

## STYLE GUIDE

### Preface

We aim to be accessible and responsive and to be a leader in standards of service. It is important that written documents produced by the office are clear, concise and use a consistent style. Whether you are writing a document for people to use inside or outside the office, it is important that you communicate with your audience as clearly and effectively as possible. Good writing saves us time and money and makes everyone's job easier.

Maintaining a consistent look and feel to all our documents is an important part of our corporate image. Our corporate image is the public face of our work and one of the measures by which we are judged. We have a shared responsibility to create as positive an impression of our organisation as possible.

It is always important to keep your audience in mind. Our office supports the use of Plain English in all documents, particularly those that will be read by members of the public.

### Purpose

The aim of this style guide is to promote clear and concise writing and the use of a consistent style in all Ombudsman documents.

### Responsibility

All members of staff are responsible for ensuring that Ombudsman documents conform to this guide.

The Manager Corporate Support and Projects Manager (Executive) are responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the style guide.

### Legislative framework

The style guide is based on the Australian Government Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers. You can refer to that manual for any style issues that are not covered by this guide.

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NSW Ombudsman policy number:	39
Policy originally created:	23 March 2004
Last reviewed / updated:	28 January 2005
Version number:	3
Related policies:	None

**Definitions**

Not applicable.

**Policy**

All documents are to be drafted in accordance with the approved style guide.

**Ombudsman approval**A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. A. Barbour". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Bruce Barbour  
OMBUDSMAN

## Using this style guide

The style guide is divided into two parts:

(a) Style guide

- General matters of style – short list of [rules](#), [tone](#), [active voice](#)
- [Specific matters of style](#) – includes discussion of appropriate punctuation, grammar and vocabulary to use (subject headings in alphabetical order)
- Words our office prefers to use ([Table 1](#)).

(b) [Preparing documents](#)

- [Font](#)
- [Using templates](#)
- [Office stationery](#)
- [Correspondence](#)
- [Checklist for writing letters](#)
- [Sample letters](#)

## **Part (a) Style guide**

### *General matters of style*

Our office is not bureaucratic and your writing should reflect this. You should try to make every document you prepare easy to read and simple to use. This will encourage people to read your document and help them understand what you are saying. General rules to follow when you are writing are:

- write simply and avoid using jargon
- use the shorter word if there is more than one word that means the same thing
- use short simple sentences (average length 1 ½ lines long)
- use active voice, as it is generally easier to understand
- avoid using double negatives
- be accurate.

General rules to following when you are structuring a document are:

- use headings to break up ideas
- use text size of 12 points generally, but use a larger text size if you think your audience might have poor eyesight
- do not space your words and lines too close together
- align your text to the left instead of justifying it (this makes the spaces between words and letters the same, which is easier to read)
- use lower case and particularly avoid using FULL CAPITALS because words set out like this are difficult to read
- be consistent.

### **Tone**

Generally, you should avoid being overly formal or using too much legal language; this can be very alienating to some audiences and is usually unnecessary. Being overly colloquial or 'jokey' is also inappropriate in professional documents. The tone of your writing should generally not be condescending, angry or aggressive.

### **Active voice**

Sentences in active voice are structured with a subject then a verb then an object eg:

The council issued a notice.

(subject – verb – object)

The equivalent sentence in a passive voice is:

A notice was issued by the council.

(object –verb – subject)

*Specific matters (in alphabetical order)*

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## Abbreviations

Common abbreviations in publications include:

ch	chapter
cl	clause (of a Bill or Regulation)
eg	for example
et al	et alii meaning ‘and others’
etc	et cetera meaning ‘and the like’
f	the page following, for example, pp 19f is pages 19 and 20
ff	the pages following, for example, 9ff is page 19 and those following
fig	figure
figs	figures
ibid	ibidem meaning ‘in the same work’
ie	id est meaning ‘that is’
no	number
op cit	opere citato meaning ‘in the work cited’
para	paragraph
paras	paragraphs
p	page
pp	pages
s	section (of an Act)
ss	sections (of an Act)
vol	volume
vols	volumes

See also *Shortened forms*.

## Aboriginal people

See *Describing people, Indigenous peoples*.

## Acronyms

See *Shortened forms*.

## Acts of Parliament

When the word ‘Act’ is used to mean a piece of legislation, it begins with a capital letter. When an Act is first mentioned, give the full title, use italics and include the date (with no comma between the name and the date) eg:

*Ombudsman Act 1974*

*Freedom of Information Act 1989*

In subsequent references to the Act remove the date eg:

Ombudsman Act

A descriptive title can also be used (in plain, non-italic text). Introduce the descriptive title in brackets after the full title then afterwards only use the descriptive title without brackets, eg:

*Freedom of Information Act 1989* (FOI Act)

State, Territory and Commonwealth legislation can be distinguished from NSW Legislation by including the jurisdiction in abbreviated form — in plain, non-italic text and parentheses — following the date eg:

*Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)*

*Statute Law Revision Act 1937 (Vic)*

### **Ampersand (&)**

Shortened form of ‘and’. Should not generally be used.

### **Apostrophes (‘)**

Apostrophes are used to:

- indicate possession eg: The doctor’s bag, The Jones’ house, children’s services
- to indicate the omission of letters eg: don’t (do not), I’ll (I will), she’d (she would)

See *Its, it’s*.

### **Bill**

When the word ‘Bill’ is used to mean a proposed piece of legislation, it begins with a capital letter. The title is set in plain, non-italic text, with initial capitals and no comma between the title and the date eg:

Book Bounty Bill 1969

### **Bold**

Don’t use bold for emphasis. — it interrupts the flow of reading and makes the reader focus on words out of context.

### **Brackets, square**

See *Parentheses, Square brackets*.

### **Bullet lists**

See *Lists*.

### **Capital letters**

Use capitals sparingly. Capitals should be used for:

- personal names
- names of nationalities and peoples
- names of organisations eg the Department of Local Government
- formal titles of officers eg the Prime Minister of Australia, the Mayor
- modes of address eg Minister Brown, Her Majesty
- countries and states/provinces
- place, area, topographical and street names eg the Snowy Mountains
- names of public buildings eg Town Hall

- Acts of Parliament
- religious faiths
- trade marks and brand names
- holidays, ceremonies, days of the week and months of the year
- titles of publications (eg books), formal documents (eg the Treaty of Waitangi) and events (eg National Investigations Symposium).

Do not use capitals for:

- the office, this office, our office, etc when referring to the Ombudsman’s office
- the word ‘report’ unless it is in a full proper title
- the university/department/council etc or an agency’s branches, units or committees
- the names of each of this office’s teams (eg the general team)
- ordinary titles of officers eg general manager, police officer, councillor
- the names of policies eg the code of conduct.

For proper names, you may be able to use capitals the first time the name is used and afterwards use minimal capitals eg:

NSW Government	the government
NSW Police	the police
Parramatta Council	the council
Department for Women	the department
Aboriginal Complaints Unit	the ACU or the unit
Special Management Branch	the SMB or the branch
Youth Liaison Officer	the YLO

However, we have decided to keep capitals for special titles of office even when the full title is not used:

NSW Parliament	the Parliament
NSW Premier	the Premier
Commissioner of Police	Police Commissioner

Do not use FULL CAPITALS for titles, headings or blocks of text as they are difficult to read and dominating.

When a word or an expression (such as a brand name) needs to be in full capitals in a text, use SMALL CAPITALS.

## Co

Co as a prefix is not hyphenated eg:

Coordinate, cooperate

## **Colon (:)**

A colon indicates a shorter pause than that of a full stop. Use a colon to:

- introduce a word, phrase or clause that explains, enlarges or summarises
- introduce a list
- introduce a quotation set off from the text
- separate elements of a heading eg Copyediting: A Guide

## **Comma (,)**

A comma indicates a pause shorter than a semicolon. Commas help to make the meaning of a sentence clear. The office's preferred style is to not use commas at the end of lines in a list, except in the second-last line if it ends with 'and' or 'or'.

The choices that we were given were:

- the large milkshake with chocolate
- the medium mineral water with orange and mango, and
- the small energy drink with vitamin C.

See *Lists*.

## **Contraction**

A contraction is a shortened form of a word or words that consists of at least the first and last letters of that word. Don't use a full stop eg:

Dept, vols, Pty, Mr, Mrs, Dr

Apostrophes are only used for contractions such as can't and won't.

## **Dash**

*Em rule* (—)

Called an em rule because it is approximately the same length as a letter 'm'. Put a space on either side. Use the em rule:

- as parentheses when the break in the sentence is abrupt eg:

We went far away — far away from the cares and demands of city life — to write up our research.

- for emphasising or explaining eg:

What could the message mean? — that the bus had broken down?

*En rule* (–)

Called an en rule because it is the approximately the same length as a letter 'n'. Don't put a space on either side. Use an en rule:

- between figures and in expressions relating to time or distance eg:  
pp. 306–311, 1999–2000 financial year, Sydney–Melbourne train
- to express an association between words that retain their separate identity eg:  
Commonwealth–State agreement, hand–eye coordination

## **Dates**

The date must appear on all correspondence and reports and should be written: day/month/year with no commas before or after, eg: 31 January 2002.

## **Describing people**

When describing people (or groups of people), avoid using adjectives describing a person's sex, age, cultural background, race, disability, sexuality, marital status, nationality or religion unless this is relevant. It is important to maintain the office's respect for people as individuals. When these kinds of descriptors are relevant, keep in mind the following tips:

- if you do not know the sex of a person about whom you are writing, try to use 'he or she' rather than always using the male pronoun.
- use gender-neutral words and phrases where possible eg 'humanity' not 'mankind'.
- use 'people with a disability' not 'disabled people'.
- adjectives identifying a person's nationality, race or religion should generally be followed by the word 'people', eg 'Aboriginal people' instead of 'Aboriginals' or 'Aborigines'. Use a capital letter for the adjective.
- it is important to acknowledge the distinction between Aboriginal people and people from the Torres Strait Islands. The phrase 'Indigenous peoples' refers to both Aboriginal people and people from the Torres Strait Islands. Use a capital 'I', 'peoples' is preferred to 'people'.

## **Disability, people with a**

See *Describing people*.

## **Email**

One word, no hyphen.

## **Federal**

When it is used adjectivally, or when it doesn't refer to a specific entity, use lower case eg:

federal legislation, federal responsibilities

## **Full stop**

Full stops are used at the end of a sentence or list, or as a decimal point.

Full stops should not be used:

- at the end of a title or heading
- after items in a bullet list (see *Lists*)
- at the end of index entries
- after dates or signatures
- in abbreviations or contractions (including 'eg').

See also *Abbreviations* and *Shortened forms*.

## Government

When it is used adjectivally, or when it doesn't refer to a specific entity, use lower case eg:

government control, local government

## Hyphens (-)

Use a hyphen:

- in words with a prefix or suffix eg:  
anti-intellectual, pre-eminent, ex-wife, post-1999
- to distinguish the meaning of two words containing the same letters eg:  
re-cover (to cover again) as opposed to recover (to revive or regain)  
re-sign (to sign again) as opposed to resign (to give up membership)
- in expressions consisting of two or more separate words eg:  
colour-blind, icy-cold, four-part series, one-third share, 20-fold, 140-odd record-keeping

## Indigenous peoples

Racially specific language should generally be avoided unless it is relevant to what you are writing about. If it is relevant, please use the most appropriate and accurate term. 'Indigenous peoples' is a phrase which refers to both Aboriginal people and people from the Torres Strait Islands. 'Indigenous' has an initial capital, 'peoples' is preferred to 'people'.

See also *Describing people*.

## Italics

Italics are used in Ombudsman publications for:

- full citation of Australian Acts (see *Acts*)
- titles of books and similar publications
- names of newspapers and periodicals.

[Italics should not be used for emphasis or for quotations set in the text \(unless they form part of the original text being quoted\). They should only be used for quotations set apart from the text in some instances. See \*Bold, Quotations\*.](#)

## Its, it's

Use 'its' to show possession:

its tail, its lid

It's is an abbreviation for 'it is' or 'it has' eg:

it's a fine day, it's lost all its feathers

## Lists

Lists are a convenient way of summarising information and can help to break up text to make it easier to read. For this reason, lists should be brief.

If a list only contains two points or the points are very short, re-write the whole list into a sentence.

It is sometimes necessary to have a second level list (that is, points within a list). However, if a point within a second level list is an entire sentence, re-write the whole list into a paragraph.

Lists are indented and are usually introduced by 'for example', 'including', 'such as', 'that is' or 'namely' followed by a colon and a:

- number (1) or
- lower case letter in parentheses ( (a) ) or
- bullet (•).

A second level list should be indented further than the first list and indicated by an en rule (–).

There are three basic styles for a list:

- (a) When a list consists of items of one or a few words, each item begins with a lower case letter and has no punctuation.
- (b) When items in a list are long phrases or clauses, each item begins with a lower case letter and has no punctuation except the last item that ends with a full stop.
- (c) When items in a list are complete sentences, each item begins with a capital letter and finishes with a full stop.

## Numbers

Express numbers in figures or words. Numbers from one to nine are spelt out in full. Numbers 10 and over are expressed numerically. However, always begin a sentence with a word, not a figure, so try not to begin a sentence with a number if it is too long as a word. eg:

Do not write '20, 504 people rallied in the town square' OR

'Twenty thousand five hundred and four people rallied in the town square.'

Instead try 'On Monday, 20,504 people rallied in the town square.'

For shortened forms put a space between 'no' and the figure eg: no 19.

If more than one number appears in a sentence, and one of those numbers is 10 or greater, express all the numbers numerically. eg:

There were 54 children in the class, 9 of whom had long ears.

## Ombudsman

Use the same word for both singular and plural. We do not use the word 'Ombudsmen', eg:

The Ombudsman, Mr Bruce Barbour...

We held a gathering of regional Ombudsman...

See also *Table 1*.

## **Parentheses ( )**

Use parentheses to enclose:

- expressions that are not essential to the meaning of the sentence
- a reference in a text
- letters or numbers within a series eg: (a) . . . , (b) ...
- a shortened form of a full name to be used throughout a work eg: Police Integrity Commission (PIC).

See also *Shortened forms*.

## **Parliament**

Use an initial capital eg State Parliament, the Parliament. The adjective, ‘parliamentary’, is usually not capitalised.

## **Parliamentary Joint Committee**

The full title is: Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Office of the Ombudsman and the Police Integrity Commission. Our preferred abbreviation is PJC. See also *Shortened forms*.

## **Percentages**

Use ‘per cent’ in text eg 19 per cent (with a space between the figure and the word), unless there are a lot of percentages, in which case, use ‘%’.

## **Postal addresses**

Use shortened forms such as St (Street), Pl (Place), PO (Post Office).

Set in capital letters with no full stops eg:

PO Box 4 GPO Box 321

## **Quotations**

Quotes less than 30 words long should be set in the text using single quotation marks (‘...’) without italics.

If a quote is more than 30 words long, it should be set apart from the text with no quotation marks. Use a paragraph return and a 10–15mm indent on the left (this is sometimes referred to as a block quote). Set the quote in a smaller type size than the text (usually two points smaller) or, if this would make the text too small to read, use italics.

See also *Quotation marks*.

### **Quotation marks (‘ ’ “ ”)**

Use single quotation marks (‘ ’) for quotes within the text less than 30 words long and double quotation marks (“ ”) for quotes within quotes. Don’t use quotation marks in headings. Use quotation marks:

- to enclose the exact words of a writer or speaker. If punctuation marks are part of what is being quoted, include these within the quotation (otherwise, punctuation marks remain outside the quote)  
‘Yes, that is the situation’, she said.  
He agreed that he was trying to add ‘an air of responsibility’ to the meeting.  
He shouted, ‘Stop, thief!’, but the robber got away.
- around the title of articles and essays
- around technical terms in non-technical writing
- around colloquial words in formal writing
- around words and phrases that are humorous or coined (the quotation marks are omitted from any subsequent mentions).

### **Semicolon (;)**

Semicolons separate parts of a sentence that require a stronger break than a comma but are too closely related to be broken up into separate sentences.

Use a semicolon to separate parallel clauses or to separate clauses or phrases that already contain commas.

### **Shortened forms**

When a shortened form is used for the name of an organisation, a document, a title or any other entity, the full name should be followed by the shortened form in parentheses the first time it is mentioned, and the shortened form used afterwards eg:

Police Integrity Commission (PIC)  
member of Parliament (MP)  
freedom of information (FOI)

For plurals add an ‘s’ (without an apostrophe), eg POWs, NGOs, figs.

### **Singular/plural ( (s) )**

There is a tendency in Ombudsman publications to move between the use of singular and plural by using (s) eg:

whistleblower(s), allegation(s) etc.

Use the singular as it has the same meaning.

Use ‘people’ not ‘persons’.

A department, office, organisation or agency is a singular body eg:

The agency is planning to expand its premises.

‘Staff’ is a plural noun eg:

Our staff are an energetic bunch.

Members of staff are very keen to see changes.

### **Slash (/)**

Use a slash:

- to indicate alternatives eg yes/no, male/female
- to form abbreviations eg a/c (account)
- to denote a fraction eg 1/2
- to express the words ‘per’ eg 60 km/hr
- in dates expressed in figures eg 11/3/01.

Do not use a slash in the place of an en rule eg:

Sydney–Brisbane not Sydney/Brisbane

1998–99 not 1998/99

### **Square brackets [ ]**

Use square brackets when quoting from another document to enclose any additional words or phrases that were not written by the author, eg:

It was reported that more rain had fallen in Tamworth over the past 24 hours than in the last [year].

### **States and territories of Australia**

Use initial capitals. Shortened forms are NSW, Vic, Qld, WA, SA, Tas, NT and ACT. The word ‘state’ is not capitalised when used adjectivally or when it refers to an abstract entity eg:

state control

the states of South East Asia

### **Telephone/fax numbers**

Set as follows:

02 9286 1072

61 2 9286 1072

1800 451 524

0411 345 678

### **Time**

Express in figures eg:

10.30am or 12 o’clock or 5pm

12 midday or 12 midnight, not 12am or 12pm

## **Vocabulary**

Use simple, direct and unpretentious words eg:

now	(rather than ‘this point in time’)
before	(prior to)
said	(announced, stated)
begin/start	(commence)
many	(numerous)
talks	(consultations, discussions)
after	(following)
for	(for the purposes of)
to	(in order to)
consider	(give consideration to)
most	(the majority of)
about	(in respect of, in relation to, with regard to, in the region of, concerning)
except	(with the exception of)

## **Website**

One word.

Express website addresses as [www.ombo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au)

If you are referring to specific information on a website, you should refer to the organisation, the full website name, and the date it was accessed. For example:

Advice obtained from Victoria’s Road Safety Strategy website:

[http://www.arrivealive.vic.gov.au/c\\_drugs\\_test.html](http://www.arrivealive.vic.gov.au/c_drugs_test.html). Accessed on 10 November 2004.

## **Webpage**

One word.

**Table 1 – Words our office prefers to use**

This table lists some words or phrases that we commonly use in this office. Wherever possible, try to use the preferred words and phrases on the right hand side.

<p>When referring to the position:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ombudsman</li> <li>• NSW Ombudsman</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ombudsman</li> </ul>	<p>When referring to the people who work for an agency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public official</li> <li>• public servant</li> <li>• official</li> <li>• employee</li> <li>• staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staff</li> </ul>
<p>When referring to our organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ombudsman</li> <li>• NSW Ombudsman</li> <li>• Office of the Ombudsman</li> <li>• Ombudsman’s Office</li> <li>• This /Our /The Office</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ombudsman</li> <li>• we, our, us</li> <li>• this /our /the office</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• local council</li> <li>• the Council</li> <li>• the Shire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• council</li> </ul>
<p>When referring to the staff of the Ombudsman:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ombudsman officers</li> <li>• Officers of the Ombudsman</li> <li>• Ombudsman staff</li> <li>• staff of the Ombudsman</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staff, our staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• correctional centre</li> <li>• prison</li> <li>• prisoner</li> <li>• inmate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• correctional centre</li> <li>• inmate</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inquiry/enquiry officer</li> <li>• inquiries/enquiries officer</li> <li>• Inquiries/Enquiries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inquiries staff</li> <li>• Inquiries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• juvenile detention centre</li> <li>• juvenile justice centre</li> <li>• prison</li> <li>• prisoner</li> <li>• inmate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• juvenile justice centre</li> <li>• detainee</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official Community Visitors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OCVs</li> <li>• community visitors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSW Police</li> <li>• the Service</li> <li>• the Police</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSW Police</li> <li>• the police</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police Officer</li> <li>• Officer</li> <li>• Policeman/Policewoman</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• police officer</li> <li>• officer</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• customer</li> <li>• complainant</li> <li>• client</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• complainant</li> </ul>	<p>write out charges (eg: ‘resist arrest’, ‘obtain benefit’, ‘cause public mischief’ etc) without quotation marks and in plain English eg resisting arrest, obtaining a benefit, causing public mischief etc</p> <p>See also <i>Quotation marks</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public authority</li> <li>• organisation/s</li> <li>• body/bodies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public sector agency/agencies</li> <li>• agency/agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• youth</li> <li>• young person</li> <li>• persons</li> <li>• juvenile</li> </ul> <p>See also <i>Singular/plural</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• young person</li> <li>• people</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• local government</li> <li>• region</li> </ul>		

## **Part (b) Preparing documents**

### **1. Font**

Publications should be in the office's official font. For all other documents you are to use Times New Roman. The only exception is if you are writing a letter to a person who you know, or reasonably believe, has poor eyesight and would find your letter easier to read if it was in a different font. (also see *Text* under the heading *4. Correspondence*)

### **2. Using templates**

There are corporate templates for some of the main types of documents created and used within the office, which are:

- letters
- facsimiles
- memoranda
- meeting minutes
- powerpoint slide presentations
- discussion papers
- special reports to Parliament.

They are stored in ADM/65. To use them, double click on the relevant template, complete the details and save it as a new document. Please use these to create your documents as it should make your job easier and ensure consistency of style across the office.

### **3. Office stationery**

#### **Business cards**

Personalised business cards are provided to staff who require them. The order form is in ADM/65. To request a business card, fill out a form and have it signed by your team manager. Return the form to the publications officer who will organise the printing.

#### **Envelopes**

DL are in the envelope feeder in each printer. B4, C4, small and large are in the stationery cupboards.

#### **File notes**

Use the yellow file note pads provided in the stationery cupboards to record details of matters or to record conversations with others.

#### **Letterhead**

The Ombudsman's letterhead should be used for all official correspondence. The letterhead has our logo on the top right hand corner with contact details directly below. It is to be used for all

external correspondence. The letterhead (tray two of printer) is followed by a blank sheet (tray one of printer) when letters are longer than one page. See *Correspondence* for more details.

### **Media release**

The Ombudsman's media release letterhead is used for communications with the media. The public relations officer is responsible for media releases which must be approved by the Ombudsman.

### **With compliments slips**

With compliments slips have the Ombudsman's logo and address details with room to write a short message. The slips are generally used to accompany other documents.

## **4. Correspondence**

For sample letters, see *Appendices*.

Please use the letter template that is available in ADM/65.

### **Text**

Letters should generally be set in 12pt Times New Roman. Remember to take into account your audience. Put the text in a larger and/or different font (eg Arial) if you know, or reasonably believe, that the recipient of the letter has poor eyesight or would find your letter easier to read. The text block is left aligned (not justified). Studies have shown that text that is not justified is easier to read.

### **Contact details and reference number**

All outgoing correspondence should have your contact details and a reference number in the top left hand corner of the first page. The reference number should include the Context container number and the record number, if this will help you and others find the document in the future. eg:

<b>Our reference:</b>	C/2004/1234, 2004/123456
<b>Your reference:</b>	XX/7981
<b>Contact:</b>	Lisa Du
<b>Telephone:</b>	02 9286 1000

### **Date**

The date on your letters should fall midway between the reference number and the first line of the address block and be written: day/month/year.

### **Address block**

The address should be written without punctuation and without capitalising the suburb (if it is an Australian address). There should be three spaces between the suburb and the State, and between the State and the postcode, eg:

Ms Maxine Smith  
44 Bathurst St  
Menai NSW 2234

## **Page numbers**

Please remember to number pages.

## **Subject heading**

Insert between the salutation and the first line of text of the letter. Set in bold and left align. Don't use 'Re:...' before the subject heading.

## **Forms of address**

### *General*

- use the basic forms of address — Mr, Ms — where known eg Dear Ms [name]
- use Doctor, Reverend, Rabbi, Commissioner, Councillor etc where known eg Dear Dr
- where a female correspondent does not indicate whether she wishes to be addressed as Ms, Mrs or Miss, she should be addressed as Ms
- if the gender of the writer is not known use Dear Madam/Sir
- responses to organisations are usually addressed to the individual who signed the letter or to the title of the office bearer if the letter has not been properly signed eg The Coordinator
- where known, include awards after a person's surname such as OBE, AM.

### *Parliament*

- all members of the NSW Legislative Assembly (lower house) are referred to as MPs eg Ms [name] MP
- all members of the NSW Legislative Council (upper house) are referred to as The Hon [name] MLC
- Government ministers are addressed listing all of their portfolios eg:  
The Hon R J Carr MP  
Premier of NSW  
Minister for the Arts  
Minister for Citizenship
- the salutation for all NSW Government ministers is 'Dear Minister'
- the salutation for the NSW Premier is 'Dear Premier'
- shadow ministers are addressed in the same ways as other MPs or MLCs.

### *Judiciary*

- judges of the Supreme Court are given the title The Hon Justice [surname]
- judges of the District Court are given the title The Hon Judge [surname], except the Chief Judge who is The Hon Justice [surname]
- the salutation for a judge is Dear Judge

- magistrates of the Local Court have no title and are referred to as Mr/Mrs/Ms [surname] LCM.

### **Sign off by the Ombudsman**

The Ombudsman personally signs some outgoing correspondence. For bulk mail, use an electronic signature. Make sure the Ombudsman has approved the content of your letter and agreed to have his electronic signature used. See the Publications Officer to obtain a copy of the Ombudsman's electronic signature. Electronic signatures must be deleted after use.

When preparing letters for the Ombudsman's signature, the correct format is:

Yours sincerely

[five returns]

Bruce Barbour

**Ombudsman**

Note: Proofread and correct all correspondence before it goes to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman should not have to correct your grammar, spelling or page layout.

### **Sign off by staff**

Always sign any outgoing correspondence. The correct format is:

Yours sincerely

[five returns]

Your name

Your position

for the Ombudsman

Note: Proofread and correct all your correspondence. See *Checklist for writing letters* for more information.

## 5. *Checklist for writing letters*

Before sending your letter, check:

- the reference number is included
- your contact details are included
- the name, title and address are correct
- Re: has not been used before the subject heading
- spelling, grammar and style are correct
- the tone of the letter is appropriate for the reader
- the layout of the page is correct and not overcrowded (don't cram too much onto the page — use a second page if necessary)
- pages are numbered
- the sign off is correct
- for a mailout, a contact person and phone number has been provided in the last paragraph of the letter
- the letter is printed on Ombudsman letterhead
- any attachments are actually attached and properly labelled
- an addressed envelope has been provided with the letter for signing.

## **Appendices**

[Appendix A](#): sample letter — staff sign off

[Appendix B](#): sample letter — Ombudsman sign off

## Appendix A

**Contact:** Jennifer Agius  
**Telephone ☎:** 02 9286 1000  
**Our reference:** C/2001/0001  
**Your reference:** 2002/99

7 February 2003

Ms Anita Whittaker  
11 Smith St  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Ms Whittaker

### **Your complaint about a NSW public sector agency**

Thank you for your letters, which we received on 19 June and 5 July 2001. I was pleased to read in the second letter that the disturbances around your home had stopped.

I note the concerns you are raising now are similar to those you brought to us in 1998 and would like to reiterate the advice given to you then, that you firstly raise your complaints with the Blue agency. I am aware you have had contact with local staff of the Blue agency, but would suggest that your written complaints should be directed to the Director of Blue agency at PO Box 1 Sydney 2001.

At this point, however, I do not believe there is enough evidence that the conduct of a NSW public authority requires investigation in terms of the *Ombudsman Act 1974*, and I will now close my file.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Agius  
Senior Investigation Officer  
for the Ombudsman

## Appendix B

**Contact:** Michelle Stewart  
**Telephone** ☎: 02 9286 1000  
**Our reference:** ADM/2004/0034  
**Your reference:** 2002/99

7 February 2003

Ms Jacqui Spedding  
Publications officer  
Acme public sector agency  
14 Phillip St  
Melbourne Victoria 3000

Dear Ms Spedding

### **Seminar on regional development**

Thank you for your letter of 16 January 2003 and your invitation to attend the seminar on 15 March 2003 in Melbourne.

I am pleased to hear of your office's plans to establish a complaints system. Our office encourages all public sector agencies to manage their complaints effectively. A formal complaints system is a good start.

I would appreciate it if you could provide me with further information about your proposal as soon as possible. You can send the documents for the attention of Ms Michelle Stewart at Level 24, 580 George St, Sydney 2000.

As mid-March is a very busy time of year for my office, I will not be able to attend the seminar. However, I look forward to seeing any plans that are developed at its conclusion.

Thank you again for your kind invitation.

Yours sincerely

Bruce Barbour  
**Ombudsman**

## **further reading**

### **1. Spelling**

*The Macquarie Dictionary*, 3rd edition (revised), 2001.

*The Macquarie Thesaurus*, 2nd edition, 2001.

*Butterworth's Concise Australian Legal Dictionary*, second edition, 2001

### **2. Word usage and style**

*Australian Government Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers*, 6th edition, John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd, 2002.

*The Little Book of Style*, AusInfo, 1998.

*The Collins Dove Guide to Australian Usage and Punctuation*, Collins Dove, 1993.

*The Penguin Working Words: An Australian Guide to Modern English Usage*, Penguin, 1993.

Eagleson, R, *Writing in Plain English*, AGPS, 1990.

Asprey, M, *Plain Language for Lawyers*, 2nd edition, The Federation Press, 1996.