interest that are essential to capture the attention of the listener/viewer and enable the news to be properly understood.

Our objective is to give warmth, colour and life to all the news where this is possible.

Take this RVO script, for example:

An American man has regained consciousness after 19 years in a coma. 39-year-old Terry Wallis was injured in a car crash in 1984 and had been comatose ever since. His mother was at his bedside when he suddenly came to.

UP SOT

THERE'S REALLY NO WORD TO DESCRIBE IT. WE WAITED
19 YEARS AND WE'RE SO HAPPY. IT'S WONDERFUL.

END SOT

Terry Wallis's daughter, Amber, was born shortly before his accident. The car accident has left him a quadriplegic. He says he wants one day to be able to walk again.

The facts are there. It's a serviceable telling of the story. But it would have benefited from a more personal touch, unfolding the drama of the event:

Terry Wallis was 20 when he was pulled from a car wreck in Little Rock, Arkansas. That was in 1984. For 19 years he lay in a coma – though his mother never gave up on his recovery. Yesterday she was there... when he regained consciousness.

GRAB

He missed seeing his infant daughter grow into a woman.

But, at 39, Terry Wallis still has a journey ahead – hoping for the day he can walk again... because the accident also left him a quadriplegic.

Commercial Names

The proliferation of commercial naming of sporting teams, events and venues requires us to exercise fine judgement. The rule is: Would the audience understand our reference if the commercial tag were omitted or another name substituted?

The issue for us is not satisfying the commercial interest, but choosing our usage to fit the situation and the demands of good sense. We need to ensure the listener understands what we are talking about when we mention an event or competitor, while minimising the use of commercial names.

There is rarely, if ever, a need to refer to a stadium or a venue by a commercial name.

[See: Advertising; Sponsors' Names]

Commonwealth

No longer the British Commonwealth. 'Commonwealth Government' and 'Federal Government' are usually interchangeable. 'The Commonwealth of Australia' is the nation, Australia. Be wary of confusing Commonwealth (the Federal Government) and Commonwealth (Australia).

[See Canberra; Royalty]

Community

A favourite among politicians and bureaucrats who speak of 'the wider community', when 'people' would do. Some journalists are inclined to anoint any group of people who share an interest or occupation – as in 'medical community', 'aviation community', 'business community', 'chess community'. In most references, 'doctors', 'pilots', 'business people' and 'chess players' are better.

Compared

Say 'compared with' if you want to draw attention to the difference: 'He compared radio with television'.

Say 'compared to' when drawing attention to the similarity: 'Life has been compared to a pilgrimage'.

Complaints

Telephone complaints should always be handled with courtesy, no matter how unreasonable they may seem. Persistent callers should be invited to put their complaint in writing. Staff are not expected to listen to threats or abuse. If the conversation develops along these lines it should be ended, politely.

Reporters and presenters do not answer written complaints. They should be referred to your editorial supervisor.

[See: 'Editorial Policies', 12]

Contacts

Good reporters usually can be judged by the quality and number of their contacts. Most contacts don't come to you, they have to be sought out and cultivated. Specialist rounds, if they are to break stories, must adhere to a discipline of daily contacts – it's as true today as it ever was.

Back in 1949, an ABC industrial reporter was expected to contact 250-plus organisations each month. Style notes at that time drove the message home:

Calling the rounds is like door-to-door selling – you cannot afford to miss a call. That call might be the customer.

Every time you phone a contact you are selling the news service. Contacts are flattered that you think them worth a call regularly and not just when you need them because they have a story.

Never break a confidence imposed on you. You will never be expected to. But remember you are working for the ABC, not your round or your contacts. Don't accept information 'off the record' if this would prevent you obtaining it for publication from another source.

[See: Off-the-Record; Protection of Sources; Sources]

Contempt

Generally, courts and other tribunals are open to the public, and the media can report proceedings with relative freedom. But there are limits. The law of contempt imposes restrictions to protect the right to a fair and impartial hearing and to maintain the authority of the court. Publishing material likely to prejudice the conduct or outcome of a matter before the courts, attacking the impartiality or integrity of a judge and disobeying a court order are all clear cases of 'contempt of court'.

The penalties for contempt of court can be severe, including harsh fines and imprisonment.

In a recent case where a journalist and newspaper were given a substantial fine, the judge said: 'Other than reporting the actual proceedings in the court, nothing should be stated in the media concerning the trial, the court, the accused or witnesses'.

For advice, call ABC Legal.

Publishing photographs or drawings of an accused in crimes such as murder, assault and robbery may be in contempt of court because the identity of the accused is likely to be important in such cases. Any editorial decision to do so should only be made after consulting ABC Legal.

[See: 'ABC All-Media Law Handbook'; Courts and Benches; Defamation; Privilege]

Contemptible/Contemptuous

A 'contemptible' person is 'a despicable being worthy of contempt'. A 'contemptuous' person shows by attitude or action that he or she holds someone **else** in contempt, i.e. regards them as contemptible.



Context

Meaning often depends on context. Never assume the audience knows all the background or context of a story.

Bring back essential information. For instance, if reporting the progress of an inquiry into a major accident, remind the audience of the number of fatalities and possibly the date of the accident.

Continually/Continuously

Parliament sits 'continually' (i.e. regularly, with breaks) while some politicians drone on 'continuously' (i.e. without stopping) for hours.

Contractions

In your script, if you reduce 'will not' to **won't** or 'does not' to **doesn't**, think how it will sound when read. Often the fuller form is clearer. A commonly abused contraction is 'there's' (i.e. 'there is'), as in 'There's new claims...' It should be 'There **are** new claims...'

Some reporters tend to start sentences with 'it is (or it's)' and then get to the subject, e.g. 'It's the wind and the rain that are causing the damage'. Choose more direct speech, e.g. 'Wind and rain are causing the damage'.

Controversial

Usually an unnecessary word in the news business. It means 'disputation on a matter of opinion'. Since news is full of opposing opinions on all sorts of things, consider how meaningful is it to attach the word 'controversial' to your subject? If you do, make perfectly clear what the point of controversy is.

Conversational Language

The way we speak is the way we should write. It does not run to slang, but it shuns formal, official words and phrases that often obscure the meaning or just try to sound important.

Conversational usage, for example, includes 'found' (instead of 'located'); 'happened' (instead of 'occurred'); 'taken' (instead of 'transported'); 'plane' (instead of 'fixed-wing aircraft'); 'people' (instead of 'occupants'); 'free' (instead of 'at large'); 'work together' (instead of 'interface'); 'contribution' (instead of 'input'); 'got' (instead of 'acquired'); 'happen' (instead of 'transpire'); 'begin' (instead of 'commence'); 'meet' (instead of 'meet with'); 'move' (instead of 'relocate'); 'use' (instead of 'utilise'); 'boat', 'ship', 'dinghy', 'yacht', 'tanker' (instead of 'vessel'). The list could go on.

Don't surrender to the language of the police bulletin, the political rally, the computer blurb, and the myriad other sources of stodgy officialese.

We don't speak to each other in long, convoluted sentences with several qualifying phrases, so don't write that way.

An example: 'The Raelian movement, which believes that human beings were originally created by extra-terrestrials and sees cloning as a route to immortality, claimed it had created the first-ever carbon-copy of a human last week'.

Much better to simplify: 'The Raelian movement says human beings were originally created by extra-terrestrials. It sees cloning as a way to immortality – and claimed last week it had created the first carbon-copy of a human'.

Remember, the listener gets one fleeting chance to catch your meaning.

[See: Gender; Jargon; Language; Meaning; Spokesman]

Convince

Often misused, when 'persuade' is meant. Also overworked in 'convincing' wins and losses – the scores tell the story.



Copy

Radio News bulletin producers need a range of options. Where stories come with audio, a copy version should also be provided. When an important story breaks, don't immediately go for the big production – get a brief copy story in the system quickly.

[See: Breaking News; Transcripts]

Copyright

Under Federal copyright law, an exception is made for uses including 'research, study or reporting the news'. Up to 10% of a copyrighted text may be used in such cases. If in doubt, consult ABC Legal.

Corrections

The ABCWire carries hundreds of items a day, so we need a clear system for quickly correcting or removing stories, when required.

If a story is found to be wrong, or there are serious doubts about it, we use one of four slugs – KILL, CORRECTION, HOLD or REMOVE – to identify and resolve the problem.

A story found to contain matter that is **substantially wrong, potentially defamatory or in contempt** must be KILLED.

In the Slug box write: KILL, KILL, KILL

In the story area write: The story slugged JUDGE RESIGNS ex RN-SYD has been killed. The judge has not resigned.

Immediately notify the Network Editor, Day Editor or State Editor.

A KILL may require a CORRECTION which will need to be broadcast wherever the original story went to air. ABC Legal should be consulted.

In the Slug box write: CORR JUDGE RESIGNS

In the Headline box write: State Editor advises this must run in 1200 bulletin (or the 'must use' advisory determined by the Network Editor, Day Editor or State Editor).

In the story area write: Contrary to our earlier report, the Chief Judge of the Family Court has not resigned, in protest over lax court security. He has taken leave.

If we make a mistake that's less critical, and a KILL is not required, then a straight CORRECTION will be issued. That is, the original story, corrected, is put onto the Wire. Such stories must carry an explanation in the Headline box, e.g. 'Corrects gymnast's first name from Sam to Tom'. Mark the item 'CORR Gymnast Wins', retaining the original slug. Mention if other versions are affected. **Do not hesitate to correct an error. Never try to cover up.**

When the accuracy or appropriateness of a story has been **seriously questioned, and cannot be quickly confirmed**, issue a HOLD.

In the Slug box write: HOLD, HOLD, HOLD

In the story area write: Hold story slugged RESCUE SUCCESS ex RN-BRIS. Police say the ambulance service is wrong.

After checking, issue a RELEASE or KILL, as required.

There are two other slugs we use, in different circumstances: REPLACE and REMOVE.

A REPLACE is not a CORRECTION. Only use a REPLACE when a story has gone out of date or a fuller version is now available, not when the original story was wrong.

If a story was **issued inadvertently, is judged in poor taste or has already been run and no REPLACE is coming**, issue a REMOVE notice and give the reason (e.g. 'The story is old').

News bulletins are not to be regarded as trial-and-error forums for getting a story right, eventually. Mistakes sometimes occur, wrong information can be passed on in good faith. That's understood. Our task is to get the most accurate version to our audience first time, and to quickly and clearly eliminate errors from our coverage. Therefore, reporters and producers are required to carefully follow the procedures set out above.



Corroboration

Where we have a single source of information that's in dispute or we may have to defend in court (e.g. in defence of defamation) we have a responsibility to seek corroboration. This is a basic tenet of investigative journalism.

Corroboration means testing and weighing up the veracity of information, not just selectively applying means of arguing its plausibility. Corroboration may come from independent witnesses, documents and other substantiating or supporting evidence – but is not achieved by ignoring or concealing contrary evidence.

[See: Claims; Defamation]

Court Etiquette

When entering and leaving a courtroom at least nod respectfully to the judge. Avoid any contact with an accused person. Do not speak to the judge or the jurors during a trial. Wear business dress when attending court and don't eat, or read newspapers, in a courtroom.

Some judges and magistrates will permit reporters to use tape recorders for note-taking and, in rarer cases, will allow recording or filming in court for broadcast, but neither practice is generally accepted. Always check with the judge's associate, the court or the court's information officer **prior** to using a tape recorder (even for note-taking) or camera.

Courts and Benches

'A' Full Bench of the High Court is two or more judges. If all seven judges of the High Court (rare cases) are sitting, it is 'the Full Bench'. 'A/the Full Court' of the High Court is not correct.

'A' Full Bench of the Federal Court is normally three or five judges. Never 'the Full Bench' (there are dozens of judges). 'A/the Full Court' of the Federal Court is not correct.

'The' Full Court of the Family Court is at least four judges (never fewer than three Full Court judges, plus another Family Court judge). Never 'a Full Court or Bench'.

'A' Full Bench of the Industrial Relations Commission is more than three and up to seven (normally at least two of the Deputy/Senior Deputy Presidents, Vice-Presidents or President and one Commissioner).

[See: Crime and Punishment; Honorifics; Judges and Magistrates]

Crash

In finance stories, 'collapsed', 'crashed', 'plummeted', 'slumped' and their kind should be reserved for truly out-of-the-ordinary events. A share price has not 'slumped', for instance, when it's given up what amounts to one or two per cent of its value. 'Fell' and 'rose' convey the essential meaning, even in a volatile market.

Credibility

The quality of being believable. A 'credulous' person will believe anything. 'Credence' means belief or trust.

Credits

ABC programs with exclusive stories/interviews should be credited. Programs broadcasting actuality of a news conference need not be credited.

If a story or actuality is used before the source program goes to air, then the program should be credited together with a reference to when it can be heard/viewed (e.g. 'The Prime Minister has told tonight's ABC "Four Corners" program...').

The ABC credits other media organisations that provide actuality: 'The Prime Minister told Channel Ten...'. For TV, this can be in a super. (We should not, of course, overdo the use of non-ABC material.)

When actuality includes a question from the interviewer, the credit should identify this: 'Jane Doe told ABC Radio's Joan Smith...' (plus a program credit if the interview is an exclusive).

[See: Attribution]

Crescendo/Climax

A crescendo is a gradual increase usually in the volume of music, and is not a climax. Often it's incorrectly stated that something has 'reached a crescendo'. Things reach a peak or climax.

Crime and Punishment

Subject to the laws of defamation, there are no legal limits imposed on reporting a crime, until a person is arrested. Our rule is strict accuracy, no sensationalism and no dwelling on distressing details.

Once a person is charged, we're permitted to use the person's full name, age, address, the nature of the charge and the bare facts that would have been apparent to any observer, unless any of these matters have been suppressed or are otherwise the subject of a reporting restriction, e.g. where the accused is a child or it is a sexual offence. Anything else that may prejudice the conduct or outcome of the proceedings (e.g. 'The man was arrested while trying to leave the country') must be omitted.

The police may be the source of the charged person's name, and the name may be used prior to the charged person's appearance before a bail court. In such cases, special care must be taken to ensure accuracy because, until the court appearance, such information is not privileged.

Contempt of court cannot be overcome by omitting a charged person's name and referring to the person as 'the offender' (which suggests guilt) rather than the proper term 'the accused', because at some stage that person will have been named.

Once a person appears in court, we may only use his or her name, age, address, occupation, the charge and what is said and admitted in evidence in open court. We should identify the accused by their full and correct name to avoid a possible mistaken identity (and hence risk of defamation). Once we start reporting a case, make certain we cover it fairly and accurately, and report the result.

It is always safest for a journalist to be present for the whole proceedings that are being reported, as another person or publisher's account may be wrong, unfair or lack balance. Reliance on third party accounts would be no protection against a contempt of court charge. You must always ensure any commentary on court proceedings (if cleared by ABC Legal) is presented clearly separate to the report of those proceedings.

Problems occur when reporters try to dress up a court report with a sensational introduction that goes beyond a fair and accurate report of proceedings; leave out formal but essential detail about the proceedings; or include material that has not been given in evidence or said in open court and before the jury, if there is one. **Don't do it.**

[See: 'ABC All-Media Law Handbook'; Contempt; Defamation; Court Etiquette; Courts and Benches; Honorifics]



Crisis

Heavily overused. Let other people (e.g. in actuality) say if the moment is truly 'decisive or vitally important' and be judged by history.

Criteria

Criteria is the plural of criterion. So, 'the criteria for the job is good health' does not make sense.

Crucial

This is something that involves 'a final and supremely important decision'. Do not substitute it for what is merely important. 'Climax' is also sometimes misused to describe one of several interesting episodes along the way.

[See: Crescendo/Climax]

Cruelty

Stories of cruel or inhuman behaviour (e.g. war atrocities, child abuse, torture, etc.) should avoid details that are not essential and would be likely to cause listeners unnecessary distress. We should inform in general terms, choosing our language and actuality carefully. For instance, special care should be exercised when reporting explicit sexual cases during breakfast-time bulletins when children may be listening/viewing.

When, for sound editorial reasons, it's considered necessary to broadcast potentially distressing reports or images, a warning must precede the item.

[See: Children's Programs; Violence; Warnings]

Currency

We should provide the Australian dollar equivalent when quoting other currencies (e.g. '10 million yen, or about 140-thousand dollars'). Any story referring just to 'dollars' will be understood to mean Australian dollars, unless the context makes absolutely clear that the dollars are U.S. or New Zealand or Canadian, etc.

Spoken style is 'one-point-six million dollars'; 'one dollar sixty' (not 'one-point-six dollars'); '69-point-two US cents'. Figures can be rounded, where commonsense permits, so the decimal point is not overused. 'One-point-five million dollars' should, more conversationally, become 'one and a half million dollars'.

Avoid the diminutive, 'Aussie dollar' or 'the Aussie'. It's currency trading jargon. We don't refer to the 'Aussie Prime Minister'.

For graphics, our style is 'US\$10' (i.e. denomination, followed by dollar sign). Figures without national denomination (e.g. \$3 million) will be assumed to be Australian dollars.

Online style is \$US 1.6 million (i.e. dollar sign, followed by the national denomination).

[See: Decimals]

Current Affairs

Our news bulletins aim to be an electronic journal of record, while our current affairs programs focus more on context, emerging issues and possible outcomes. A distinction is sometimes made between the task of a news reporter to deliver the facts and the task of a current affairs reporter to analyse them. However, that does **not** mean a news reporter will be unquestioning or that a current affairs reporter is free to deliver analysis unsupported by evidence.

[See: Editorialising]



Cyclones

Whatever the name, they are neither male nor female: 'Cyclone Brenda is causing havoc. **It** is centred 20 kilometres off Townsville'.

[See: Weather]

Damage

Damage is '**worth**' nothing; it '**costs**' money. So don't say 'damage worth one million dollars'. When you get an estimate, attribute it: 'The company estimates damage at...'

Dates

The spoken style is 'January the 30th' or 'the 30th of January'. Don't say 'January 30' (though this is the style for TV supers).

If the precise date is not critical to the meaning, say 'at the end of January' or 'in mid-March' or 'early last month'.

Online style is 'January 30, 2004' (month, day and year – in full).

Deadlines

The deadline for stories required for network use is **not** one minute to bulletin/program air time. And don't plan solely in terms of your local outlet – allow time for audio or video syndication. *Bear in mind other states and other time zones.*

[See: Bulletin Times]

Death

Don't resort to euphemisms such as 'demise', 'deceased' or 'passed away'.

[See: Euphemisms]

Death Toll

There is something morbidly hopeful about the way this term is sometimes used, as in 'the death toll so far' or 'the death toll is expected to rise'. It's better to say 'the number of people killed [or dead]...' The numbers of dead and injured in a disaster are best kept in the link, where they can be easily kept up to date.

Road toll stories should not be overdone – because of a lack of alternative news – during holiday periods.

Decimals

Generally, we round to the nearest full number. When precise decimal figures must be given, use this form:

For .05, say 'point-oh-five'.

For 2.32, say 'two-point-three-two' (not 'two point thirty-two').

When writing graphics using decimal points, and *for online*, '0.4' is the correct form, not '.4'.

[See: Currency; Numbers]

Decisions

People **'make'** decisions, they don't **'take'** them.

Decorations

Use only if relevant to the story. Examples: 'The 90-year-old Victoria Cross winner returned to the battlefield'; 'John Smith refused an Order of Australia medal three years ago, and is now in jail for treason'.

Defamation

Defamation occurs when published material, identifying someone, conveys a meaning that tends to lower that person's reputation in the eyes of reasonable members of the community.

In Australia, the defences to a defamation action differ between the various States and Territories, but fundamentally are the same. For advice, call ABC Legal.

Remember, a court may decide a person has been defamed **and** that a defence has been successfully argued by the publisher. So, in reporting the outcome, you'll probably find both sides will claim victory.

[See: Contempt; Crime and Punishment; Privilege and Protected Reports]

Definite Article

The form 'Prime Minister Jones' or 'Acting Treasurer Williams' (title followed by surname only) has overtones of the parade ground ('Colonel Jones; Sergeant Williams). It's not the way people normally speak. People say **'the** Prime Minister, Frank Jones' (then, Mr Jones); **'the** Acting Treasurer, Mary Williams' (then, Ms Williams), **'the** bank manager', etc. So should we.

Similarly, it is awkward to say, 'Chairman of the local shire, John Smith...' Better to say, **'the** chairman of the local shire...' or, if it works comfortably, 'Shire Chairman, John Smith...' (but 'Shire Chairman Smith' is not acceptable, for the reason given above).

Don't say 'Council has decided'. Use the definite article: **'the** Council...'

Always: 'the Pope', 'the Queen'.

[See: Honorifics]

Demonstrations

Be wary of reporting plans for public demonstrations. They might not happen and we have no business trying to rally sympathisers or boost numbers. There is often no need to detail the time or place.

If there's any possible contention about crowd sizes, especially at protest or political rallies, seek estimates from the police or the organisers and credit them.

And don't say '**at least** one thousand' turned up, or '**more than** one thousand', or '**only** one thousand'. It may sound like we're impressed, or otherwise, with the numbers. Best to say '**about** one thousand', and let others do the boasting or sneering, if necessary.

[See: Violence]

Departments

It's the Department **of** Defence, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, etc. But it's the Minister **for** Defence, etc.

[See: Government Portfolios]

Desperate

'Desperate appeal', 'desperate escape bid', etc. are desperately tired forms.

Detail

Concerns about deadlines and tight durations can lead reporters to adopt a minimalist approach to gathering information.

Nothing annoys a listener or viewer more than to be given a story that ends merely in a big question mark. It's our job to ask the questions and get the essential facts. All the facts may not be worth recording. But to know what to write you must know what to leave out. You must have it all.

Don't be satisfied easily, get your teeth into a subject and don't let go until you've got everything. If the hallmark of a good editor is a lively suspicion, it's just as true that the mark of a good reporter is an unquenchable curiosity.

[See: Durations]



Details

Avoid the hackneyed phrase 'details are sketchy'. But where details are conflicting we should say so, rather than plump for one figure or fact over the other. Better to stick to generalities until details are confirmed, or say 'few details are available'.

Different

Say 'different **from**', not 'different to' or 'different than'.

Dilemma

A choice between two courses of action, both of which are likely to be unpleasant. Not a synonym for 'trouble', 'predicament' or 'quandary'.

Diplomats and Consuls

Ambassadors are accredited **to** a country. Say 'the Australian ambassador **to** the United States'. Countries of the Commonwealth have 'High Commissioners'. 'Consuls' look after the interests of their own nationals in foreign countries and deal with immigration matters.

Disabilities

Take care not to make gratuitous references to disabilities. A disability is not necessarily a 'handicap'. People who use wheelchairs are not necessarily 'confined' to them. However, if a disability is relevant to a story, be specific, e.g. 'A man in a wheelchair has been swept off a bridge by floodwater'.

[See: Discrimination; 'Editorial Policies', 10.8.4]

Disasters and Emergencies

There is a Disaster queue in Avstar for both Radio and Television. It explains how to respond to breaking news. Make yourself familiar with the procedures, including how to get News Flashes/Crawls to air.

It's essential NewsCAff executives are alerted immediately.

Remember, first reports are often exaggerated. Don't accept blindly. We should avoid giving remote disasters, of minor general interest, too much prominence in bulletins.

[See: News Flashes; Rolling Coverage]

Discrimination

We need to be careful in our choice of language so as not to contribute to discrimination. Equally important is the need to extend our coverage of people, events, issues and opinions to include the whole society and not to discriminate, by omission, against those who have less 'visibility' with mainstream media.

[See: Disabilities; 'Editorial Policies', 10.8; Ethnicity; Stereotypes]

Disinterested

A word every reporter should cherish. It means 'objective, unbiased'. So don't surrender it to the meaning of 'uninterested', which is the last thing a reporter should be.

Down Under

This may be a way others – especially inhabitants of the Northern Hemisphere – see Australia, but it is not a way we should refer to ourselves.

In the same vein, don't indulge in over-familiar terms such as 'Aussie', 'Tassie', 'Kiwi', 'Vics', 'Windies', etc., including in sports stories.

[See: Currency; Far East]



Durations

Ultimately, the bulletin producer decides how long a story should be. Reporters, though, must be careful not to allow their stories to run longer than necessary – or to leave a story hanging, lacking essential information. Two- or three-paragraph stories are a waste of air-time if the listener is left wondering what it was about. But taking three paragraphs to get to the story is just bad writing.

Radio News Voice Reports should aim for a maximum duration of 35-40 seconds – anything over 45 seconds should be cleared first with the producer.

Television News Packages should aim for a duration of 1:15 to 1:45 – anything longer should be cleared first with the producer. Having said that, there is still a place for stories of longer durations, whether they be lead stories or down-the-bulletin contributions.

[See: Detail; Links/Intros/Throw Lines]

Editorial Practice

The 'Charter of Editorial Practice' for news and current affairs sets the following standards:

1. The ABC takes no editorial stand in its programming.
2. Editorial staff will avoid any conflict of interest in performance of their duties.
3. Every reasonable effort must be made to ensure that the factual content of news and current affairs is accurate and in context. Demonstrable errors will be corrected in a timely manner and in a form most suited to the circumstances.
4. Balance will be sought through the presentation, as far as possible, of principal relevant viewpoints on matters of importance. This requirement may not always be reached within a single program or news bulletin but will be achieved as soon as possible.
5. The commitment to balance requires editorial staff to present a wide range of perspectives and not unduly favour one over the others. But it does not require them to be unquestioning, nor to give all sides of an issue the same amount of time. News values and news judgements are a material consideration in reaching decisions, consistent with these standards.

6. In serving the public's right to know, editorial staff will be enterprising in perceiving, pursuing and presenting issues which affect society and the individual.
 7. Editorial staff will respect legitimate rights to privacy of people featuring in the news.
 8. Authority for editorial directions and decisions will be vested in editorial staff.
 9. Editorial staff will ensure that coverage of newsworthy activity within the Australian community is comprehensive and non-discriminatory.
- ABC Editorial Policies, 5.1

[See: Charter/Code]

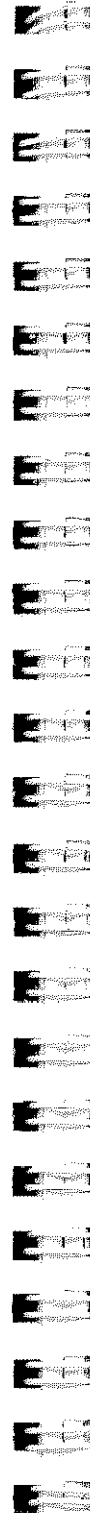
Editorial Responsibility and 'Upward Referral'

Subject to normal management and editorial controls, program makers are responsible both for making the program and for exercising editorial judgement. If a problem arises, or there is any doubt, the program maker must consult the next higher level of executive or management for guidance.

- ABC Editorial Policies, 5.2.1

This is known as 'upward referral'. Make yourself aware of the lines of upward referral.

[See: 'Editorial Policies', 5.2]



Editorialising

We should concentrate on giving the public the news: what happened, where, when, and who was involved. Reporters have a legitimate role analysing events to explain what they mean, but it's essential to give the public the facts.

We should be careful not to resort, unthinkingly, to stock phrases which characterise events, impute motives, declare winners and losers, or in various other ways gratuitously **editorialise**. It may be as subtle as the use of 'safe' in the phrase 'safe injecting room', or 'finally' in the headline 'the council finally changes its parking policy'.

People want the opportunity to make up their own minds without us forcing a view upon them.

If, for example, we start a story with 'The Government is **playing down** the dispute', we're elevating opinion to the status of fact. It may be apparent to most people what the Government hopes to do, but any analysis is better delivered by our reporter in a voice-piece, argued from the facts.

If we report 'Universities are lifting fees, **cashing in** on demand for student places', we are suggesting these are opportunistic increases, not principally motivated by concerns about financial viability and service. Can that be demonstrated?

In another example, if we begin '**In good news** for the Government, unemployment has fallen to eight point six per cent', we're adopting one perspective over all others, and possibly an unreasonable one for those still unemployed.

Be specific, rather than revert to lazy formulas which characterise – belittling or aggrandising – something even before we've reported it.

All NewsCAff reports are expected to be grounded in fact and free of bias.

[See: Attribution; Claims; Current Affairs; Finally; Quotes; Reaction]

Election Campaigns

Special obligations apply to our reporting during election campaigns. You will be notified of official campaign periods and told what feedback is required.

[See: Balance]

Embargoes

We should respect **genuine** embargoes on the release of stories. Many are applied for good reason, others for no good reason. Every effort should be made to have an embargo lifted if no good reason is apparent. However, if the effort is unsuccessful, the embargo must be observed, or your EP/COS consulted. Embargoed stories should be marked clearly. For example:

EMBARGOED UNTIL 1115 (WA Time) TUES. 25 NOV.

Embattled

Too often the word of choice when someone is 'in trouble'.

Enquiry

Our style is to say and spell 'inquiry'.

Epidemic

More than just an 'outbreak' or an above-average incidence of a disease.

[See: Miracle]



Ethnicity

Only refer to ethnic origins when you're certain they're relevant. It's not appropriate to 'tag' whole ethnic groups in reporting crime or other anti-social behaviour. If someone dies in a traffic accident, we probably wouldn't say: 'An Aboriginal man was killed when his truck hit a tree at high speed'. If police charge someone with a drug offence, we probably wouldn't say: 'A Vietnamese-born woman is in custody charged with possession of heroin'. Australians of all backgrounds are known to have traffic accidents or be involved in drug crime; there's nothing defining about their ethnic origins, per se.

However, if a specific and relevant connection exists between an event and the person's ethnicity, we might use such a reference. Some examples:

- i. Police in South Australia have reported another Aboriginal death in custody – the fifth this month. A 22-year-old man was found dead in his cell, 12-hours after his arrest on a charge of disorderly conduct.
- ii. Police have issued the description of a woman being sought for questioning in connection with a bank robbery in Dubbo. She's of Asian appearance, with a slim build and about 160 centimetres tall.

[See: Discrimination; Stereotypes]

Euphemisms

Plain words are best every time. Do not talk of 'disadvantaged people' when you mean 'the poor'. Or a woman who is 'expecting' when you mean 'pregnant'. Do not have people 'pass away' or speak of their 'demise' in bulletins; say that they 'die'. Also avoid 'collateral damage' when referring to 'civilian casualties'.

[See: Conversational Language; Death; Language]

Excessive

It does **not** mean 'great' or 'increased', as in 'the rain is expected to result in an excessive wheat crop'. Excessive means '**more** than is necessary' or '**exceeding** the proper limit'.

Execute

Judges order executions. Gangsters, gunmen, hoodlums and terrorists 'kill' or 'murder' people.

[See: Assassin; Shoot-out]

Experts

Experts should be quoted as experts in their own field only.

The same principle applies when reporting someone's intentions: they are the best authority for what they intend to do. If we say 'the company president is due to address the staff this afternoon', be sure we are not just reporting what staff think he **should** do. As far as possible, check with the source rather than rely on others to speak for somebody else's planned statement, action or itinerary.

[See: Analyst; Attribution; Claims]

Explicit/Implicit

'Explicit' is often mistaken for 'implicit', which means 'something assumed or implied'. 'Explicit' means 'something that has been expressed clearly'. For example, 'Mr Brown said tax charges were implicit in the agreement, but he declined to be **explicit**'.

Facility

Instead of 'medical facility', say 'hospital' or 'doctor's surgery', or whatever it is. 'Retail outlets' and 'facilities' can safely be called 'shops'. Most 'manufacturing facilities' can be described as 'factories'. Recognise jargon for what it is.

[See: jargon]

Failed

A word often involved in clumsy editorialising. If you say, for example, that a political party 'failed to stand a candidate', are you sure it previously declared an intention to do so? Too often events that 'fail' to occur have been gratuitously predicted. Don't justify wayward previews or predictions, after the event, by resorting to this device.

'Failing' to do something also implies an effort made but not achieved, whereas people often choose quite deliberately not to take an action. An example: 'The mayor failed to respond to the allegations'. It might be more accurate and impartial to say: 'The mayor did not respond to the allegations'. [See: Editorialising; Finally]

Far East

'Far' and 'east' if you're in London, maybe, but not from Australia's point of view. [See: Down Under]

Female/Male

They have a formal, biological ring to them. 'Man' or 'woman' sounds more human, if you're talking about people.

Fewer

In general, 'fewer' refers to numbers (e.g. 'We need fewer bottles'). 'Less' refers to quantities (e.g. 'Cattle are drinking less water'). But common sense should prevent us describing someone as 'fewer than 30 years old'. [See: Collective Nouns; Numbers]

File Pictures

In general, we should only use the 'File' super when leaving it out could lead to a misunderstanding. However, file pictures of a particular incident (especially images of public disorder or disasters) must be identified with a 'File' super or a super that gives the place and date. **Generic** overlay is not usually given a 'File' super.

In television rolling coverage, use the super 'Earlier' over vision recorded earlier, when going back and forth between live and recorded images or when confusion might arise.

[See: Supers]

Finally

Often a loaded term. It suggests the reporter has been impatient for something to happen. Let someone else say if it's been 'a long time coming'.

'Hopefully' is another word that raises a question. Who hopes?

'Defiant', as in 'the president remains defiant', carries a similar taint, when 'the president' may be simply sticking to a policy, in the face of pressure.

And if you say 'in a surprise move', be sure you aren't the only one surprised.

[See: Editorialising; Failed]

Fires and Floods

Stories on fires and floods are of general interest to a large section of our audience, but they can have life or death importance for a particular section. Whatever else we do, we must serve that particular audience. With news reports, this audience is not interested in the drama, it wants the facts – about river heights, wind directions, road closures, etc. Make sure it gets the facts from official sources and that generalisations do not lead us into errors. Remember our aim: to give the public the information it needs.

First Draft

A first draft is the form of a story you read through and check for factual errors, awkward phrasing or literals, **before** offering it for use in a bulletin. Don't submit copy expecting producers to do your writing for you.



First Names

The familiarity bred by the use of first names when addressing or referring to certain people in stories often sounds patronising, or evokes a sense of ABC sympathy for the person or issue.

Except if the surname is being suppressed for reasons of confidentiality (which we would mention in the script), there is almost no situation where the use of first names alone is acceptable. We should remain even-handed and unaligned, whatever the subject-matter.

Flaunt

Flaunt means 'to show off' or 'display proudly'. It is not the same as **flout**, which means to 'disregard or deride openly'.

FOI

Freedom of Information laws vary among the states and the Commonwealth but, broadly, they enable access to information held as records by government agencies, a government minister, local government and other public bodies.

All reporters should make themselves familiar with procedures for lodging FOI requests and techniques for maximizing results.

Following

So much of our copy has something happening 'following' something: 'Farmers are hoping for better times, **following** some good rain'; 'a man is dead, **following** an accident'; 'the government is confident unemployment will fall, **following** the release of new figures'. The word 'after' can often work instead, or there are plenty of other conversational ways to write a sentence.

[See: After]

Free Offers

News and Current Affairs will not accept offers of free or discounted products, services or facilities, except on those occasions where coverage of an important newsworthy event is only possible by accepting such an offer, e.g. travel to a disaster scene or a remote location.

- ABC Editorial Policies, 15.7

Where a free offer of assistance has been accepted, producers need to consider whether the public should be told in our report.

If in doubt, 'refer up'.

Fulsome

Avoid using the word, as it can mean 'generous' to some people and 'insincere' to others. It does not mean 'wholehearted' or 'comprehensive'.

Gale

A gale sounds worse than a storm, but isn't. The Beaufort scale of wind speeds goes, in ascending order: breeze, gale, storm, hurricane.

[See: Cyclones; Temperature; Weather]

Gaol

If you spell it 'jail', no newsreader will mistake it for 'goal'.

Gender

Avoid words and phrases that can offend by appearing to suggest women are excluded from consideration, e.g. 'man' (meaning 'people'), 'man-in-the-street', 'sportsmanlike'.

Avoid

Ambulance men

Businessmen

Cleaning lady

Foreman

Firemen

Housewives

Lady

Mother of three

Policemen

Sportsmanlike

Prefer

Ambulance officers

Business people

Cleaner

Supervisor

Firefighters

Women

Woman (unless you'd use 'gentleman' in the same context)

Woman

Police officers

Sporting

But don't adopt unwieldy words like 'chairperson' or 'spokesperson'. Use 'chairman' or 'chairwoman', etc.

Refer to ships, boats and yachts as 'it', not 'she' or 'her'. Usually the same rule applies to animals.

[See: Conversational Language; 'Editorial Policies', Appendix 6, 2.4ff; Spokesman]

Geriatric

Don't use it as a term for an older person to imply senility or irresponsibility. But a hospital can have a 'geriatric ward'.

[See: Age]

Gets Underway

'Starts' or 'begins' are better than this laboured, over-used phrase.

Gone Missing

People **are** missing'.

Government

Bulletins and programs are constantly reporting items about governments. We need to make clear which government we're referring to. Repeat, if necessary, the 'Federal Government' or 'New South Wales Government' or 'Italian Government', as the case may be. A story referring to the government of another State or Territory should always spell out which government: 'the Queensland Government', 'the Northern Territory Government', 'the Tasmanian Premier', etc.

Government Portfolios

If a minister holds more than one portfolio, refer only to the one(s) relevant to the story. But use common sense. If referring to a Minister's obscure additional portfolio, cite his or her familiar title and then say, '...who is also responsible for Country Roads'. (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Minister **for** Foreign Affairs, though normally 'Foreign Minister').

[See: Departments]

Graphics

Television news graphics may be simple or static, complex or moving, but they have one essential purpose: to illustrate a **news point**. If the graphic is confused, too complex, too wordy or illegible, it will fail in its purpose. It's not an art form, but a news technique.

Grief

Reporters will, from time to time, encounter victims of grief. Sometimes grief will be part of the story. But be sensitive, and do not exploit distressed survivors or bereaved friends and family. Children in such circumstances normally should not be featured.

[See: Cruelty; 'Editorial Policies', 10.10; Death; Hostages and Sieges; Next-of-kin; Violence]



Gross National Product

The value of all the goods and services a country produces during a given period. The growth in GNP, adjusted for inflation and annualised, is commonly used as a measure of economic growth.

Shun the usage 'negative growth'. Say 'economic decline' or 'contraction'.

Gunned Down

Another ugly expression from pulp fiction. 'Killed' or 'wounded' or 'shot dead' will suffice. Never blame 'armed gunmen' for what happened.

[See: Assassin; Execute; jargon]

Guns/Rifles

You do not 'shoot' a gun or rifle. They are 'fired'. And don't confuse a gun with a rifle, or vice versa. They are different.

Hanged

Criminals may be 'hanged'. Pictures are 'hung'. Don't mix up the two.

Headlines

There is scope for creativity, but headlines must always accurately reflect the substance of a story. Mistakes often occur because the writer did not read the whole story, but framed the headline based on only the first couple of paragraphs.

[See: Back Announcements]

Hectare

The unit of surface measurement we use, not acres. One hectare is 10,000 square metres or 2.47 acres.

Hero/Heroic

Genuine heroism is devalued by over-use of these terms.

[See: Historic; Miracle]

Hidden Cameras

ABC Legal must be consulted before hidden cameras are **used** to film a private activity. The Managing Director must give prior approval for any **broadcast** of material obtained using a hidden camera.

[See: 'Editorial Policies' 6.9]

Historic

Over-used. The word means 'important, memorable or famous in history'. Historical means 'pertaining to history or based on fact, as distinct from legend'. Use the indefinite article 'a' before 'historic' or 'historical'.

Honorifics

In the first reference, use both the first name and surname, without the honorific. Use the honorific and surname in subsequent mentions. Examples:

- i. One of Australia's leading merchant bankers, Henry Morgan, has arrived in Spain at the head of an investment mission. Mr Morgan...
- ii. The Prime Minister, Jane White, is appealing to voters to avoid a hung parliament. Ms White...

Unless a woman asks to be called 'Miss' or 'Mrs', or is well known to adopt either honorific, our style is 'Ms'.

Don't strip people of their titles: 'Sir', 'Lady', 'Lord' must be retained, except when the person is charged with a crime. The wife of a knight takes his **surname** only, e.g. 'Lady Renown', not 'Lady Felicity Renown'.

Use the full name of sports players and entertainers in the first mention, and only the surname in subsequent references, e.g. 'Cathy Swift', then 'Swift'.

With police, in the first reference say, 'Assistant Commissioner John Smith', then 'Mr Smith'; 'Detective Sergeant' in the first reference, then 'Sergeant'.

'The President of the Industrial Relations Commission, Mr Justice Truth', then, 'Mr Justice Truth'.

[See: Arabic Names; Asian Names; Judges and Magistrates; Military; Religious Affairs; Royalty]



Honorifics in Court Cases

Once a person is charged with a criminal offence, the honorific may be dropped.

However, discretion needs to be applied. For example, dropping an honorific prior to a trial may contribute to a presumption of guilt (particularly in a highly-emotive or politicised environment). Consideration may be given to dropping an honorific prior to a **charge** being laid, but any such instance must be 'referred up'.

Hospitalised

Nouns trying to pass themselves off as verbs include, 'bailed', 'choppered', 'helicoptered', 'stretchered', 'suicided' and 'hospitalised'. Shun them. While on the subject, remember, not everyone taken to hospital is **admitted**. (And people are not 'rushed' to hospital.)

Hostages and Sieges

We must report accurately and quickly, but with great care. We do not endanger the lives of hostages or compound the distress of anyone involved. Do not seek interviews with hostage-takers. If in doubt, 'refer up'.

[See: Air Incidents; Bomb Hoaxes; Disasters and Emergencies; Grief]

Hyphens

Watch out for examples like 'Courier-Mail' or 'General Motors-Holden', and note the absence of the hyphen from cases such as 'Kingsford Smith'. Use hyphens in compound adjectives, e.g. 'red-haired woman'; 'limited-overs cricket'.

[See: Sport]

If

The word signifies something that has not happened, is not happening, but **could** happen, in certain circumstances. Therefore, in a sentence like, 'If I were you I would see a doctor', the **subjunctive** 'were' (not 'was') reinforces the meaning of 'if'.

Use the full power of the language available to you.

Imply/Infer

They are not interchangeable. 'Imply' means 'to suggest or hint by something you say'; 'infer' means 'to conclude or deduce from something another has said'. You can infer something from what someone else says, but they may not have implied it. The word 'indicate' is sometimes used to exploit a semantic middle-ground. For example: 'The Minister indicated the Government would adopt the measure'. But did he **intend** this meaning, or has the reporter merely inferred it?

Important

If you report something is 'important', remember to say why and to whom.

Indescribable

It sounds lame, especially for a reporter, to say something is 'indescribable'. That's our job, so find a way.

Industrial Action

A catch-all term that can confuse. If you mean 'strike', 'sit-in', 'lock-out', 'go-slow', then say so. Be specific. Avoid the expression 'strike action'.

Infinitives

Usually it's not necessary to split an infinitive and certainly it's unacceptable to do so with 'not' or 'never'. 'He advised his staff to not insist on their demands' should read 'He advised his staff not to insist on their demands'. 'He ordered them to never deliver the mail early' should read 'He ordered them never to deliver the mail early'.

Time references also should not be inserted within verb phrases. 'A Brisbane man was last night shot dead' should read 'A Brisbane man was shot dead last night'.



Ingenious/Ingenuous

Ingenious means 'to show inventiveness'. Ingenuous means 'to be open and frank', but is acquiring a pejorative sense of 'artless or naive'. 'Disingenuous' means 'insincere'.

Interviewing

Have a plan. Beware of asking more than one question at a time, it gives the interviewee the chance to answer only one part.

Listen to answers and be prepared to abandon your plan. Remain calm and impartial – don't hector or lead the interviewee. Keep questions brief and relevant.

Get into the habit of doing all interviews as though for broadcast (recording the questions and answers) – it trains you to ask succinct questions and keep the interview moving forward. It also allows a news interview to be used in longer-form outlets, such as Radio Current Affairs and Local Radio.

It is **unlawful** in Australia to record telephone conversations without the prior consent of the person who is to be recorded. Make your intention clear **before** beginning the interview.

[See: Q & A]

Ironic

It does not mean 'strange', 'coincidental' or 'curious'. It is probably a good word to leave out of news reports – even if it fits.

Jargon

From governments, doctors, police, scientists, economists, the military and numerous other groups comes an avalanche of specialised circumlocutions called 'jargon'. They're all to be avoided, or at least treated with great caution. Plain words usually make a report clearer.

[See: Cliches; Conversational Language; Language]

Judges and magistrates

Magistrates

First reference: Magistrate Michael Jones,
Then: Mr Jones said,
The Magistrate said.

District and County Court Judges

First reference: Judge Jane West,
Then: Judge West said,
The Judge said.

Senior Judges (State and Territory Supreme Courts, the Federal Court, the High Court)

First reference: Justice Rex Chong,
Then: Justice Chong said,
The Judge said.

Chief Judges/Chief Justices (High Court, Supreme Court, Federal Court, Family Court, District and County Courts)

First reference: Chief Justice Mary Gleeson,
Then: The Chief Justice said.

In a story, employ the definite article, e.g. 'The Chief Justice of the Federal Court'.

[See: Courts and Benches; Definite Article]

Justify

A word that is too often misused as a synonym for 'defended' or 'explained'. Justify means 'to **show** something was right or warranted'.

[See: Refute]

Language

Words are your tools. Be the master of the words you use, not their slave. Understand that words are nothing, have no value at all, except to convey ideas and feelings. Truthful reporting is a great responsibility. Be worthy of the trust.

Words that are clear and plain are not in themselves dull. Short words usually do the job much better than long ones.

Language, of course, is continually developing and changing, but that doesn't lessen the need to shun jargon, slang, euphemisms and tautologies. Stick to words and phrases that are simple and well understood.

Choose direct speech and, wherever possible, the present tense. Poor grammar signifies that an idea has not been properly thought through. Cliches are the first refuge of the thoughtless. Be creative, clear and specific. As always, keep an eye on SCOSE.

[See: Cliches; Conversational Language; Euphemisms; Jargon; Offensive Language; Tautology]

Lay/Lie

Hens 'lay' eggs. People 'lay' things such as carpets and tablecloths. 'Lay' needs a direct object and its past form is 'laid'.

'Lie' (meaning 'to be in a horizontal position') does not take a direct object. Its irregular forms can cause confusion. Adopt the following usage:

'Why don't you **lie** [not 'lay'] down and have a rest'. (Present Tense)

'We found it **lying** under the bed'. (Present Participle)

'As he **lay** dying...' (Past Tense)

'The manuscript had **lain** in the attic all those years'. (Past Participle)

Lead

Someone who has an 'unassailable' lead cannot be overtaken – so they should be declared the winner, if that really is the situation. Otherwise, they may just have a 'commanding' lead.

Legal

Seek advice on any story that may have legal implications. ABC Legal is there to help. If a story has been 'legalised' add a production note giving the name and contact of the solicitor.

Ultimately News and Current Affairs management will decide whether to run a story when it's a matter of weighing up news value against legal risk.

[See: Contempt; Crime and Punishment; Defamation; Privilege]

Licence/License

'Licence' is the noun and 'license' is the verb.

Link

An important aspect of Internet communication is the ability to provide links to other web sites. Program makers must regularly review the content of all such web sites in order to ensure the links are appropriate and relevant. Care must be taken to ensure the ABC's editorial integrity is maintained.

A hyperlink is a web address 'embedded' (usually appearing in blue) in online text.

[See: 'Editorial Policies', 8]



Links/Intros/Throw Lines

The way you introduce a story will often determine whether it succeeds.

Write the link or intro first. This forces you to pinpoint the main interest of your story. Adopt crisp, direct speech that appeals to the imagination.

Instead of this: 'The world's top-ranked female golfer, Swede Annika Sorenstam, has impressed in her opening round on the men's tour... firing one over par, to be well positioned to make the cut.'

Try this: 'She's not leading, but she's still in the hunt. The world's top woman golfer, Annika Sorenstam, finished her first round on the men's tour one over par... and it could have been a lot better.' (The package explains she missed half a dozen short putts.)

Instead of: 'Qantas has rejected calls for extra security staff following an embarrassing breach yesterday at Sydney airport. The company says new technology will soon be introduced to prevent a similar incident.'

How many stories use the tired formula of 'rejecting calls' or 'supporting calls' in the intro?

So, how about: 'There won't be any rush to hire more guards at Sydney Airport, if Qantas has it's way. The airline believes new technology will prevent a repeat of yesterday's security breach, when passengers got onto a flight without being checked.' (Tells the audience more.)

Instead of this: 'The latest agricultural surveys have revealed a damaging wheat virus has been found on farms and roadsides across four states and territories. The wheat streak mosaic virus has now been detected at eight South Australian sites, nine properties in Victoria and two in New South Wales.'

Too much detail for a link – and wrapped in the deathly cloak of 'latest surveys reveal'.

How about this: 'The plant virus that's worrying Australia's wheat industry has now been found in four states and territories... and it's not confined to farms. Further traces of the wheat streak mosaic virus have been detected in South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria – after it was first found in the ACT.'

Emphasise key information, build a context, and tease other facts that will come later in the body of the story.

The link or intro is the audience's first pass at a story. They will hear it once and must understand it first time. The link should introduce the story in a clear and concise way, but not simply repeat the information or turn of phrase appearing in the first lines of the voiceover or script.

The balance between clarity and brevity is crucial. Generally, Radio News intros leading to voice reports will be briefer than those leading to actuality only. Television News links should be closer to 15 seconds than 30.

In radio, particularly, avoid the repetitive use in one bulletin of one form of throw line.

Keep the information in the throw line brief, so the reporter's/talent's name is still close to the voicer/actuality, and ensure the throw and the start of the voicepiece work together.

[See: Actuality; Durations]

Local Government

Local government uses many titles that differ from city to municipality to shire. Check locally to ensure that 'Mayor', 'President', 'Alderman', 'Councillor' or 'Commissioner' is used correctly.

Major

One of the most over-worked adjectives in our bulletins and programs. A thesaurus will list dozens of other ways to say 'important', or it may be obvious without an adjective.

Malapropism

'Comparisons are odorous', 'taken for granite', 'a photogenic memory': Mrs Malaprop lives on – sadly, too, in some of our copy.

Close cousin to her/our often humorous confusion of words is the less theatrical nonsense of such slip-ups as 'very perfectly', 'one of the only', 'died of serious injuries', 'even more healthier'.

[See: Meaning]



Maori

Indigenous New Zealanders are no longer referred to as 'Maoris'. The singular and plural form is 'Maori'.

Meaning

Always write for meaning. Obvious? Apparently not, considering these 'muddled messages' got to air:

'It's the third case of the virus in Victoria, which is known to devastate crops in North America' (a lethal state?);

'Tikrit is the last stronghold of Saddam Hussein's regime, whose fall would mark the effective end of the war' (whose fall, Tikrit's or the regime's?);

'The priest was due to face trial next month after one of his alleged victims came forward in 1996 but died unexpectedly in March' (turns out, it was the priest who died);

'With a lot of their natural habitat cleared, tracking has discovered the honey-eater is finding new locations to forage in, posing new challenges'.

In each case, qualifying phrases are detached from their subject, or two or three bits of information hang loosely together. Break your prose into separate sentences if that's the safest way of ensuring clarity and avoiding ambiguity.

Always re-read your copy for sense.

Meanwhile

It should not be used to link **unrelated** events. It should be used sparingly.

Media Releases

Nothing has done more to ruin good reporting than the 'handout'. It should be recognised that handouts are not necessarily designed to give information, but to disguise it. Find out all you can about what is not in the handout. When you have completely exhausted your curiosity, you will have finished the job.

The onus is on us to check the authenticity and accuracy of information we run as news. That includes checking back with the putative source of a media release to ensure it's genuine. The title 'media release' on a document dropping off a fax machine does not give it automatic or unchallenged entree into our bulletins.

Some organisations have taken to issuing video and/or audio packages. Treat with care, but they may be a source of pictures for a television story, suitably supered (e.g. Defence vision; Advertisement). Audio sourced this way also should be identified as such. Normally we would not use 'interviews' packaged in this way. We seek to ask our own questions. An exception may be if the interviewee is genuinely unavailable and the content is essentially factual. If in doubt, 'refer up'.

[See: Attribution]

Metric

Australia's standard for weights and measures.

For quick reference:

an inch	= 2.54 centimetres
a mile	= 1.61 kilometres
an ounce	= 28.3 grams
a pound	= 454 grams
a ton	= 1.02 tonnes
an acre	= 0.405 of a hectare
a bushel	= 0.0364 of a cubic metre
a fluid ounce	= 28.4 millilitres
a pint	= 568 millilitres
a gallon	= 4.55 litres.



But there are exceptions: sailors and aviators measure distance in 'nautical miles' and calculate speed in 'knots'; pilots measure altitude in 'feet'; a knot is one nautical mile (6080ft) per hour (so don't write '16 knots per hour'); aircraft and ships specify engine output in 'horsepower'; horses are measured in 'hands'; and bullion dealers weigh gold by the 'troy ounce'. Do not convert these into metric equivalents.

Military

The Australian Defence Force Command, based in Canberra, is headed by 'the Chief of the Defence Force' who is also the principal military adviser to the Minister for Defence. Next in command is 'the Vice Chief of the Defence Force'.

Reporting to them are the 'Chief of Army', 'Chief of Navy' and 'Chief of Air Force' (Note: No definite article before the branch of the military). Give the full title once, e.g. 'the Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Peter Uniform'; 'Lance Corporal Mary Jones'. After that we say 'General Uniform', or 'the general'; 'Corporal Jones'. The Australian pronunciation of 'leff-ten-ant' (not 'lew-ten-ant') is adopted, **except** in the Navy.

Usually it's not necessary to retain the 'Royal' in 'Royal Australian Navy' and 'Royal Australian Air Force'. The briefer forms, 'Australian Navy' and 'Australian Air Force' are acceptable.

The Navy musters 'ratings', not 'other ranks', a ship's captain does not necessarily hold the rank of 'Captain', and sailors always serve 'in', not 'on', a ship. A 'cruiser' is not a 'frigate' and a 'destroyer' is not a 'battleship', but they're all 'warships'. Say 'H.M.A.S. Melbourne' the first time (not 'the H.M.A.S. Melbourne'), then shorten it to 'Melbourne', as in 'on board Melbourne' (not 'on board the Melbourne').

The term 'officer' correctly describes only commissioned officers. Most military personnel are not officers, but 'other ranks'. Use the generic term 'soldier' or 'Defence Force member', unless the rank is known. (In contrast, 'police officer' is acceptable as a general description.) In most cases, 'soldier' or 'sailor' is better than the stuffy 'military personnel'.

Ranks:

Navy
Admiral
Vice Admiral
Rear Admiral
Commodore
Captain (Capt)
Commander (Cdr)
Lieutenant Commander (Lt Cdr)
Lieutenant (Lt)
Sub Lieutenant (Sub Lt)
Warrant Officer (WO)
Chief Petty Officer (CPO)
Petty Officer (PO)
Leading Seaman (LS)

Air Force
Air Chief Marshal
Air Marshal
Air Vice Marshal
Air Commodore
Group Captain (Group Capt)
Wing Commander (Wing Cdr)
Squadron Leader (Sqd Leader)
Flight Lieutenant (Flight Lt)
Flying Officer (FO)
Pilot Officer (PO)
Warrant Officer (WO)
Flight Sergeant (Flight Sgt)
Sergeant (Sgt)
Corporal (Cpl)



Army

General
Lieutenant General (Lt Gen)
Major General (Maj Gen)
Brigadier (Brig)
Colonel (Col)
Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col)
Major (Maj)
Captain (Capt)
Lieutenant (Lt)
2nd Lieutenant (Lt)
Warrant Officer Cl. 1 (WO)
Warrant Officer Cl. 2 (WO)
Staff Sergeant (Sgt)
Sergeant (Sgt)
Corporal/Bombardier (Cpl)

Miracle

It's not merely a 'wonderful' or 'amazing' event, but 'something that can be attributed only to a supernatural cause'. We should never use it. Also avoid 'freak accident'.

Mitigate/Militate

'Mitigate' is sometimes used by mistake for 'militate'. 'Mitigate' means 'to make something less extreme'. It's often used in reference to the severity of a punishment or the intensity of heat, anger, pain, etc. 'Mitigating circumstances' are those which reduce blame.

'Militate (against)' means 'to be a force (against)' or 'to work (against)'.

Names

It has always been necessary to spell names correctly, but with the arrival of online, errors hidden on radio and television in a phonetic spelling emerge to damage our credibility. Take extra care with names.

[See: First Names; Spelling]

National Versions

We are a **national** and an **international** news service, as well as a local service, so your stories may be seen or heard anywhere. References to places, people and events need to take this into account. Producers are on the frontline in this matter. A story that says 'the State is facing a week of industrial disruption' is completely misleading if written about Victoria, but heard in Queensland. Relevant background and clear references to locations, etc. must be provided. This is where, in radio, copy versions give producers the opportunity to shape stories to different audiences – but we still need reporters' packages when a story has been identified for network use.

Don't refer, in a story written about another place/state, to 'their' law or 'their minister', etc. It may need to travel there and will sound foolish to the local audience.

News Bulletins, Radio

A radio news bulletin should have a personality. It is not merely a collection of stories strung together in a descending order of perceived importance.

Bulletin producers must aim to achieve a flow and balance, through careful selection of the best available material. Lead stories will often pick themselves on the sheer weight of news value, but the key lies in the mixing and matching of state, national and international material – from politics to sport, and anything in between. There can be no firm rules, because one major story can sometimes dominate a bulletin. At other times, a sports story might be the top yarn of the hour, or the day.



In addition to the mix of stories, producers must make the best possible use of actuality and voicers. An audio tease can be very effective at the top of longer bulletins. There are various ways to achieve the effect. The death of a leading politician, actor or singer, for example, begs the use of actuality – either at the very top of the bulletin, or to illustrate a final headline if the story is not leading the bulletin.

Headlines, mid-bulletin time checks and back heads should be regular features of longer bulletins. An exception may be where a major story so dominates the news it is better to start with actuality, as a tease, then go straight to the story.

We should also encourage reporters to file more self-contained packages (voicer/actuality/voicer), rather than trailing off reports with actuality. If packages need to end on actuality, avoid using reporter sign-offs.

Back announcements should also be used regularly, to re-identify less well-known talent, or after long actuality grabs, or to round off a story with extra information.

Be wary of using reporter throw-lines at the start of a paragraph leading to a package. Unless the sentence is short and uncomplicated, it is preferable to place the credit ('Sally Jones reports...') immediately in front of the voicer.

Bulletin producers must sub-edit voice scripts whenever possible, and actuality and voice reports must be auditioned before broadcast, to ensure audio quality and presentation standards are met.

News Bulletins, Television

The recipe for a good TV bulletin is similar to the radio one, involving a mix of stories.

In recent history, the ABC's 7PM TV News bulletins have operated on an informal philosophy of containing one-third international news, one-third national and one-third state. Obviously, this varies day-to-day, and from state-to-state, but it is a general formula which has been very successful.

Banners/titles/headlines should be kept short and sharp, but they must still be sentences – not newspaper-style headlines without verbs.

We should not sacrifice sense for the sake of brevity by using very short actuality grabs. Talent should be on camera long enough for their visual and verbal presence to be properly absorbed. Usually, that means more than the five-second minimum required for supering purposes.

One or two words from a talent, or a one-liner, can be an effective technique in helping to tell a story – but the technique requires skilled scripting and editing.

We must always remember that what passes muster in the rarefied audio and visual surrounds of an edit suite might not survive when it reaches the intended audience in the nation's lounge rooms.

RVOs (reader voice overs) should never start with a one-line (reader to camera) intro, leading into actuality or NATSOT (natural sound on tape).

The first vision in a RVO must be covered with an establishing paragraph of script. There are no exceptions.

Use opportunities to create a flow between stories ('Returning overseas'; 'As the state fights that flu outbreak, a breakthrough in treatment of a very different ailment'; 'From the office to the school playground'; 'Continuing with business'). They can give an organic quality to the bulletin, but be sure they can be carried off by the presenter and are not contrived. Also beware of making links between stories that have inappropriate legal or editorial implications.

Closing vision (the 'closer') should be chosen carefully. There is a tendency to package the most dramatic story of the day, which can involve violence or disaster vision. This is not always desirable, without the context of the script that went with the vision originally.

Bulletin producers must audition (or 'shotlist') stories before broadcast whenever possible. This should be regarded as a compulsory requirement for locally-produced stories, with particular emphasis on stories being syndicated for network use. It may not always be practical for a state producer to view all stories from other states before they air, but it is desirable for quality and suitability purposes.



News Flashes and Crawls

Our aim is to react quickly, but never put a report to air without confirming the facts. As soon as a breaking story has been confirmed, put a brief version on ABCWIRE so everyone can use it.

The procedure for getting News Flashes to air on the various networks is explained in the Avstar cue: Disaster - News Flash.

When selecting images and sounds for a News Flash give consideration to the likely composition of the audience.

[See: Breaking News; Charter/Code; Children's Programs; Disasters and Emergencies; Rolling Coverage; Violence]

Next-of-Kin

Before naming people killed or injured in any incident, be sure their relatives have been told. Only when someone well-known is involved would we consider whether public interest comes before the family's private grief.

Remember, for cultural and spiritual reasons, caution should be used before broadcasting names or images of dead Aborigines. Seek clearance from the family first.

[See: 'Editorial Policies' 10.10; Aborigines; Grief]

Notorious

Use with care. Commercial networks might refer, for example, to Cabramatta as the 'notorious drugs centre'. We don't.

Number

Take care your copy does not mix up singulars and plurals.

If the subject of a sentence is singular it takes a singular verb. A plural subject takes a plural verb. Two singular subjects linked by 'and' require a plural verb.

So **don't** muddle them like this, e.g. 'the police say (plural) its (singular) numbers are down'; 'the number (singular) of farming families have (plural) declined'; 'a series (singular) of three matches are (plural) being played'. This kind of mistake is becoming common.

Groups, communities, governments, etc. are to be treated as single entities. Unless, of course, they have a plural name. **Don't** say, 'the Brisbane Bullets is maintaining its lead'; 'Victoria Police is recruiting officers'.

Other typical mistakes: 'Labor was warned that lives could be lost if **they** don't back tighter border security'; 'The Indigenous Games is underway'; 'A new series of fires **have** started near Melbourne'.

Not quite so simple is the singular/plural treatment of the likes of 'family'. In the strict sense, it is singular. But it can sound awkward to say: 'Police are searching for clues after a family of three **was** found dead in **its** home in Sydney's north'. More comfortably, that sentence should read along these lines: 'Police are searching for clues after **three members of a family were** found dead in **their** home in Sydney's north'.

In our style, 'media' is plural (because the word is the plural form of 'medium'), 'public' is singular (there is no such word as 'publics') and 'none' is singular (because you can't have a plural of nothing). 'One', obviously, is singular. But you don't hear it always used correctly: 'one of the cars **is** faulty'; 'one in three journalists **is** under 25'.

Be consistent and use common sense.

Numbers

Consider whether you have to be precise with a number, or if the meaning requires only a round figure.

Few listeners are likely to grasp this: 'A per capita cost of 874-thousand 463-dollars and 24-cents will be spread over the city's two million ratepayers'.

In most cases, round numbers (e.g. 'nearly half a million', rather than '489-thousand'). If a precise figure is essential to the meaning, it may be necessary to repeat it.

Say 'about', rather than 'approximately' or 'some' (the latter is non-conversational, formal-speak). Say 'more than 500', not 'over 500'.

The mathematical rule for rounding fractions is: round any half or more up to the nearest whole number; and round amounts less than half down to the nearest whole number. (For example, fractions between 1.5 and 1.9 become two; fractions between 1.1 and 1.4 become one.) But use judgement before rounding numbers. In a news story, rarely would it be appropriate to say 'two per cent of the population has AIDS', for example, if the precise figure is 1.6 per cent.

When writing whole numbers: one to nine should be in words; for 10 to 999, use figures; one thousand should also be in words; after that use a combination of the two, e.g. 400-thousand.

For online: Exceptions are in such constructions as '9:00am'; 'January 2'; '\$3'; '5 per cent'. (Graphics and supers also use figures and symbols rather than spelling out numbers.)

Especially in Radio News, there are still more ways to confuse listeners with numbers:

Overdoing Them – 'After deliberating for 19 days, the jury of seven men and four women soon after three-o'clock announced its verdict that 21-year-old Ernest John Stiletto was guilty of having stabbed his 37-year-old wife four-and-a-half years ago'.

Putting Them First in a Sentence – 'Thirteen votes separated the candidates...' How many? Who? The first words of a news item can easily be missed. It may be best to avoid starting a sentence with a number.

[See: Conversational Language]

Obituaries

Obituaries for prominent people are held in each state. Know where to find the list in Avstar.

Off-the-Record

Be aware of what you are agreeing to by accepting material off-the-record. In dealing with an informant you should confirm whether information is being offered on- or off-the-record (and for attribution or not), and seek, whenever possible, to have it placed on the record (and for attribution).

[See: Attribution; Contacts; Corroboration; Sources]

Offensive Language

We don't use language in bulletins or programs simply for shock value – or (usually) language that could be reasonably expected to give offence. Just because such language occurs in actuality it does not lessen our responsibility for its appearance in a story.

There are cases when we may broadcast offensive language, if it's integral to the story or of news consequence itself. Such cases must be referred to your EP for prior approval. A warning should be given to the audience.

[See: Language; Violence; Warnings]

Only

Misplacing 'only' can greatly affect the meaning. Put it as close as you can to the phrase it modifies and take care that you don't turn the sentence into a comment. 'He was sentenced to **only** three years jail' suggests we think he got off lightly. Note the following differences:

'**Only** David drives the family car'. (No one else is allowed.)

'David **only** drives the family car'. (He does nothing else.)

'David drives **only** the family car'. (He doesn't drive any other.)

'David drives the family's **only** car'. (There's just one car in the family.)



Or/And

'A boat **or** a car is a mode of transport', but 'A boat **and** a car are modes of transport'. That is, items (whether singular or plural) joined with 'and' require a plural verb, but when naming one or another singular subject the verb remains singular.

[See: Number]

Order of Australia

There are four levels of appointment, in descending order: Companion (AC), Officer (AO), Member (AM) and Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM).

Our

As in 'our cities', 'our troops', 'our swimmers', 'our weather', 'our dollar', etc. The ABC does not own cities, troops, a swimming team, or the weather – and it's certainly not 'our dollar' that changes in value.

Say 'Australian cities', 'Olympic swimmers', 'the Adelaide weather', 'the Australian dollar', etc.

Our/or Endings

For online: We favour spellings ending in –our (e.g. flavour) where the dictionary offers a choice.

Over

Do not use 'over' (which means 'on top of') when you mean 'more than' (which means 'greater than').

[See: Numbers]

Pending

It means 'awaiting an outcome of some process that has already begun'. 'Impending', on the other hand, means 'something about to happen'. For the sake of conversational English, avoid both.

People

Never forget we are broadcasting for people, not radio or television sets. Failure to keep in mind people – all people – is one of the great dangers of our profession. When it happens, the people in their turn, forget you. Get news about people in the bulletins; report anonymous news in terms of people.

Per Cent

Two words – although ‘percentage’ is one. The symbol ‘%’ is only to be used in graphics, not copy.

When a figure goes from 50 per cent to 60 per cent it rises ‘ten percentage points’, not by 10 per cent.

For online: As an exception to the rule for writing numbers, all percentages should appear as a figure (‘2 per cent’, ‘24 per cent’) unless used to start a sentence.

[See: Fractions; Numbers]

Personnel Credits

When used at all in back announcements or credit rolls, personnel credits should be kept to a minimum and should only credit staff who worked on the specific program.

[See: Back Announcements]

Piece-to-Camera/PTC/Stand-Up

The common term for a reporter’s appearance speaking to camera in a television story. It enhances a story when properly done and appropriately placed – it can also mar a story.

Often a PTC works better within the body of a story, linking material, rather than at the end. But it can be tedious to sandwich a PTC between two ‘talking heads’.

[See: Presentation; Sign-Offs]



Plea

In legal reporting, the word ‘plea’ should not be used as a synonym for ‘appeal’ or ‘request’. And don’t refer to people in court ‘entering a plea’. Strictly, it’s the **court** that ‘enters a plea’. However, ‘the accused did not plead’ is correct.

Positive

Human selfishness in all its forms makes headlines. So does the unusual. ‘Man bites dog’ is sometimes given as a defining example of what makes news. But this is a flawed definition because it’s incomplete and assumes nothing ‘ordinary’ makes news.

It’s our duty to take proper notice of the positive social side of our community life, inasmuch as concentration on its anti-social aspects can present a false picture.

You have to be able to recognise this kind of story, if for no other reason, because it can make a bulletin/program come alive.

Post-Mortem

Literally, it means ‘after death’, thus the common expression ‘post-mortem examination’. However, ‘post-mortem’ used alone has come to mean the same thing, and is acceptable. ‘Autopsy’ may also be used.

Prepositional Verbs

What are they? They’re clumsily contrived variants of simple verbs and should be banished from bulletins. Some examples: ‘Miss out on’, ‘face up to’, ‘divided up’, ‘meet with’, ‘meet up with’, ‘consult with’, ‘give consideration to’, ‘cut back’, and so on.

[See: Conversational Language; Language; Verbs]

Prescribe/Proscribe

Doctors 'prescribe' medicine. To 'proscribe' is to 'condemn or prohibit'.

Presentation

This encompasses everything from voice production and interviewing technique, to on-camera demeanour and dress standards. Your presentation should complement and support the story content, not distract from it.

The way you narrate your script can make or break a story. Even the sharpest prose will be dulled by poor delivery: a 'sing-song' rhythm detracts from the meaning; repeated downward inflections are boring; repeated upward inflections are distracting; breaths in the wrong places cause confusion, etc.

Voice training and refresher sessions are essential, no matter what your level of experience. Producers must advise reporters if there's a problem that needs correcting.

We must ensure we put our best/most suitable voices and/or faces forward, so justice is done to all the work that goes before. Pieces-to-camera must be necessary to the story and fit our presentation standards. They include dress, setting, delivery, content and 'viewer comfort-level'.

Producers must take responsibility, and drop non-essential elements that fail our standards for voice quality and on-camera appearance.

[See: Piece-to-Camera/PTC/Stand-Up]

Prevaricate/Procrastinate

'Prevaricate' means to 'speak or act evasively'. 'Procrastinate' means to 'put off'.



Privilege and Protected Reports

A witness in a court case or a politician speaking in parliament has the right or 'privilege' to make defamatory statements even if they are false and malicious.

However, the media's privilege to report such proceedings is 'qualified'. That is, the law permits only a 'fair and accurate report' of proceedings of parliament, open courts and Royal Commissions. This protection extends to official reports and papers published in parliament and documents put into evidence in court, but **not** to media releases or other statements made outside courts or parliament. For advice, call ABC Legal.

The media's right must be exercised with care, especially:

- to clearly identify that what is being reported took place in court or parliament;
- where possible, to report directly rather than relying on second-hand information (from other journalists, lawyers or police) about what happened in court or parliament;
- to ensure court documents being quoted have been put into evidence;
- not to confine your report to one part of proceedings if another part contains a denial, disproof or contrary position;
- not to add information, jump to conclusions, extrapolate or misquote any part of court or parliamentary proceedings.

Failure to do so may lead to the loss of privilege, which means you would not be able to rely on the defence of 'protected report' if required to defend a defamation action.

We must also not allow the possibility of a mistaken identity to arise. To do so would be defamatory and indefensible as a protected report of court proceedings. That's why, in court cases, we give details in full, e.g. '27-year-old John James Smith of Bigtown'.

[See: Contempt; Defamation]

Promotions/Promos

Program summaries prepared to promote stories need to fairly and clearly represent the contents. However, due to the repetitive use of promos, violent content should be minimised.

[See: Children's Programs; Violence]

Pronunciation

We pride ourselves on correct pronunciation.

When copy contains difficult or unfamiliar words, provide a precise pronunciation guide at the top of the page. Be guided by SCOSE – cut and paste the reference if necessary. If you don't know it, don't guess.

It's useful when doing an interview to ask the talent to pronounce his or her full name on tape, and keep it for reference.

[See: SCOSE; The]

Protagonist/Antagonist

A 'protagonist' is the main character in a story: someone who supports or advocates an issue. An 'antagonist' is an adversary.

Protection of Sources

The ABC's Code of Practice includes this protection: 'Editorial staff will not be obliged to disclose confidential sources which they are entitled to protect at all times'.

[See: Contacts; 'Editorial Policies', Appendix 6, 4.4; Off-the-Record; Sources]



Punctuation

Most problems occur in the misuse of the comma. There are two guiding principles: Is a comma necessary to protect the meaning of the sentence? In normal conversation, would you pause where you've put a comma?

Read your copy aloud and think about the punctuation and emphasis.

The use of quotation marks in radio and television copy is usually superfluous. But online stories need quotation marks for direct quotes. If a word or phrase requires quotation marks, it probably needs further explanation or qualification. Either that, or a good newsreader will convey the meaning.

The apostrophe is another punctuation mark often misused.

[See: Apostrophe]

Q & As

A good Q & A needs preparation – and, wherever possible, should be preceded by a discussion between the reporter and the presenter about the line of questioning **before** going to air. Reporters must ensure they keep control of the content of Q & As, whether conducted live into our own bulletins/programs or with Local Radio presenters.

When you get to a story location, don't do a Q & A before you know what's going on. **The rule is: Get the story, then report it.** Often the best way to get an initial report to air is with a Q & A – and the first outlet may be a Local Radio program – but reporters must not allow a commitment to a Q & A to prevent them filing a story for the next scheduled Radio News bulletin.

Don't become involved in legally risky Q & As about court cases in progress.

[See: Interviewing]

Quotes

Take care not to run accusations or opinions as matters of fact. 'North Korea has blamed the US for escalating tensions, because of its bullying tactics' contains an accusation that must be qualified along the lines of '**what it [North Korea] says** are American bullying tactics'.

Similarly, make clear who is the source for language that is judgemental. Rather than 'the Premier has apologised unreservedly for the blunder of allowing the tax change', to emphasise who used the terms 'unreservedly' and 'blunder' write: 'The Premier **says** he apologises unreservedly for **what he calls** the blunder...'

Sometimes it's appropriate for a reporter to provide interpretation or analysis (always grounded in the facts). But we don't advance our personal views or opinions. News copy must always make the source of an opinion perfectly clear, so it cannot be perceived as coming from the ABC.

There is usually a better way of presenting a direct quote than using the words 'quote' and 'unquote'.

[See: Attribution; Editorialising; Interviewing; Punctuation; Q & As]

Rampage/Spree

A 'rampage' is a bout of violent, destructive behaviour. A 'spree' is a bout of fun. So don't say 'shooting spree'.

Reaction

Many of our stories deal with reaction to things. Public familiarity with the original event or decision will vary enormously. Give the necessary background.

And don't reduce every issue to a battle, someone attacking or defending someone else. People 'lend weight to' or 'caution against' things at least as often as they adopt positions wholeheartedly for or against them. Report their views, instead of consigning them to the metaphorical barricades.

[See: Editorialising]

Recapitulation

In reporting replies to attacks (or criticism), recapitulation of the original attack is usually necessary, but it should be done as briefly as possible to avoid the danger of over-emphasising the original attack.



Re-enactments

Re-enactments of events will be clearly identified as such and presented in a way which will not mislead audiences.

[See: 'Editorial Policies', 6.11]

Receiver

A receiver is called in when a business fails, usually by a secured creditor(s). The receiver will try to help the company trade out of its difficulties, but he or she is responsible first to the secured creditor(s). A **liquidator** takes over – and sells the assets – if the receiver cannot keep the company going. A company may appoint an **administrator** to stave off receivership.

Both receivership and administration are forms of insolvency, and can be safely termed 'collapse'. In both cases, accountants take day-to-day control of the business.

[See: Bankruptcy]

Referendum

Section 128 of the Constitution provides that a Bill to alter the Constitution, once passed by Parliament, must go to a referendum. To become law, it must be approved by a majority of States and by a majority of all electors voting. In determining the result, the outcome in a Territory is not counted towards 'a majority of States', but the vote is included in the 'majority of electors' total.

Reform

Common usage has weakened the meaning of this word, but there's still a case for using it with more care. The word means to '**improve** by alteration', but it is not our job to prejudge whether an alteration is an improvement. What some people describe as 'abortion law reform', for example, others regard as 'a licence to kill'; what the Treasurer calls 'tax reform' might be considered, in some quarters, a euphemism for 'robbery'. By choosing instead to say 'change' or 'alteration' we don't beg the question of whether or not it is for the better. On the other hand, 'the Treasurer's tax reform proposal' is acceptable in the sense that the Treasurer **proposes** or claims that the changes are for the better.

Refute

It means 'to **prove** something (a statement, theory, charge, etc.) false or incorrect'. It does not mean 'denied', 'rejected', 'disagreed with', 'dismissed', 'ridiculed' or 'repudiated'.

If we use 'refute', we are effectively accepting and endorsing one side of an argument.

[See: Justify]

Regularly

Use it to suggest that the interval between things or events is even (i.e. equal), not that something 'happens often'.

Religion

Religious affairs offer many pitfalls in terminology, concepts and doctrines.

Christianity:

A common mistake is the omission of 'the' and a Christian name from the title 'Reverend'. Correct: 'The Reverend John Jones'. He may be called 'Mr Jones' after the first mention. It is not correct to say 'Reverend Jones' or 'the Reverend Jones' any more than it is to say 'Sir Jones', instead of 'Sir John Jones'.

It is not a requirement always to use the full titles that follow, but when they occur they must be applied correctly.

Anglican

Archbishop ('The Most Reverend'); Bishop ('The Right Reverend'); Dean ('The Very Reverend'); Priest or Minister ('The Reverend'). After the first reference, say 'Archbishop Grange'; 'Bishop Mitre', etc.

Catholic

The Pope ('His Holiness, The Pope'); Cardinal ('His Eminence, Cardinal'); Archbishop ('His Grace, The Archbishop of Melbourne'); Bishop ('His Lordship, Bishop'). After the first reference, say 'Pope Pius'; 'Cardinal O'Brien'; 'Father Collins'.

'Roman Catholic' Is used only where the context requires a distinction between Roman Catholics and members of other churches that call themselves 'Catholic'.

Orthodox

The Greek Orthodox or Russian Orthodox Churches are also Christian.

The term 'priest' is not used by all Christian denominations, so be careful. The Uniting Church, for instance, does not call its ordained clergy 'priests'.

Judaism:

It may be necessary to distinguish between orthodox and non-orthodox (sometimes called 'liberal') movements. The only formal titles of clergy are 'rabbi', who leads the spiritual congregation, and 'cantor', who leads the congregation in singing. Rabbis are not the equivalent of 'priests' and the 'Chief Rabbi' is not the equivalent of an Anglican primate or a Catholic cardinal. Refer to the 'synagogue', not 'the Jewish church'.

Islam:

The Muslim religion. Its deity is Allah. Mohammed is its founder and prophet. The main groups are Sunni and Shiite. The prayer leader, teacher and celebrant at a mosque is called the 'Imam'. People of an Arabic background would use the term 'Sheikh'. Sunni Muslims are in the great majority worldwide. For historical reasons, in some countries, this has forced the Shiites into the opposition camp and as a result they've used theological arguments ('fundamentalism') to attack the 'materialism' of the Sunni establishment. However, 'Shiite' does not equate to 'fundamentalist', nor does 'Sunni' to 'moderate'.

Sunni

The Mufti of Australia
Sheikh or His Excellency, Sheikh

Shiite

Sheikh or His Excellency

Buddhism:

Legend has it the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) was born in Nepal about 450 BC. There are many sects of Buddhism, ranging from the evangelical to the meditative and sequestered. It has no strict dogma, but adheres to a practical wisdom or ethic based on the belief that 'living beings are trapped in a cycle of birth and death, with the momentum to rebirth provided by one's previous physical and mental actions' ('Columbia Encyclopaedia').

Buddhist temples are occupied by 'monks' who have as their superior an 'abbot' or 'chief monk'.

The exiled spiritual leader of the Tibetan people is 'His Holiness the Dalai Lama' or just 'the Dalai Lama'. (Never refer to him as 'the Dalai'.)

For online: All references to God, Christ, (including Almighty, Holy Spirit, Messiah, the personal pronouns He, His, Him, etc.) are capped. The Bible, the Gospel and the Scriptures are capped, as are specific references, such as the Apostles Creed (no apostrophe), the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, etc.

Repetition

We don't repeat important facts or figures enough. Repeat breaking news briefly during and/or at the end of a bulletin. For example, the style for a radio bulletin would be: 'just repeating, Australia's unemployment rate has risen sharply to ten-point-eight per cent'.

[See: Back Announcements]

Rolling Coverage

The term we use for *unscheduled and open-ended coverage of a breaking news event.*

Going from scheduled bulletin/program production to extended coverage of breaking news requires a change of 'mind set'. Roles must be quickly realigned. Staff must be prepared to step outside their 'comfort zone'. **Don't under-estimate: this is a big and difficult leap to make.** Staff should know they have the freedom and responsibility to do what is necessary to get to air with the latest and best coverage – in terms of facts, comment, pictures and sound.

Rolling coverage involves a certain amount of 'irreverence'. Technical hitches will happen – remedy them, or work around them, and move on. Don't bemoan the fact on air. Remind the audience: this is history, it's happening before your eyes/ears; it's not finely honed television/radio.

[See: Disasters and Emergencies; News Flashes]



Roll Over

As in 'the accused rolled over and gave evidence for the Crown', the term implies a certain motivation for the witness's action, and may even suggest guilt. It is not an expression to use lightly.

Royalty

Refer to the Queen of Australia as 'the Queen'. In the context of the UK, she's 'the Queen', not just 'the Queen of England'. Her husband is 'the Duke of Edinburgh' in the first mention, then 'Prince Philip'.

Say 'the Prince of Wales', then 'Prince Charles' or 'the Prince'.

[See: Honorifics]

Rumours and Speculation

In news reports, we do not fuel rumours. The hectic corridors of parliament and the hot screens of currency dealing rooms are just some of the favourite haunts of rumour. If something is expected to happen, say 'it's expected' and by whom; if something is being 'watched for' (but not necessarily expected), report the matter in such terms.

It applies to all NewsCAff programs, that gossip is gossip and must be treated with the appropriate caution. A rumour may become significant where it shapes opinion, or is an explanation for an event or reaction worth noting. **Analysis must never elevate rumour to fact.** For example, a rumour that a prominent person has died may influence the sharemarket. We may describe the share movement and its apparent cause – but we don't give credence to the rumour and we always make clear whether our checks have substantiated it.

SCOSE

SCOSE is the ABC's Standing Committee on Spoken English. It issues daily pronunciation guides on the SCOSE website at <http://nucdbo4/scose/>. It is our first reference for pronunciation and usage.

[See: Pronunciation]

Searches

If we start reporting a 'search' story, we need to follow through and report when or whether the missing person or thing is found. So consider, is the story important enough to start with?

Don't have authorities trying to 'locate' people; use the conversational word 'find'. Falling into official parlance can lead to nonsense like this, from a Radio News bulletin: 'The fire victims have been located and are now waiting to be relocated'.

See

Don't say, 'next month will see inflation falling'. Next month can see nothing.

Segue

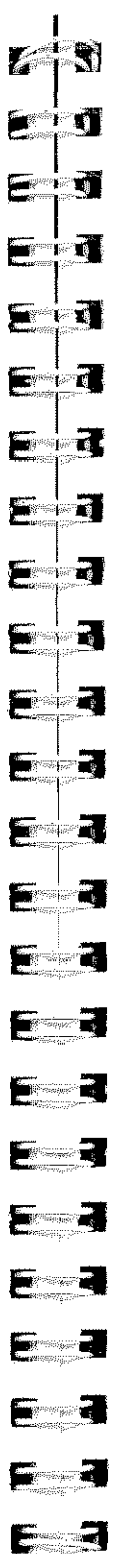
A television news production technique that should be used sparingly, especially if combining segments with two male or two female voices.

Shadow

A title like 'Shadow Transport Minister' is self-administered and for that reason alone we should shun it. 'Opposition Transport Spokesman/-woman' says it all, without confusing the issue. Otherwise, we end up with a plethora of State/Federal would-be ministers – who aren't. 'Shadow... Minister' leads to supering errors and has spawned mistakes like 'Shadow Opposition Front-Bencher'.

If 'Minister' does not appear in the title, an exception may be allowed (e.g. 'Shadow Treasurer', 'Shadow Cabinet').

[See: Supers]



Sign-Offs

In Radio News Bulletins sign-offs are not always necessary for domestic stories. But for extraordinary events, to highlight our presence at an event, or when reporting from a remote location, they are suitable. The form is: 'Jane Doe, Brussels'; 'Frank Jones, Police Headquarters, Hobart'.

Avoid ending radio stories with a grab.

In Radio Current Affairs when sign-offs are used, the form is: 'Jenny Brown, AM, Brussels'.

In Television News Bulletins sign-offs are required. Usually, producers should use the reporter's name in the link only for international stories or for an ABC exclusive or major news event. The usual form is: 'Mary Manners, ABC News, Adelaide'.

If the story uses elements from more than one source or is not location-specific, the form is: 'Mary Manners, ABC News'. (Canberra is an exception to this rule.)

Avoid ending a story with a grab, but if that works best, drop the sign-off. A piece-to-camera used at the end of a story should employ a sign-off, but stories ending with a strong natural sound element **do not** require a sign-off.

Sports stories written off the satellite should not give a location in the sign-off. But give a location in sports stories involving original reportage. Drop sign-offs in weekend sports segments to avoid repetition.

When a segue is employed, the first story or segment should not have a sign-off.

[See: Piece-to-Camera/PTC/Stand-Up; Segue]

Slugs

The words which identify a story – two or three at the most. Make them relevant and clear; never cryptic, funny or offensive. If your report ends up in court, so will the slug or catch-line.

Don't confuse producers by using 'Cricket', when two or three matches are underway.

Subsequent versions of a story should retain the same slug, plus a number. For example: 'Willis Inflation 2'; 'Kembla Fire 4'. Avoid time references in the slug – they mean nothing in other time zones (an exception may be a story prepared specifically for the 0745 bulletin, although this is better noted in the History box).

Soliciting

Sometimes groups will try to sell a 'news story' in order to solicit members to their cause. One method is to say someone is misrepresenting them and to invite the public to call or write if they have any questions. Firms of solicitors, saying they want to represent injured parties, use the same technique to drum up business. We don't play along and broadcast such 'information'.

[See: Media Releases]

Sources

The advent of cyber-journalism exposes us to a new, vast range of sources, many of them offering information which is unconfirmed and often based on hearsay.

Online publishes reports based only on a recognised source (ABCWIRE or a wire service taken by the ABC). Online journalists may use another television or radio source only when a live interview or media conference breaks major news.

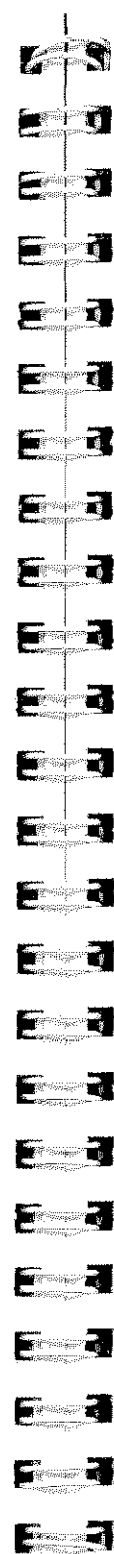
It is not permitted to lift any story, any assertion or 'fact' from a newspaper – and report it as fact – without making our own checks. The ABC prides itself on original reportage and every source must be checked for accuracy. Defamation is no less defamatory because it has been published elsewhere.

We must seek confirmation of any report, whether it has appeared in a newspaper, non-ABC TV/Radio program or on the Internet. Where a piece of information reported by another media outlet cannot be immediately confirmed, but is of such moment that it also cannot be ignored, we make careful attribution. Such cases will usually require 'upward referral'.

In making our checks, we rely on the judgement of the individual journalist. No one shall be pressured to report something they cannot be confident is true. On the other hand, when our journalists are confident they have a genuine story to tell (and the experience to support that confidence), we should back their judgement.

Live interviews, broadcast elsewhere, may be reported without further confirmation. But if there is any doubt about the 'live' nature of the material, it should be checked. It's also possible for live interviews to contain defamatory matter – if in doubt, check with ABC Legal.

[See: Attribution; Contacts; Corroboration; Off-the-Record]



Spelling

Don't believe spelling doesn't matter when writing for radio or television. Pity the producer who must try to decipher copy that confuses 'sucker' and 'succour', 'prescribe' and 'proscribe', 'razed' and 'raised', 'principal' and 'principle', 'complement' and 'compliment', 'counsel' and 'council', and so on. Homonyms abound.

Note: Accurate spelling of names is essential for archival retrieval. (Is it Brown or Browne; Shmith, Smyth or Smith?)

[See: Pronunciation]

Spies

ASIS is the Australian Secret Intelligence Service, charged with intelligence-gathering **overseas**. ASIO is the **domestic** Australian Security Intelligence Organisation.

Spokesman

We prefer 'spokesman' or 'spokeswoman' to the unwieldy form 'spokesperson'.

[See: Gender]

Sponsors' Names

Use them only when not to do so would mislead or confuse the audience.

[See: Advertising; Commercial Names]

Sport

All our journalists are expected to have a working familiarity with sport. The correct idiom is important; incorrect usage can make a story sound ridiculous. The 'sporting audience' is highly discerning, so if in the slightest doubt about correct usage, check it.

Keep it simple. Avoid phrases like 'the Collingwood outfit', when you mean 'team'. Our sports stories should mirror our normal style and approach, which certainly means we do not say 'Gilly' for Gilchrist, or 'Super Fish' for Kieran Perkins, or 'Warney' for Shane Warne, or 'Windies' for West Indies, etc. Familiarity breeds audience contempt for our ability to report in an unbiased and independent manner.

Following our normal style for writing numbers will often lead to long and unwieldy constructions when applied to sport scores. So, as a general rule, use numerals in **scores** (not for margins or other figures, such as 'six-run lead', 'best-of-five series', 'after nine holes'). But even with scores, there'll be cases where it's necessary to mix numerals with words, e.g. '9 point nine-nine seconds' (because 'point 99 seconds' could mistakenly be read as 'point ninety-nine seconds') or 'nought-point-four' (because we spell out 'point' for easier visibility, and that dictates the form for the rest of the phrase).

[Examples peculiar to online are shown in **bold**]:

AFL

Essendon 10-10 (70) defeated St Kilda 9-9 (63);
Bill Brown kicked six goals in Carlton's 10-goal winning margin;
grand final, semi-final, quarter-final, play-off, round robin (note which needs a hyphen and which doesn't);

Athletics

Mary Jones's time was 2-hours 18-minutes and 42-seconds;
Mary Jones's time was 2:18:42;
Donovan Brown ran the 100-metres in 9 point nine-nine seconds;
Donovan Brown ran the 100-metres in 9.99 seconds;
Mary Smith won in 25 point two-five seconds which was nought-point-four of a second outside the record;
Mary Smith won in 25.25 seconds, 0.4 of a second outside the record;
the 400-metres event (note the plural);
cross-country, pole vault (note which needs a hyphen and which doesn't);



Cricket

Australian won by seven wickets;
Australia is 6 for 114;
Phillips is on 6;
He added 146 at six runs an over, scoring 10 fours and five sixes;
Hat-trick, no-ball, leg-side field, mid-on are all hyphenated, but leg bye, leg glance aren't;

Golf

Crosby was at 5-under-par;
He holds a four-shot lead;
After nine holes, Tim Woodsman is 3-under;
He shot a first-round 5-under-par 68 to lead the tournament by two strokes;

Rugby (Union and League)

New Zealand beat France 15-6;
John Brown scored two tries within three minutes in the second half, after the All Blacks led 3-nil at the break;
Ricky Quick converted one of the tries, and kicked one penalty from four attempts;
five-eighth (the 'h' is not sounded), half-back, second-rower;

Soccer

Liverpool beat Arsenal 3-1;
Richmond won by two goals;
Avoid nil-all or 0-0: opt for 'scoreless draw';
Barcelona and Madrid played a nil-all draw (acceptable for Radio/TV);
penalty shoot-out;

Tennis

Jones won 6-4, 7-6 (9-7), 6-0 (Radio/TV: The tie-break score, if mentioned, would be given as an addition: 'He took the second-set tie-break 9 points to 7');
He won the five-hour match in five sets.

These points of style assume the scores or other details are of genuine news value. Too often we overload sports stories with detailed information that is not meaningful to the wider audience.

Story Craft

A fact or event doesn't become news until it's communicated – it dies unless it's picked up and reported. Likewise, an idea doesn't become a story until it's written down.

Any experienced editor will tell you that it's impossible to judge a story, good or bad, while it exists only in the reporter's mind.

Sub-Editing

This heading is intended to apply to all text editing of scripts and copy.

Every story sets its own requirements in sub-editing, but you won't go far wrong if you:

- Respect a reporter's copy. Don't change for the sake of change.
- Respect individual styles and don't try to make every story sound as if it came out of the same vending machine.
- Hate useless, impeding words.
- Don't write anything into copy unless you check with the reporter or a reference book.
- Be unfailingly suspicious.

Suffer

Cars, buildings and other inanimate objects suffer no pain. They have been 'damaged', they have not 'suffered damage'. People can be hurt or injured, but do not let them 'sustain injuries'.

Suicide

If reported at all, suicides will be reported in moderate terms and will usually avoid details of methods. Usually we'd report suicides in news bulletins only if a prominent citizen was involved or the suicide caused an incident in a public place that we couldn't ignore (e.g. peak train services disrupted). Ultimately, suicide is a matter for the Coroner to establish.

[See: 'Editorial Policies', 10.4.12]



Summonsed/Summoned

You can be 'summonsed' to appear in court, but you would be 'summoned' to the boss's office.

Superlatives and Records

Unique/first-ever/world first/for the first time/greatest. Be certain of your facts. Do not automatically accept someone's claim as fact.

Supers

Supers are text information for inclusion on screen in a television story at the time of broadcast. Super details should be entered into Avstar with the reporter's link.

All stories require either a location, date or 'File' super:

Melbourne [Upper and lower case]
JANE DOE [Upper case]
Reporting/Designation [Upper and lower case]
(IMMED)

If the reporter was not at the location, the location super appears immediately and the reporter's name appears in a separate super, as soon as possible afterwards:

1. Sydney
(IMMED)
2. MICHAEL BROWN
Reporting/Designation
(SOONEST)

The same separation of supers applies if a story begins with natural sound. Give the location super immediately and the reporter's name once the narration begins.

A 'File' super is **not** necessary for generic images, where viewers are unlikely to be confused.

If a story begins with file tape, and needs to be identified as such, super:

File or November 18
(IMMED) (IMMED)

Specifying the date is often preferable (for recent events, the best form is 'Last Saturday'). Even if there is a script reference to the date of an historic event, specific occasion or grab, a super of the date should be included.

Give the year only if the date does not refer to the current year.

Be careful when moving in the one story between current and old images of a similar sort (e.g. parliamentary debate, a leaders' summit, a demonstration, a court appearance). It may be appropriate to identify the current vision with a 'Today' super if a lot of file vision surrounds it.

Super the reporter's name 'soonest', even when black-and-white vision or still pictures are in use. Exceptions will be if the super might obscure important vision, or if it would appear across a photo of a person.

Supers of interviewees must give the name on the top line, the designation on the next line, and the super time below that:

JOHN SMITH
Veterans' Association
(0.15)

Brief grabs should be flagged:

(0.43 – 0.48)
QUICK

Grabs of less than five seconds are too short to super. Indicate them on the script. Likewise, indicate any cutaways which might clash with a super:

(0.43 – 0.48)
AFTER C/WAY

Use acronyms only when completely familiar (e.g. 'ACTU', 'ASIO'), and don't use full stops (e.g. 'NSW').

For talent interviewed elsewhere, other than the story location, give the new location:

Darwin
SUZANNE WHITE
Public Prosecutor
(0.52)

[See: Abbreviations and Acronyms; File Pictures]

Tautology

The phrase 'active consideration', though frequently heard, is no less absurd than 'passive consideration'. It belongs in the dustbin with other tautologies like 'living memory', 'component parts', 'general consensus', 'new initiative', 'exact replica', 'very unique', 'completely destroyed', etc.

[See: Cliches; Language]



Temperature

The temperature is 'high' or 'low'. But it's the **weather** or climate which is 'hot' or 'cold'.

[See: Gale; Weather]

Tense

Use the continuous present wherever possible. Write 'company executives say', rather than 'said'. But be consistent. Switching back and forth between present and past tense within a sentence is wrong. Stay in the same tense right through a story if possible.

[See: Active; Number]

Terrorist/Extremist

Remember, one person's 'terrorist' is usually someone else's 'freedom fighter'. 'Terrorism', 'terrorist', 'militant', 'gunman', etc. are all labels. Our reports should rely first on facts, and clear descriptions of events, rather than labels that may seem too extreme or too soft, depending on your point of view.

When reporting a conflict, such as in the Middle East, we avoid partisanship, or the perception of it, by not adopting for ourselves the preferred labels of one side or the other – instead confining their use mostly to when giving one side's assessment of the other (e.g. 'what the Israeli Government calls a terrorist cell'). Our audience will be able to draw their own conclusions about, say, the bombing of a bus full of school children or a missile fired into a congested residential neighbourhood – so our first objective must be to inform.

The use of violence, including against civilians, in a political cause is not new. Terrorism – violence targeting civilians and not necessarily in a clear political cause – is not new. We won't resile from using the word 'terrorism' in appropriate cases – but as a rule, strong, thorough reporting is better than labels.

The phrase 'war on terror' is essentially rhetorical, and does not describe a definite conflict. It is a phrase we would use only out of someone else's lips.

That

Use 'that' for animals or inanimate objects. The correct personal pronoun for people is 'who'. Countries, companies, governments, organisations and sports teams are not referred to as 'who', but 'which' or 'that'.

Always make sure the listener will know exactly what your 'that' refers to in a sentence, and don't omit 'that' if it sacrifices clarity for brevity.

For example: 'Liberian Health Minister Peter Coleman says 300 civilians have been killed in intense fighting in the capital, warning the health services in Monrovia need urgent attention.'

At first glance the phrase 'the health services' appears to be the direct object of the verb 'warn(ing)' (i.e. Coleman issued a warning to the health services). In this case putting 'that' after 'warning' would have made the meaning immediately clear.

The

The definite article 'the' is pronounced *thuh* before words starting with a consonant, and *the(e)* before words starting with a vowel (e.g. '*thuh* sky', '*the(e)* apple').

[See: Pronunciation]

Time References

References such as 'now', 'in a few hours', 'later tonight' can add impact to a story, but are soon out of date. Usually confine them to the link. Watch out for the unnecessary repetition of 'today' in a bulletin. With foreign news, make clear which 'today' or 'yesterday' you mean: theirs or ours?

Be sure we follow up a story if we've whetted the appetite for something 'coming in a few hours'.

Top-Level/High-Level

Don't overdo them. Speaking in the same bulletin of 'top-level Middle East talks' and 'top-level talks over the future of Cottesloe Beach' will strike some listeners as risible.



To the Tune of

Money does not sing. Not in the ABC, at least.

Trade Names

The ABC does not carry advertising, so avoid trade names. Of course, commonsense should be used, as when a product is the news, e.g. 'Arnotts has withdrawn packets of its Tim-Tam biscuits from shops after receiving an extortion demand'.

[See: Advertising; Commercial Names; Sponsors' Names]

Tragedy

Up there with 'major' among journalism's most abused word.

Transcripts

Provide an accurate transcript of interview grabs, voice reports and pieces-to-camera. Producers need transcripts to sub a new version of a story and make editorial assessments when compiling bulletins. They're vital if d-cart fails and for making snap cuts. Online requires transcripts to prepare its stories, including to obtain direct quotes.

'In' and 'out' words are sufficient if a story is being prepared close to bulletin time, but it is the reporter's responsibility to get the transcript into Avstar as soon as possible. Voice-reports filed from the field must also be transcribed – radio producers and assignment editors are responsible for vetting voice-reports to ensure transcripts are completed.

[See: Copy]

Try

'He will try to do his best'. You don't 'try and do' something.

Upcoming

An ugly word that is usually redundant or avoidable. 'Ongoing' and 'going forward' are similarly non-conversational.

Verbs

Use them. There is a continuing tendency to drop verbs or parts of them from copy: 'Collingwood by four', 'Manufacturers struggling to meet demand', 'The Prime Minister happy to endorse the action'. These are not sentences because they don't contain a finite verb. Finite verbs are the forms of verbs that have a definite tense (either past, present or future). Write and speak in sentences.

Be able to recognise a verb and distinguish it from a word that's formed from a verb, but in fact functions as a noun or an adjective:

'She **scored** at three runs an over' is a complete sentence containing the finite verb 'scored';

'Manufacturers **struggling** to meet demand' is an incomplete sentence – 'struggling' is only part of the required finite verb 'are struggling' (or 'were struggling');

'The opener **scoring** at three runs an over' isn't a sentence because it lacks the auxiliary verb 'is' (or 'was').

Adding '-ing' to a verb can change its function. In the sentence 'scoring was easy', the word 'scoring' isn't a verb – it's a noun. Compare this with 'scoring' in the phrase 'a scoring shot' – here it's an adjective.

[See: Prepositional Verbs]

Verdict/Judgement

'Verdicts' are brought down by juries and coroners, 'judgements' are made by judges.

Versions

The practice of preparing multiple versions of a Radio News story to feed bulletins over an extended period of time must not distort our editorial values. It is **not** an acceptable means of getting the story right, eventually. We must also avoid letting second- or third-order elements of a story become dominant in bulletins, over time, because the main element is considered 'old'. **Protect the integrity of our original news judgement by bringing back essential information.**

Our policy is quality over quantity.

[See: First Draft]



Violence

Reports depicting violence (in images particularly, but also in sound) may need to be preceded by a warning to the audience. Such reports should not run in news updates during children's programming times. Promotional clips containing violence may be inappropriate because of their repetitive use.

When choosing your terms, always remember the context. One violent episode in a public gathering, for example, does not constitute a 'riot'. Maintain balance and objectivity. Don't tag a demonstration as 'violent' if it was mostly peaceful. Likewise, do not characterise demonstrators as 'peaceful' simply because they state their motives as such – if so, quote them.

Reduce the frequency of 'violent' metaphors in everyday stories: we hear too much about people or organisations 'dropping bombshells' (i.e. causing a surprise), 'killing off' (i.e. ending) things, 'going on the attack' (i.e. criticising or rebutting criticism), etc.

[See: Children's Programs; Cruelty; Warnings]

Warnings

There may be occasions when, for valid editorial reasons, we will broadcast material – words, sounds or images – that will disturb, distress or offend some people. Warnings should be broadcast immediately before the relevant program or program segment.

The style is: 'The following story contains disturbing/distressing images' (don't quibble); 'The following story contains language/images which may offend some viewers/listeners' (acknowledges that matters of taste are more subjective).

[See: Children's Programs; Cruelty; Offensive Language]

Weather

Don't underestimate the impact and interest of weather stories. Don't confine important weather events to the end of the bulletin.

[See: Cyclone; Gale; Temperature]

Western Australia

This is the name of the state. A person from Western Australia can be called a 'West Australian' – it's easier to say than a 'Western Australian'.

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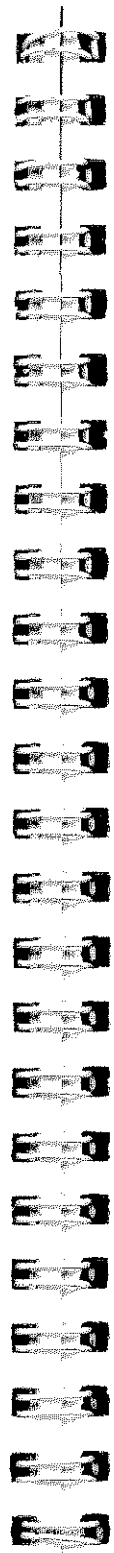
ABC Newsroom Telephone Numbers

Capital Cities	Internal Prefix	Contact Number
Adelaide	(85-)	(08) 8343-4332
Brisbane	(84-)	(07) 3377-5356
Canberra, Northbourne	(81-)	(02) 6275-4600
Canberra, Parliament	(81-)	(02) 6275-4737
Darwin	(88-)	(08) 8943-3173
Hobart	(87-)	(03) 6235-3340
Melbourne	(83-)	(03) 9626-1666
Perth	(86-)	(08) 9220-2760
Sydney	(82-)	(02) 8333-4771/4781

Regionals

New South Wales (STD Area Code 02)

Bega 6491-6011/6030	Lismore 6627-2011/2030	Tamworth 6760-2411/2430
Broken Hill (08) 8082-4030	Muswellbrook 6542-2811/2830	Wagga Wagga 6923-4811/4830
Coffs Harbour 6650-3630/3631	Newcastle 4922-1250/1257	Wollongong (02) 4224-5011/5030
Dubbo 6881-1811/1830	Nowra 4428-4511/4530	
Kempsey 6566-2111/2130	Orange 6393-2511/2530	



Northern Territory (08)

Alice Springs
8950-4730

Queensland (07)

Bundaberg
4155-4930

Cairns
4044-2030

Gladstone
4972-3812

Gold Coast
5595-2930

South Australia (08)

Mount Gambier
8724-1030

Port Augusta
8641-5511

Tasmania (03)

Burnie
6430-1230

Victoria (03)

Ballarat
5320-1041

Central Victoria
5440-1730

Western Australia (08)

Albany
9842-4031

Broome
9191-3010

Longreach
4658-4030

Mackay
4957 1130

Mt Isa
4744-1330

Rockhampton
4924-5130

Port Lincoln
8683-2611

Port Pirie
8638-4831

Launceston
6323-1030

Gippsland
5143-5544

Goulburn Murray
6040-2035

Bunbury
9792-2732

Geraldton
9923-4131

Sunshine Coast
5475-5030

Toowoomba
4631-3830

Townsville
4722-3030

Renmark
8586-1330

Mildura-Swan Hill
5022-4540

Kalgoorlie
9093-7030

Karratha
9183-5030