

# STYLE GUIDE

## Introduction

This document is a point of reference for moments of uncertainty about any questions of style. It aims to promote consistency and coherency in the writing style of *Observer*, with a focus on ANU-specific terminology.

The guide is not exhaustive - many basic points have been omitted on the basis that they are well-known to most university-level writers and will be picked up with a cursory edit. Nor is the guide rigid - it should evolve as new issues arise and are resolved. Feel free to suggest alterations.

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## General points

### Length

*Observer* is a news publication, and as a result it should communicate information clearly and concisely.

In news writing, sentences should generally be no longer than 25-30 words, quotes included. If a sentence is longer than this you should consider dividing it into two or more shorter ones.

Paragraphs should be 2-5 sentences in length. Avoid one-sentence paragraphs which only include one piece of information, except in the opening or conclusion of a longer article.

Breaking news pieces should aim to be between 250-500 words. Standard news should be no more than 800 words. Investigative pieces may be up to 3000 words, or further if considered necessary by editorial discretion.

### Formatting

Paragraphs should be separated by a single line.

A single space should be used between a full stop and the start of a new sentence.

### Headlines

Headlines should be attention-grabbing, and may be fun; feel free to make puns or alliterate. However, they should never misrepresent the content of the article.

Headlines should follow title case - all words except articles, prepositions and conjunctions should be capitalised. If unsure, <http://www.titlecase.com/> is a good but imperfect guide.

### Facts vs Claims

Anything not presented as fact should be attributed to a source. Compare:

#### Fact

The National Union of Students (NUS) campaigns and lobbies on penalty rates, deregulation, and other student issues.



## **Claim**

Smith said she was “one of NUS’s largest critics”.

## **Attribution**

Closely consider the implications of verbs of attribution. ‘Say’ may seem bland, but it is a neutral verb which does not colour the reader’s perception of the information to follow.

Contrastingly ‘allege’, ‘declare’, ‘claim’ and so on may compromise the objectivity of the article. Evidently these verbs will sometimes be appropriate, but use discretion when making this choice.

## **Warnings and Declarations**

Articles including commonly triggering topics should include a content warning of the form “This story contains mention of [topic/s]” in grey italics at the top of the story. Topics which require a content warning include but are not limited to:

- Suicide
- Self-harm
- Rape and sexual assault
- Harassment
- Death
- Violence
- Domestic violence
- Abuse
- Graphic sexual descriptions
- Misogynistic language

Articles including quotes of discriminatory statements, detailed discussion of discrimination, or slurs should include a content warning of the form “This story includes quotation and discussion of [discrimination type] statements and attitudes”. Topics which may require this warning include but are not limited to:

- Racism
- Sexism
- Homophobia/Queerphobia
- Ableism
- Antisemitism
- Islamophobia

Articles including coarse language should include a content warning of the form “This story contains coarse language”. Words which require this warning include but are not limited to:



- Fuck
- Shit
- Cunt
- Cock
- Bitch
- Slut
- Whore
- Dick
- Pussy
- Nigger
- Faggot

The following words do not require this warning:

- Damn
- God
- Crap
- Bloody
- Hell
- Bugger
- Jesus H Roosevelt Christ

Conflict of interest declarations should occur at the end of an article, and take the form of a brief statement in italics, specifying the person involved and what their conflict of interest is.

*Disclaimer: Michael Turvey sat on the ANUSA Grants & Affiliations Committee in 2016.*

## References

Detailed references are usually unnecessary for news journalism; clarification of sources can be offered after the fact if requested. Passing in-text references are normally sufficient.

Bruce, in an interview with the Canberra Times last year...

If practical, hyperlinks should be used in online articles to link to any online materials or sources mentioned.

If any other *Observer* story is mentioned, or content covered in any other *Observer* story is discussed, that story should be linked.



# Language and expression

## Australian English

*Observer* follows Australian English spelling conventions, including:

- -re, not -er (e.g. litre, metre)
- -our, not -or (e.g. honour, valour)
- -ise, not -ize (e.g. realise, notarise)
- -ence, not -ense (e.g. defence, licence)

If in doubt the Macquarie Dictionary is the authoritative source on Australian English. As it is not free to access online, however, Australian English mostly follows conventions of British English as a rule of thumb.

## Level of language

*Observer's* focus is brevity and clarity. Language should ideally be accessible to a broad readership, avoiding unnecessary verbosity or complexity.

Jargon and technical terms are sometimes essential in a university context, but should not be overused and must always be clearly explained. See Section 4.4 for more information.

Each year, ANUSA votes on 'accreditation' with NUS, which means paying a fee and voting at NatCon.

Profanity is unlikely to be used by the author of a news story. If it occurs in quotes it does not need to be censored.

## Quotation

Double quotes should be used for direct quotes.

Jamison said, "Get some cheese," before writing cheese on the list

Technical terms should first be presented in single quotation marks ('), then followed by an explanation. The exception to this is if they are capitalised titles.

Each year, ANUSA votes on '**accreditation**' with NUS, which means paying a fee and being able to vote at NatCon. (normal term)



It is governed by the **National Conference** (NatCon), where delegates from member universities vote on policy, elections, and other business. (capitalised title)

Single quotes should be used for a quote within another quote.

“Coombs told us, ‘you kids are the worst,’ and wouldn’t speak to us,” O’Malley said.

Quotations may need to be altered for length and clarity. There are two main ways of doing this: insertion and abridgement. Neither technique should ever alter the meaning of a quote.

To insert text into a quote, use square brackets ([ ]).

Fraser blamed the ALP, arguing “the problems started when he [Whitlam] was in power”

Note that insertions should not replace words in the quote.

To abridge a quote, use an ellipsis (...). The ellipsis should have a space on either side.

Curtin described the atmosphere as “an even more juvenile House of Reps Question Time ... where delegates tackle each other to eat bits of paper”

If the quotation is a complete sentence, punctuation should be placed within quotations. If the sentence is incomplete, punctuation should be placed outside quotations. A comma should be placed before the inclusion of a full sentence quote.

Woden said, “Belconnen is a twat” in the course of the argument.  
Woden, in the course of the argument, said, “Belconnen is a twat.”  
Woden called Belconnen a “twat” during the argument  
Woden, in the course of the argument called belconnen a “twat”.

If quotes are interrupted, the same rule applies. However, punctuation should be adapted for the piece, not taken from the original quote, provided original meaning is preserved. For example, “That’s the problem with Belconnen. He’s a twat.” would become

“That’s the problem with Belconnen,” Woden said. “He’s a twat.”



In uncommon situations quotations may exceed a paragraph in length, although this should be avoided if possible. In this case, the quotation should be formatted as follows:

“This is how a block of reported speech is continued.

“Where there are several consecutive paragraphs of quoted speech from the same speaker, who is usually identified in the first paragraph of the series, only use quotation marks at the start of each paragraph.

“Only at the end of the last paragraph in the sequence should you conclude with the quotation marks.”

## **Abbreviations**

Abbreviations should be introduced once, and placed in brackets afterwards.

During Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) policy...

## **Titles**

Titles of any publications (e.g. reports, journals, books, newspapers) should always be given in title case italics.

E.g. ‘Jane Easthope, in an interview with the *Canberra Times* last year...’

When referencing *Observer*, it is not necessary to use the particle ‘the’ beforehand.

‘... *Observer* can confirm ANU offered significant relocation payments to several existing vendors.

## **Titles and honorifics**

Regular titles (e.g. Mr, Ms, Dr) should be avoided unless they are relevant to the article.

If you decide to use a regular title be sure to verify it before inclusion.

Pay particular attention to Ms/Miss/Mrs - many women prefer to use ‘Ms’, a neutral title that does not specify their marital status.

Honorific (courtesy) titles are granted to people who attain a variety of noteworthy positions. Examples include: Mayor, Dean, Chancellor, Ambassador, Judge, Professor.

Honorific titles should always be capitalised



## **Names**

Where possible ask subjects which name they would prefer to see used in print. Some people prefer to use abbreviations or variations of their birth names, while others may have changed their names.

Be aware of non-Anglophone cultural conventions surrounding names. For example, Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's family name is Ai while his given name is Weiwei.

## **Pronouns**

Take the opportunity to clarify the pronouns of your subjects (e.g. he/him, they/them).

Be sensitive to their wishes and the realities of context - some subjects may not be publicly 'out' about their personal gender identity and may not wish it to be widely known.

## **Grammar and punctuation**

### **Parentheses**

Parentheses - ( ) - should be used for explanatory purposes only, and sparingly. Consider whether the information they contain should constitute another sentence.

### **Commas**

Generally commas should be used sparingly. If they are abundant, consider dividing sentences.

Some cases where comma usage is frequently misunderstood:

An Oxford comma should be used to separate the last component of a list to avoid ambiguity of meaning.

Delegates from member universities vote on policy, elections, and other business.

Avoid comma splicing. Comma splicing refers to the practice of using a comma where a full stop, conjunction or semicolon is necessary. It is an unsightly error but is easily rectified.

They were never seen apart, they even shared the same Facebook account.

Should be:

They were never seen apart; they even shared the same Facebook account.



The house is large and spacious, it only has three bedrooms though.  
Should be:

The house is large and spacious. It only has three bedrooms, though.

## Dashes

*Observer* does not distinguish between an em-dash (—) and an en-dash (–), preferring instead to use en-dashes exclusively. Dashes should be used with a space on either side.

Department status was a long-term goal – one delegate argued this would be a ‘step backwards’.

## Hyphenation

Hyphenation should be used for compound adjectives

A fast-talking guy

A writer who is well-known

Adverbs ending with ‘-ly’ are never followed by a hyphen.

The poorly painted house

Hyphenation may be used to distinguish between senses of words which could cause confusion

“re-cover the chair” vs. “recover the chair”

## Numbers

Words should be used for numbers zero through nine, but any number above 10 can be written in numerals.

The exception to this rule is when a number occurs at the beginning of a sentence; it should then be spelt in full.

NatCon was attended by 37 delegates...

Thirty-seven delegates attended NatCon...

An exception can be made where numbers are used in sequence or in reference to one another, for example,



7 out of the 84 surveyed

For percentages, the word 'percent' should always be written in full.

## **Dates**

Dates should be written in full

5/11/07

Should be

5 November 2007

If a date begins a sentence, it should be written in full

The fifth of November witnessed the first day of operation of ...

If multiple dates are referenced within a story to document a series of occurrences, the year may be excluded, and the date written "5 November"

To refer to a decade, no apostrophe is needed between the numerals and the 's', but one is needed if the numerals are abbreviated.

The 1990s

or

The '90s

## **Active and passive voice**

Writers are typically cautioned to avoid the passive voice, and it is true that the active voice is more economical and should be preferred.

However the passive voice can catch the reader's attention in opening sentences by positioning their subjects at their beginnings.

ANUSA's promised new system for Club funding, intended to be launched last year, has been delayed ...

## **Tense consistency**

Make sure to keep tense consistent throughout the length of a sentence.

The Prime Minister said the Government will pass the Bill soon.

Or



The Prime Minister said the Government would pass the Bill soon.

### **Things to avoid**

Avoid clichés and superlatives which make your writing sound tired and fligid.

Avoid tautologies (e.g. most unique).



# ANU-specific style points

## Abbreviations

A limited number of abbreviations are ubiquitous on campus and do not need to be referenced in full before use. These are as follows:

ANU (The Australian National University)  
ANUSA (The Australian National University Students' Association)  
PARSA (Postgraduate and Research Students' Association)  
AGM (Annual General Meeting)

List of abbreviations:

CBE (College of Business and Economics)  
CASS (College of Arts and Social Sciences)  
CAP (College of Asia Pacific)  
CECS (College of Engineering and Computer Science)  
JCOS (Joint Colleges of Science)  
CPMS (College of Physical and Mathematical Sciences)  
CMBE (College of Medicine, Biology and the Environment)  
CoL (College of Law)  
CRC (Common Room Committee; used at some residential halls)  
NUS (National Union of Students, or possibly, National University of Singapore)  
SAIt (Socialist Alternative)  
UAC (Universities Admissions Centre)  
SRC (Student Representative Council)  
OGM (Ordinary General Meeting)  
MSL (Membership Solutions Limited)

