

NZNO writing style guide

Abbreviations and Acronyms

If using abbreviations, don't expect readers to guess what they stand for. Write out the full title and put the abbreviations in brackets the first time you use the name and then use just the abbreviation, eg Counties Manukau District Health Board (CMDHB), Council of Trade Unions (CTU), Ministry of Health (MOH). The exception is, of course, NZNO.

An acronym is where initials form a new word. If that new word is pronounceable, write it with an initial capital and then lower case, eg Aids, Anzac, Pharmac, Unesco.

Active constructions

Use active, not passive sentences.

The previous sentence is an active construction. "Active constructions should be used" is a passive construction. "Negotiations ended last month." not "The negotiations were concluded last month."

Apostrophes

Use the possessive apostrophe correctly.

Plurals of words do not need apostrophes. The 1990s, 1960s do not require an apostrophe anywhere as they are plurals.

- > The possessive apostrophe denotes possession: ie of/ belonging to
- > The committee's recommendation: ie the recommendation of the committee (of one committee)
- > The committees' recommendation: ie the recommendation of the committees (of two or more committees)
- > The children's shoes: ie the shoes of the children

"Its" is a possessive pronoun and does not need an apostrophe. The committee discussed its recommendation for several hours.

The only time "its" requires an apostrophe is when it's short for it is. This proverb may help. It's a wise child that knows its father.

Capitals

Do not use capitals except for proper nouns — nursing, nurses, organiser, chief executive, president, , minister, the board, , are not proper nouns.

Do not use capitals for a lot of things politicians would cap: the state; the minister; the caucus; the front bench, the bill, the act.

The Government, referring to the Government of New Zealand, is always capped but a government department, government policy.

Ministry of Health (MOH) in first reference, subsequently the MOH or the ministry.

The Parliament, when referring to the proper name of the New Zealand Parliament but parliamentary debates.

Political parties are capped: Labour, National, Green but ideologies are not, so fascism, communism, unless named after someone, eg Marxism, Trotskyist.

Coroner is lower case, thus Christchurch coroner Sue Johnson. The police. Capitalise governor-general when used with the name of incumbent, ie, Governor-General Sir Jerry Mataparae, but not when office stands alone, ie the governor-general.

Medical terms are lower case unless involving a person's name, hence Parkinson's disease.

Botanical, zoological and bacteriological names are all lower case.

Collective nouns

When using a collective noun (ie a noun which refers to a number of individuals eg the committee, the group, the family, the team) use the singular verb form. The committee recommends . . . not the committee recommend.

As always in English, there are some exceptions, to wit: The couple is a collective noun but requires a plural verb form. The couple was married yesterday and was enjoying its honeymoon is absurd. So: The couple was married yesterday and were enjoying their honeymoon.

Colons

Where a speaker's name precedes a direct quote you should use a colon, not a comma, before the quote. NZNO chief executive Memo Musa said from Wellington: "The profession of nursing and the industrial component are mutually interdependent and getting the balance right is quite critical."

If a list starts with a colon, then the items in that list should be separated by semi colons.

Honorifics

We don't use them, eg Ms, Mrs, Dr, for both equity reasons and because it eliminates a huge area of potential error.

Sentences

Write in complete sentences. All sentences should contain a subject and/or object and a verb.

Use short words and short sentences – crispness and clarity are virtues in the written word. The average sentence length in TIME magazine is 17 words. There is little to be gained but confusion from very long sentences. If the sentence you write is more than 30 words, read it out loud and see how easy it is to understand.

Titles and names

NZNO chief executive Memo Musa, not Memo Musa NZNO chief executive. Use NZNO throughout the publication, not the NZNO. The organisation can be used as a change from NZNO. Stick to the same style.

“We are a society strangling in unnecessary words, circular constructions, pompous frills and meaningless jargon.”¹ More so now than ever . . .

Cut all these out of publications. Say what you mean and say it as clearly and simply as possible. Negotiations, not the negotiating process. In fact the word process should be used with great care as, mostly, it is a pompous frill.

Please do NOT mimic the language of health bureaucrats – the purpose of their language is too often to confuse. The purpose of ours is clarity.

Put everything you write to this test: “Every word that serves no function, every long word that could be a short word, every adverb that carries the same meaning that is already in the verb (eg trudged slowly, smiled happily), every passive construction weakens a sentence and should be cut.”

The use of Māori words

Capitalisation and Māori words

Use upper case ‘T’ in the definite article ‘Te::

Where it is the first word of the name of an organisation, school, movement etc:

Te Runanga o Aotearoa

Use lower case ‘t’:

Where it precedes a person’s title or position such as:

te Kaiwhakahaere

te Tumu whakarae

te Poari

The five simple rules of good writing are:

Accuracy

means words, names, titles etc are spelt correctly and what is written is true;

Brevity

means short words and short sentences;

Clarity

means writing simply and clearly;

Simplicity

means cutting the clutter;

Humanity:

means writing in a way that indicates a person, not a jargon-crazed bureaucrat, is involved.

All publications should be proofed by an editor.

References

- 1) Zinsser, W. (1994) *On Writing Well*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- 2) Oxford University Press (2002) *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. (10th Ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 3) Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori. (2012). *Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori Guidelines for Māori Language Orthography*. Wellington: Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori.
- 4) Ngata, H.M. (1993). *English-Māori Dictionary*. Wellington: Learning Media.

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Mission statement

NZNO is committed to the representation of members and the promotion of nursing and midwifery.

NZNO embraces Te Tiriti o Waitangi and works to improve the health status of all peoples of Aotearoa/ New Zealand through participation in health and social policy development.

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