

Content Design - Style guidelines

Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology -
Sultanate of Oman

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1. What to publish on the Government Unified Platform (GUP)

1.1. What should be published

You can publish content on GUP if you have evidence that a user needs it.

For example, if it helps users to:

- complete a task with government
- understand what government is doing

Content that does not do one of these things should not be published on GUP.

1.2. What not be published

The following types of content should not be published on GUP:

- content that repeats or significantly overlaps with existing content
- advertising for commercial purposes
- services exclusively for civil servants, for example an intranet
- information or advice that is not specific to government and can be provided by other organisations or charities
- organisations and companies that are not publicly owned, for example commercial organisations

2. How people read online

Knowing how people read means you'll write in a way they can understand easily and quickly - so you do not waste their time.

2.1. Common words

A 9-year old can recognise around 10,000 common words.

For example, 'find', 'get' etc.

They use these words every day.

As an adult, you stop reading these words and start recognising their shape.

In other words: if you use these 10,000 words to write, your audience can process what they are reading without thinking too much.

This is why you should aim for a reading age of 9 years old on GUP.

2.2. Use short words instead of long words

When you use a long word (8 or 9 letters), users are more likely to skip shorter words (3, 4 or 5 letters) that follow it. So if you use longer, more complicated words, readers will skip more. Keep it simple.

For example:

"The recently implemented categorical standardisation procedure on waste oil should not be applied before 1 January 2015."

The 'not' is far more obvious in this:

"Do not use the new waste oil standards before 1 January 2015."

2.3. Reading skills

Children quickly learn to read common words (the 5,000 words they use most). They

then stop reading these words and start recognising their shape. This allows people to read much faster. Children already read like this by the time they're 9 years old.

People also do not read one word at a time. They bounce around - especially online. They anticipate words and fill them in.

Your brain can drop up to 30% of the text and still understand. Your vocabulary will grow but this reading skill stays with you as an adult. You do not need to read every word to understand what is written.

This is why we tell people to write for a 9 year old reading age on GUP.

2.4. Explaining the unusual

We explain all unusual terms on GUP, for example 'PKI.'

Avoid words that a user may not recognise or understand. If you need to use an unusual word, explain it in full the first time you use it.

For example: You can confirm your identity using Public Key Infrastructure (PKI).

Better example: Register and confirm your identity.

This is better for the user, because it does not mention PKI. The user does not need to get to grips with this term, because it adds to their cognitive load (the amount of information their memory can hold at one time). You should only tell the user what they need to know to complete their task.

2.5. Short sentences

People with some learning disabilities read letter for letter - they do not bounce around like other users. They also cannot fully understand a sentence if it's too long.

People with moderate learning disabilities can understand sentences of 5 to 8 words without difficulty. By using common words we can help all users understand sentences of around 25 words.

2.6. How users read web pages

Users read very differently online than on paper. They do not necessarily read top to bottom or even from word to word.

Instead, users only read about 20 to 28% of a web page. Where users just want to complete their task as quickly as possible, they skim even more out of impatience.

Web-user eye-tracking studies show that [people tend to 'read' a webpage in an 'F' shape pattern](#) (English). They look across the top, then down the side, reading further across when they find what they need. For Arabic, this F-shape will be inverted. This is because in Arabic we read right-to-left.

What this means is: put the most important information first. So we talk a lot about 'front-loading' subheadings, titles and bullet points.

For example, say 'Canteen menu', not 'What's on the menu at the canteen today?'

2.6.1. Good example

At the activity centre you can:

- swim
- play
- run

2.6.2. Bad example

At the activity centre:

- you can swim
- you can play
- you can run

3. Writing well for the web

[People read differently on the web](#) (English) than they do on paper. This means that the best approach when writing for the web is different from writing for print.

When you write for GUP you should follow the style guide and writing guidelines. These follow best practice for writing web content.

3.1. Only publish what the user needs to know

Do not publish everything you can online. Publish only what someone needs to know so they can complete their task. Nothing more.

People do not usually read text unless they want information. When you write for the web, start with the same question every time: what does the user want to know?

Meeting that need means being:

- specific
- informative
- clear and to the point

3.2. Good content is easy to read

Good online content is easy to read and understand.

It uses:

- short sentences
- sub-headed sections
- simple vocabulary

This helps people find what they need quickly and absorb it effortlessly.

The main purpose of GUP is to provide information - there's no excuse for putting unnecessarily complicated writing in the way of people's understanding.

4. Who you are writing for

Your writing will be most effective if you understand who you're writing for.

To understand your audience you should know:

- how they behave, what they're interested in or worried about - so your writing will catch their attention and answer their questions
- their vocabulary - so that you can use the same terms and phrases they'll use to search for content

When you have more than one audience, make your writing as easy to read as possible so it's accessible to everyone.

4.1. Your audience

You are writing for:

- anyone living in Oman
- Omani citizens living abroad
- people living abroad who want to do business in or travel to Oman

Your audience will have different needs, so you must communicate in a way that most people understand.

The best way to do this is by using words that are easy to understand.

If you're writing for a specialist audience, you still need to make sure everyone can understand what the content is about.

If you're writing for an audience with accessibility needs, they may prefer to access the information using a video. You can use an artificial intelligence (AI) tool to convert plain text to a video with sign language. To do this, search for 'AI text translator' and choose a supplier.

4.2. What they need

People and businesses use government services to help them get something done (for example, register the birth of a child).

'User needs' are the things your users need from government.

Any content you write (or service you design) must answer those needs.

4.3. Why you should start with user needs

Services designed around users and their needs:

- are more likely to be used
- help more people get the right outcome for them
- cost less to operate by reducing time and money spent on resolving problems

4.4. Before you start writing

Before you start writing content, you must find out:

- who your users are and what they're trying to do
- how they currently do it
- the problems or frustrations they experience
- what users need from your service to achieve their goal

4.5. How to get this information

You can learn about users and their needs by:

- looking at analytics, survey feedback, call centre data, previous research reports etc.
- interviewing and observing actual or likely users
- talking to people inside and outside your organisation who work with actual or likely users (for example, call centre agents and charity workers)

Treat any opinions or suggestions that do not come from users as assumptions that have to be proven by doing research.

4.6. Consider a wide range of users

You must understand the needs of all kinds of users, not just 'typical' users.

You also have to consider the needs of people who provide the service or support other users (for example, call centre agents, inspectors, lawyers and charity workers).

When researching, focus on users who have problems using existing services or getting the right outcome for them. This will help you create a service that more people can use.

4.7. When to do research with users

Do user research when you're:

- starting a new project
- improving existing content

Use user research to:

- find out what users need
- test your assumptions about what users need

5. User needs

Once you have a good understanding of your users' needs, you should write them down and add them to your descriptions of users.

User needs are usually written in the format:

- I need to... [what does the user want to do?]
- So that... [why does the user want to do this?]

5.1.1. Good example

- As a [carer]
- I need to [get financial help]
- So that I can [carry on looking after the person I care for]

5.1.2. Good example

- As a [resident of Oman]
- I need to [bring my family to live with me in Oman]
- So that I can [see my family]

This is a valid user need because it does not suggest a specific solution. You might need to produce a combination of features and content to make sure the user need is met.

5.1.3. Bad example

- As a [resident of Oman]
- I need to [apply for a family visa]
- So that I can [see my family]

Write user needs from a personal perspective using words that users would recognise and use themselves.

Focus on what's most important for your users so you do not create an unmanageable list of user needs.

5.2. Testing user needs

Good user needs should:

- sound like something a real user might say
- be based on evidence from user research, not assumptions
- focus on the user's problem rather than possible solutions (for example, needing a reminder rather than needing an email or letter)

As you progress through the development phases, use what you learn to continually validate and refine your user needs.

5.3. Share your user needs

Once you've learned about your users and their needs, you should share what you know with anyone who's interested in your service, including colleagues, stakeholders, users and the public.

Present what you've learned in a way that's easy for others to understand and share. For example:

- use a visual representation to show how users interact with existing or future services and the needs they have at each stage (register, apply, interview etc.)
- user profiles or personas that describe groups of users with similar behaviour and needs (new parent, small business etc.)

The more you share, the more others will understand about your users and what they need from your service. They'll also ask questions, spot gaps and comment on what you're doing - all of which will help you design better content.

6. GUP style

It's important to stick to the style guide. This keeps the content consistent.

6.1. Be concise

To keep content understandable, concise and relevant, it should be:

- specific
- informative
- clear and concise
- serious but not pompous
- emotionless - adjectives can be subjective and make the text sound more emotive and like spin

You should:

- Use contractions like you'll (but avoid negative contractions like can't, because some users do not understand them or struggle to read them)
- Avoid caveats - for example say 'You can' rather than 'You may be able to'
- use the same words as your users - use [Google Trends](#) to check for terms people search for
- avoid long sentences - if a sentence exceeds 25 words then split it up in multiple smaller sentences

6.2. Active voice

Use the active rather than passive voice.

Active voice: You will be sent a refund

Passive voice: A refund will be sent

Active voice:

You must apply the:

- law for the practice of medicine and dentistry
- Manpower Law

Passive voice:

The requirements of the Law for the Practice of the Profession of Human Medicine and Dentistry, its regulations and policies, and the Manpower Law are applied.

The active voice makes it clear who is doing what, for example 'You must pay your parking fine'. The passive voice does not make it clear who is doing what, for example 'Parking fines must be paid'.

Research shows that:

- the active voice makes it easier to read and understand
- passive sentences contain more words than active and take longer to read

The easiest way to avoid passive voice is to address the user as 'You'.

6.3. Addressing the user

Address the user as 'you' where possible. Content on GUP often makes a direct appeal to citizens and businesses to get involved or take action, for example 'You can contact Royal Oman Police by phone and email' or 'Pay your parking fine'.

Bad example:

A birth certificate is issued to replace a damaged/lost one.

Good example:

Get a birth certificate if your old one is lost or damaged.

Bad example:

This service requires that health personnel wish to obtain an experience certificate for the years they spent working in private health institutions to submit to other entities.

Good example:

You can get an experience certificate if you have worked in a private health institution. You can use this to apply for work in public institutions.

6.4. Date ranges

Use 'to' instead of a dash or slash in date ranges. 'To' is quicker to read than a dash, and it's easier for screen readers.

For example, 'September 2019 to July 2020'.

Date ranges can be the academic year, the financial year, or the calendar year, so they need to be clear.

6.5. Gender-neutral text

If you're writing in English, make sure text is gender neutral wherever possible. Use 'them', 'their', 'they' etc.

6.6. Use language that is easy to understand

When you write for GUP, use language that is easy to understand. Aim for a reading age of 9 years old. You can [use the Hemingway Editor to check the reading age of your content](#) (English). Paste your content into the tool and select 'Enter'.

Hemingway will tell you:

- the reading age of your content
- if you have used passive voice
- sentences that are hard to read (or very hard to read)

6.7. Words to avoid

Avoid using these words:

- agenda (unless it's for a meeting), use 'plan' instead
- advance, use 'improve' or something more specific
- Allots, use 'gives'
- amendment, use 'change'
- Beneficiary, use 'you'
- Channels, use the name of the service provider or service name
- collaborate, use 'work with'
- combat (unless military), use 'solve', 'fix' or something more specific
- commit/pledge, use 'plan to x', or 'we're going to x' where 'x' is a specific verb
- deliver, use 'make', 'create', 'provide' or a more specific term (pizzas, post and services are delivered - not abstract concepts like improvements)
- deploy (unless it's military or software), use 'use' or if putting something somewhere use 'build', 'create' or 'put into place'
- dialogue, use 'spoke to' or 'discussion'
- duration, 'use 'length'
- Electronically, use 'online' or (ideally) avoid both, because the user already knows they are online
- empower, use 'allow' or 'give permission'
- Enhance, use 'improve'
- face (as in 'the new face of Oman's gateway'), use 'website of Oman'
- facilitate, say something specific about how you're helping - for example, use 'run' if talking about a workshop
- focus, use 'work on' or 'concentrate on'
- gateway (as in 'Oman's gateway to'), use 'website'
- impact (unless talking about a collision), use 'have an effect on' or 'influence'
- initiate, use 'start' or 'begin'
- Inquiring, use 'ask'
- Irregularities, use 'something wrong'
- Issue, use 'Get'
- leverage (unless in the financial sense), use 'influence' or 'use'
- modify, use 'change'
- obtain, use 'get'
- overarching, usually superfluous but can use 'encompassing'
- Procedures, use 'What you need'

- promote (unless talking about an ad campaign or career advancement), use 'recommend' or 'support'
- Report, use 'tell us'
- requirement, use 'needs' or 'you will need'
- reside, use 'live in' or 'stay in'
- Request, use 'ask for'
- robust (unless talking about a sturdy object), depending on context, use 'well thought out' or 'comprehensive'
- service provider, use the name of the service provider or do not mention the entity at all
- streamline, use 'simplify' or 'remove unnecessary administration'
- strengthening (unless it's strengthening bridges or other structures), depending on context, use 'increasing funding' or 'concentrating on' or 'adding more staff'
- tackle (unless talking about fishing tackle or a physical tackle, like in rugby), use 'stop', 'solve' or 'deal with'
- transform, describe what you're doing to change the thing
- utilise, use 'use'

This is not just a list of words to avoid. It's a way of writing. It will help you to communicate with your audience.

The list is not exhaustive. It's an indicator to show you the sort of language that confuses users.

Do not use formal or long words when easy or short ones will do. Use 'get' instead of 'issue' and 'request', 'help' instead of 'assist', and 'paid' instead of 'disbursed'.

We also lose trust from people if we write government 'buzzwords' and jargon. Often, these words are too general and vague and can lead to misinterpretation or empty, meaningless text. We can do without these words.

With all of these words you can generally get rid of them by breaking the term into what you're actually doing. Be open and specific.

Write conversationally - picture your audience and write as if you were talking to them one-to-one but with the authority of someone who can actively help.

6.8. When to use 'we'

Each time you use 'we', make sure you've already used the full name of the department or agency in that specific section. Do not assume the audience will know who the 'we' is.

7. A to Z

These style points apply to all content published on GUP.

It includes:

- guidance on specific points of style, such as abbreviations and numbers
- GUP style for specific words and phrases, in terms of spelling, hyphenation and capitalisation

7.1. A

7.1.1. Abbreviations and acronyms

The first time you use an abbreviation or acronym explain it in full on each page unless it's well known, like PKI. This includes government departments or schemes. Then refer to it by initials.

If you think an acronym is well known, please provide evidence that 80% of the Omani population will understand and commonly use it. Evidence can be from search analytics or testing of a representative sample.

Do not use full stops in abbreviations: PKI, not P.K.I.

7.1.2. Active voice

Use the active rather than passive voice. This will help us write concise, clear content.

7.1.3. Addresses

Start each part of the address on a new line. You should:

- write the city and street name on separate lines
- not use commas at the end of each line
- write the country as the final line
- only include a country if there is a reasonable chance that the user will be writing to the address from a different country

For example:

Royal Oman Police

H85M+293

Muscat

Oman

7.1.4. Addressing the user

Address the user as 'you' where possible and avoid using gendered pronouns like 'he' and 'she'. Content on the site often makes a direct appeal to citizens and businesses to get involved or take action: 'You can contact Royal Oman Police by phone and email' or 'Pay your parking fine', for example.

7.1.5. Ages

Do not use hyphens in ages to avoid confusion, although it's always best to write in a way that avoids ambiguity. For example, 'a class of 15 16-year-old students took the A level course' can be written as '15 students aged 16 took the A level course'. Use 'aged 4 to 16 years', not '4-16 years'.

Avoid using 'the over 50s' or 'under-18s'. Instead, make it clear who's included: 'aged 50 years and over' and 'aged 17 and under'.

7.2. B

7.2.1. Bank details

When adding bank details:

- do not use a table - use bullet points and a lead-in line instead
- use spaces rather than hyphens in sort codes - 60 70 80 (not 60-70-80)
- avoid using spaces in account numbers unless they are very long (like an International Bank Account Number)

For example:

Transfer the fee to the following account within 5 working days of emailing your form:

- sort code - 80 26 50
- account number - 10014069
- account name - The Muscat Municipality

7.2.2. Bold

Use bold sparingly - using too much will make it difficult for users to know which parts of your content they need to pay the most attention to.

Do not use bold in other situations, for example to emphasise text.

To emphasise words or phrases, you can:

- front-load sentences
- use headings
- use bullet points

7.2.3. Brackets

Use (round brackets), not [square brackets]. The only acceptable use of square brackets is for explanatory notes in reported speech:

“Thank you [Foreign Minister] Mr Yousef.”

Do not use round brackets to refer to something that could either be singular or plural, like ‘Check which document(s) you need to send to the Muscat Municipality.’

Always use the plural instead, as this will cover each possibility: 'Check which documents you need to send to the Muscat Municipality.'

7.2.4. Bullet points and steps

You can use bullets to make text easier to read. Make sure that:

- you always use a lead-in line (a sentence that introduces the bullet points)
- the bullets make sense running on from the lead-in line
- you use more than one bullet
- you use lower case at the start of the bullet
- you do not use more than one sentence per bullet - use commas or dashes to expand on an item
- you do not put 'or' or 'and' after the bullets
- you do not make the whole bullet a link if it's a long phrase
- you do not put a semicolon at the end of a bullet
- there is no full stop after the last bullet

Bullet points should normally form a complete sentence following from the lead text. But it's sometimes necessary to add a short phrase to clarify whether all or some of the points apply. For example, 'You can only book a doctor's appointment if (one of the following):

7.3. C

7.3.1. Capitalisation

DO NOT USE BLOCK CAPITALS FOR LARGE AMOUNTS OF TEXT AS IT'S QUITE HARD TO READ.

Always use sentence case, even in page titles and service names. The exceptions to this are proper nouns, including:

- departments (specific government departments - see below)
- Specific job titles
- titles like Mr, Mrs, Dr
- buildings

- place names
- brand names
- faculties, departments, institutes and schools
- names of groups, directorates and organisations: Sultan Qaboos University
- titles of legislation (but use 'the law' after the first time you use the full act or bill title)
- names of specific, named government schemes known to people outside government: Social Protection Fund
- header cells in tables: Annual profits
- titles of books (and within single quotes), for example, 'The Study Skills Handbook'

Do not capitalise:

- government - see government
- department or ministry - never Department or Ministry, unless referring to a specific one: Ministry of Transport, for example
- group and directorate, unless referring to a specific group or directorate: the Commercial Directorate, for example
- departmental board, executive board, the board
- policy themes like sustainable communities, promoting economic growth, local enterprise
- the military

7.3.2. Capitals for government departments

Use the following conventions for government departments. A department using an ampersand in its logo image is fine but use 'and' when writing in full text.

- Commercial Court
- Central Bank of Oman
- Civil Service Council
- Civil Service Employees Pension Fund
- Capital Market Authority
- The Tender Board
- Public Authority for Social Insurance
- General Organization for Youth Sports & Cultural Activities

7.3.3. Childcare

Lower case.

7.3.4. Childminder, childminding

One word.

7.3.5. Civil Service

Upper case.

7.3.6. civil servants

Lower case.

7.3.7. classwork

One word.

7.3.8. click

Don't use "click" when talking about user interfaces because not all users click. Use "select".

You can use "right-click" if the user needs to right-click to open up a list of options to progress through the user journey.

7.3.9. Continuous improvement

Lower case.

7.3.10. contractions

Avoid negative contractions like can't and don't. Many users find them harder to read, or misread them as the opposite of what they say. Use cannot, instead of can't.

Avoid should've, could've, would've, they've too. These can also be hard to read.

7.3.11. Co-operation

Hyphenated.

7.3.12. COVID-19

Upper case.

Do not use:

- 'Covid-19' with only the first letter capitalised
- 'covid-19' lower case
- 'coronavirus' as 'COVID-19' is the specific condition

7.3.13. Customs Duty

Upper case.

7.4. D

7.4.1. Data

Treat as a singular noun: The data is stored on a secure server.

7.4.2. Data set

Not “dataset”.

7.4.3. Dates

- use upper case for months: January, February
- do not use a comma between the month and year: 4 June 2017
- when space is an issue - in tables or publication titles, for example - you can use truncated months: Jan, Feb
- we use ‘to’ in date ranges - not hyphens, en rules or em dashes
- do not use quarter for dates, use the months: ‘department expenses, Jan to Mar 2013’
- when referring to today (as in a news article) include the date: ‘The Minister announced today (14 June 2012) that...’

For example:

- Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm (put different days on a new line, do not separate with a comma)
- 10 November to 21 December

7.4.4. department

Lower case except when in the title: the Department of Health and Social Care.

7.4.5. Disabled people

Not ‘the disabled’.

7.5. E

7.5.1. Eg, etc and ie

eg can sometimes be read aloud as 'egg' by screen reading software. Instead use 'for example' or 'such as' or 'like' or 'including' - whichever works best in the specific context.

etc can usually be avoided. Try using 'for example' or 'such as' or 'like' or 'including'. Never use etc at the end of a list starting with these words.

ie - used to clarify a sentence - is not always well understood. Try (re)writing sentences to avoid the need to use it. If that is not possible, use an alternative such as 'meaning' or 'that is'.

7.5.2. The Earth

Upper case for the Earth, Planet Earth and Earth sciences, with lower case for 'the'.

7.5.3. email

One word.

7.5.4. Email addresses

Write email addresses in full, in lower case and as active links. Do not include any other words in the link text.

7.5.5. Excel spreadsheet

Upper case because Excel is a brand name.

7.5.6. FAQs (frequently asked questions)

Do not use FAQs on GUP. If you write content by starting with user needs, you will not need to use FAQs.

7.5.7. Finance and procurement

Lower case.

7.5.8. fine

Use 'fine' instead of 'financial penalty'.

For example, "You'll pay a 50 rial fine."

7.6. G

7.6.1. Gender

If you're writing in English, make sure text is gender neutral wherever possible, such as 'them', 'their' or 'they'.

If you do need to refer to gender, use 'women' and 'men' rather than 'males' and 'females'. For example, '33% of our senior leaders are women'.

7.6.2. Geography and regions

Use lower case for north, south, east and west, except when they're part of a name or recognised region.

So, the south-west (compass direction), but the South West (administrative region).

Use lower case for the north, the south of Oman, the south-west, north-east Scotland, south Wales, the west, western Europe, the far east, south-east Asia.

Use upper case for Middle East, Central America, South America.

Always write out the full name of the area the first time you use it. You can use a capital for a shortened version of a specific area or region if it's commonly known by

that name, like the Pole for the North Pole.

7.6.3. Hurricanes

Upper case for named hurricanes: Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Sandy.

7.6.4. Hyphenation

Hyphenate:

- re- words starting with e, like re-evaluate
- co-ordinate
- co-operate

Do not hyphenate:

- reuse
- reinvent
- reorder
- reopen
- email

Do not use a hyphen unless it's confusing without it, for example, a little used-car is different from a little-used car.

7.7. I

7.7.1. internet

Lower case.

7.7.2. Italics

Do not use italics. Use 'single quotation marks' if referring to a document, scheme or initiative.

7.7.3. Job titles

Specific job titles and ministers' role titles are upper case, for example 'Minister for Transport'.

Generic job titles and ministers' role titles are lower case: director, minister.

7.8. L

7.8.1. law

Lower case even when it's 'the law'.

7.8.2. links

Front-load your link text with the relevant terms and make them active and specific. Always link to online services first. Offer offline alternatives afterwards, when possible.

7.8.3. lists

Lists should use bullet points to make them easier to read.

Very long lists can be written as a paragraph with a lead-in sentence if it looks better: 'The following countries are in the EU: Spain, France, Italy...'

7.8.4. log in

Use sign in where possible.

7.8.5. lunchtime

One word.

7.9. M

7.9.1. Maths content

Use a minus sign for negative numbers: -6

Ratios have no space either side of the colon: 5:12

One space each side of symbols: +, -, x, ÷ and = (so: $2 + 2 = 4$)

Use the minus sign for subtraction. Use the correct symbol for the multiplication sign (x), not the letter x.

Write out and hyphenate fractions: two-thirds, three-quarters.

7.9.2. Measurements

Use numerals and spell out measurements at first mention.

Do not use a space between the numeral and abbreviated measurement: 3,500kg not 3,500 kg.

Abbreviating kilograms to kg is fine - you do not need to spell it out.

If the measurement is more than one word, like kilometres per hour, then spell it out the first time it's used with the abbreviation. From then on, abbreviate. If it's only

mentioned once, do not abbreviate.

Use Celsius for temperature: 37°C.

Write out decimal fractions as numerals. Use the same number format for a sequence: 0.75 and 0.45.

7.9.3. Metadata

Not “meta data”.

7.9.4. Middle East

Upper case.

7.9.5. military

Lower case.

7.9.6. Millions

Always use million in money (and billion): 138 million.

Use millions in phrases: millions of people.

7.9.7. minister

Use upper case for the full title, like Minister for Transport, or when used with a name, as a title, like Health Minister Dr Ali Bin Mohammed Bin Moosa.

When used without the name, shortened titles are lower case: The health minister welcomed the research team.

7.9.8. money

Use the Omani Riyal. OMR 78.

7.9.9. Numbers

Use 'one' unless you're talking about a step, a point in a list or another situation where using the numeral makes more sense: 'in point 1 of the design instructions', for example. Or this:

You'll be shown 14 videos that feature everyday road scenes.

There will be:

- 1 developing hazard in 13 videos
- 2 developing hazards in the other video

Write all other numbers in numerals (including 2 to 9) except where it's part of a common expression like 'one or two of them' where numerals would look strange.

If a number starts a sentence, write it out in full (Thirty-four, for example) except where it starts a title or subheading.

For numerals over 999 - insert a comma for clarity: 9,000

Spell out common fractions like one-half.

Use a % sign for percentages: 50%

Use a 0 where there's no digit before the decimal point.

Use '500 to 900' and not '500-900' (except in tables).

Use MB for anything over 1MB: 4MB not 4096KB.

Use KB for anything under 1MB: 569KB not 0.55MB.

Keep it as accurate as possible and up to 2 decimal places: 4.03MB.

Addresses: use 'to' in address ranges: 49 to 53 Cherry Street.

7.10. O

7.10.1. online

One word.

7.10.2. or

Do not use slashes instead of “or”. For example, “Do this 3/4 times”.

7.11. P

7.11.1. PDF

Upper case. No need to explain the acronym.

7.11.2. penalty

Use 'fine'.

7.11.3. Pension provider

Lower case. Not pension payer.

7.11.4. Per cent

Use per cent not percent. Percentage is one word. Always use % with a number.

7.11.5. police

Lower case, even when referring to 'the police'.

7.11.6. Police service

Lower case.

7.11.7. PowerPoint presentation

Upper case because PowerPoint is a brand name.

7.11.8. programme

Lower case: Let's Rise Oman programme.

7.11.9. public health

Lower case.

7.11.10. public sector

Lower case.

7.12. Q

7.12.1. Quotes and speech marks

In long passages of speech, open quotes for every new paragraph, but close quotes only at the end of the final paragraph.

7.12.1.1 Single quotes

Use single quotes:

- in headlines
- for unusual terms - only for the first mention
- when referring to words
- when referring to publications
- when referring to notifications such as emails or alerts

For example: Download the publication 'Understanding employment laws' (PDF, 360KB).

7.12.1.2 Double quotes

Use double quotes in body text for direct quotations.

7.13. S

7.13.1. Seasons

spring, summer, autumn, winter are lower case.

7.13.2. Self-driving vehicle

Hyphenated. Use self-driving vehicle not automated vehicle.

7.13.3. Self-employment

Hyphenate this noun.

7.13.4. Semicolons

Do not use semicolons as they are often mis-read. Long sentences using semicolons should be broken up into separate sentences instead.

7.13.5. Sentence length

Do not use long sentences. Check sentences with more than 25 words to see if you can split them to make them clearer.

7.13.6. Sign in

Use sign in rather than log in (verb) for calls-to-action where users enter their details to access a service.

7.13.7. spaces

One space after a full stop, not 2.

7.13.8. strategy

Lower case. Do not capitalise a named strategy: national health and welfare strategy.

7.13.9. Sultan

Use His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

7.13.10. Summaries

Summaries should:

- be 160 characters or less
- end with a full stop
- not repeat the title or body text
- be clear and specific

7.14. T

7.14.1. team

Lower case: youth offending team, Behavioural Insights team.

7.14.2. teamwork

Lower case. One word.

7.14.3. Technical terms

Use technical terms where you need to. They're not jargon. You just need to explain what they mean the first time you use them.

7.14.4. Telephone numbers

Use Telephone: 0111 1111 or Mobile: - not Mob.:

Split numbers into 2 sections of 4 digits. For example:

0123 4567

7.14.5. Temperature

Use Celsius: 37°C

7.14.6. Times

- use 'to' in time ranges, not hyphens, en rules or em dashes: 10am to 11am (not 10-11am)
- 5:30pm (not 1730hrs)
- midnight (not 00:00)
- midday (not 12 noon, noon or 12pm)
- 6 hours 30 minutes

Midnight is the first minute of the day, not the last. You should consider using "11:59pm" to avoid confusion about a single, specific time.

For example, "You must register by 11:59pm on Tuesday 14 June." can only be read one way, but "You must register by midnight on Tuesday 14 June" can be read in two ways (the end of Monday 13, or end of Tuesday 14).

7.14.7. Titles

Page titles should:

- be 65 characters or less
- be unique, clear and descriptive
- be front-loaded and optimised for search
- use a colon to break up longer titles
- not contain dashes or slashes

- not have a full stop at the end
- not be questions
- not use acronyms unless they are well-known, like UAE

7.14.8. Twitter account (X)

Upper case. Twitter is a trademarked name.

7.15. U

7.15.1. URL

Upper case. No need to explain the acronym.

7.15.2. username

Not “user name”.

7.16. W

7.16.1. webchat

One word. Not ‘web chat’.

7.16.2. Word document

Upper case, because it’s a brand name.

7.16.3. webpage

One word.

7.16.4. Web server

Not “webservice”.

7.16.5. Words to avoid

- agenda (unless it's for a meeting), use 'plan' instead
- advance, use 'improve' or something more specific
- Allots, use 'gives'
- amendment, use 'change'
- Beneficiary, use 'you'
- Channels, use the name of the service provider or service name
- collaborate, use 'work with'
- combat (unless military), use 'solve', 'fix' or something more specific
- commit/pledge, use 'plan to x', or 'we're going to x' where 'x' is a specific verb
- deliver, use 'make', 'create', 'provide' or a more specific term (pizzas, post and services are delivered - not abstract concepts like improvements)
- deploy (unless it's military or software), use 'use' or if putting something somewhere use 'build', 'create' or 'put into place'
- dialogue, use 'spoke to' or 'discussion'
- duration, 'use 'length'
- Electronically, use 'online' or (ideally) avoid both, because the user already knows they are online
- empower, use 'allow' or 'give permission'
- Enhance, use 'improve'
- face (as in 'the new face of Oman's gateway'), use 'website of Oman'
- facilitate, say something specific about how you're helping - for example, use 'run' if talking about a workshop
- focus, use 'work on' or 'concentrate on'
- gateway (as in 'Oman's gateway to'), use 'website'
- impact (unless talking about a collision), use 'have an effect on' or 'influence'
- initiate, use 'start' or 'begin'
- Inquiring, use 'ask'

- Irregularities, use 'something wrong'
- Issue, use 'Get'
- leverage (unless in the financial sense), use 'influence' or 'use'
- modify, use 'change'
- obtain, use 'get'
- overarching, usually superfluous but can use 'encompassing'
- Procedures, use 'What you need'
- promote (unless talking about an ad campaign or career advancement), use 'recommend' or 'support'
- Report, use 'tell us'
- requirement, use 'needs' or 'you will need'
- reside, use 'live in' or 'stay in'
- Request, use 'ask for'
- robust (unless talking about a sturdy object), depending on context, use 'well thought out' or 'comprehensive'
- service provider, use the name of the service provider or do not mention the entity at all
- streamline, use 'simplify' or 'remove unnecessary administration'
- strengthening (unless it's strengthening bridges or other structures), depending on context, use 'increasing funding' or 'concentrating on' or 'adding more staff'
- tackle (unless talking about fishing tackle or a physical tackle, like in rugby), use 'stop', 'solve' or 'deal with'
- transform, describe what you're doing to change the thing
- utilise, use 'use'

8. Page titles and summaries

8.1. Titles

Most people who use GUP start with a search engine. Use the same vocabulary as

your audience so they can find your content. This begins with your page title and summary.

If people cannot find your page or understand the content, they will not be able to act on it or know it's for them.

8.1.1. Make your title unique

Titles on GUP must be unique and informative so that users know which page they are on.

Duplicate titles can confuse users - for example if they have more than one page open. This is particularly true for those with visual, cognitive or mobility impairments.

Before you publish a title, check to see if it is already being used on GUP. You can do a quick Google search to do this.

8.1.2. Check your title makes sense

Your title should make sense:

- by itself - for example 'Regulations' does not say much, but 'Regulations for environmental waste' does
- in search results

Remember that you only have 65 characters to capture the attention of your audience. Make sure that the title clearly answers the user need and that it explains what the user can do on the page.

Make your titles user focused, clear and descriptive so that users can distinguish if it's the right content for them.

Find out what the public calls your content by using search tools like [Google Trends](#) to look up keywords. Your scheme, organisation or process's official or internal name may not be what the public calls it.

- Check searches on GUP for any related content. This can tell you what people are struggling to find.

- Once you know the most popular keywords you can prioritise them in the title, summary, introduction and subheadings

Example:

Good title example: Social protection fund

Good summary example: The social protection fund is financial support for widows, widowers or surviving partners - rates, eligibility, claim form.

8.1.3. Keep your title short

Your title should be 65 characters or less (including spaces).

You can use more than 65 characters if it's essential for making the title clear or unique, but do not do this routinely because:

- Google cuts off the rest of the title at around 65 characters
- longer titles are harder to understand

8.1.4. Make your titles clear and descriptive

The title should provide full context so that users can easily see if they've found what they're looking for.

By being general about a topic, you leave the user asking 'what is this in relation to?'

Give the user context around the topic and what this content will tell them:

Bad title example: Hazardous waste - new process

Good title example: How to dispose of hazardous waste in your area

8.1.5. Avoid saying the same thing twice (tautologies)

Repeating yourself in the title uses up valuable characters that could be used to give more information.

Bad title example: Using and submitting your business expenses

Good title example: Submitting your business expenses

8.1.6. Using 'ing' in titles

Use the active verb ('Submit') if you use the page to do the thing.

Good form title example: Submit your business expenses

Use the present participle ('Submitting') if the page is about doing the thing, but you do it elsewhere.

Good guidance title example: Submitting your business expenses

8.1.7. Do not include the format type in the page title

Do not include the name of the page format, such as 'online service'. This will free up space to tell the user what the content is about.

It's better to explain what the service or document is about, not its format:

- **Bad title example:** Online service to replace your birth certificate
- **Good title example:** Replace your birth certificate

- **Bad title example:** Education data
- **Good title example:** Number of schools in Oman that teach Danish

8.1.8. Remove the date unless it makes the title unique

Put the date in the title if the page is part of a series that has the same title.

For example, a list of annual reports:

Title: Government annual report 2020

Title: Government annual report 2019

Title: Government annual report 2018

It's helpful to include the date range if you publish multiple versions of the same information for different periods of time.

8.1.9. Do not add your entity name unless it makes the title unique

Only add the entity name to the title if the content is about your entity
- for example annual reports or corporate information.

Title example: Royal Oman Police annual reports

On its own, 'annual reports' could apply to any department or agency. In this case, it's better to add the department name to differentiate it.

8.2. Summaries

Along with the title, the summary is usually what users see in search results so it should give them a clear indication of what the content is about. Make sure people can see quickly whether the page will have the information they need.

Keep all summaries to 160 characters (including spaces) as Google usually only shows the first 160 characters in search results. If your summary is longer, make sure you cover the main point of the page in the first 160 characters.

Summaries should end with a full stop. It can help people who use assistive technology like screen readers.

8.2.1. Use language that is easy to understand

Use simple language to make the purpose of the content clearer. Write like you're speaking to a user.

Bad summary example: Implementing the government's strengthened approach to budget support: technical note

Good summary example: How the government is making budget support more effective

8.2.2. Avoid redundant introductory words

Do not repeat the content type in the summary - for example, do not say “this guidance is about...” or “a dataset to...”.

Use as few words from the title as possible. Do not repeat the same keywords from the title. Use new keywords to cover the different words that people use when they search.

8.2.3. Use active language

Keep summaries active and include a verb. For example:

Get a new passport, check how much it costs, and upload a passport photo.

9. Page titles and summaries

Make sure that the most valuable information can be found at the top of the page.

9.1. Page length

There is no minimum or maximum page length for GUP. However:

- people only read 20 to 28% of text on a web page anyway
- remember that the pressure on the brain to understand increases for every 100 words you put on a page

This means that the quicker you get to the point, the greater the chance your target audience will see the information you want them to.

It's most important that you write well. If you write only a single paragraph but it's full of caveats, jargon and things users do not need to know (but you want to say) then it's still too much.

9.2. Writing body copy (anything that is not in the title)

Keep your body copy as focused as possible.

Remember that you're likely to be battling outside factors for people's attention, not least their mood and situation. They might be looking on a mobile in a busy coffee shop, trying to complete their task online in the middle of a stressful family event or any combination of multiple unknowns. If you want their attention, do not waste their time.

- Use the '[inverted pyramid](#)' (English) approach with the most important information at the top tapering down to lesser detail.
- Break up text with descriptive subheadings. The text should still make sense with the subheadings removed.
- Paragraphs should have no more than 5 sentences each.
- Include keywords to boost natural search rankings.

9.3. Headings

Use heading levels (subheadings) to break up your content and give it a sensible navigation structure. Each page title is an H1 (heading level 1), so start at H2 and do not use H1 in your content.

Do not skip heading levels when moving from a higher level to a lower level, for example from H2 to H4. Screen reader users may navigate using a list of headings - a missed heading level can make this confusing.

Do not use bold text instead of using subheadings. This is inaccessible because a screen reader will not recognise it as a header.

You do not always need to have text between headings. Missing text between headings is not a Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) fail, but sometimes adding text between headings is helpful to provide context.

For example, users expect to go from H1, normally the page title, to H2 without any explanatory text.

It's usually helpful to have content between an H2 and H3 especially when it's not clear how the H3(s) follow from H2.

When you link to a service, make sure the start button is under a heading which relates to the start button's task (for example, 'Register online'). Otherwise it will not be accessible.

You do not always need text between the heading and the start button.

Make sure your subheadings are front-loaded with search terms (put the important keywords at the front) and make them active.

For example:

Find out how much it costs to renew your visa

Make sure start buttons are under a related heading. If the start button is nested under a heading, that heading must relate to the start button's task (for example, 'Register online'). Otherwise it will not be accessible.

Do not use:

- questions - they're hard to front-load (putting the most important information first) and users want answers, not questions
- technical terms unless you've already explained them
- 'introduction' as your first section - users do not want an introduction, just give the most important information

9.4. [Do not use FAQs \(frequently asked questions\)](#)

FAQs are strongly discouraged on GUP. If you write content by starting with user needs, you will not need to use FAQs.

FAQs are discouraged because they:

- duplicate other content on the site
- cannot be front-loaded (putting the most important words people will search for at the front), which makes usability difficult
- are usually not frequently asked questions by the public, but important information dumped by the content editor
- mean that content is not where people expect to find it; it needs to be in context

- can add to search results with duplicate, competing text

10. Accessibility

This guidance will help you to make your content more accessible.

10.1. Writing accessible documents

GUP is for everyone, so it's important to use a format that everyone can understand. Avoid documents where possible. Instead, use video or audio files to convey information. If you publish a document, you may exclude people with accessibility needs.

If you cannot avoid using a document, include a video or audio file alongside it and follow these steps:

10.2. Think about format

Doing this will help your document support as many users as possible.

Publish in HTML format wherever possible so that your documents use your users' custom browser settings. You can see the HTML format in the list of page formats. It can be difficult to make other formats easier to read.

For example, PDF documents:

- can make your content harder to find, use and maintain
- do not work well with assistive technologies like screen readers a lot of the time

Some users may prefer to access information in a video rather than plain text. Consider using an artificial intelligence (AI) tool to convert plain text into a video with sign language. To do this, search for 'AI text translator' and choose a supplier.

10.3. Keep the language simple

Use clear and simple language.

Simple language makes your document accessible to people with cognitive impairments and learning disabilities.

Research shows that most users prefer simple language, including specialist audiences. This helps users to understand and process information quickly.

Where you need to use technical terms, abbreviations or acronyms, explain what they mean the first time you use them.

10.4. Keep the document structure simple

Give the document a meaningful title.

Keep sentences and paragraphs short. Aim for around 25 words or less per sentence.

Use a sans serif font like Arial or Helvetica. Use a minimum size of 12 points.

Use sentence case. Avoid all caps text and italics.

Make sure the text is right aligned (Arabic) or left aligned (English).

Avoid underlining, except for links.

Make sure link text clearly describes where the link goes. It should also be understandable on its own, even if read out of context. This is because some screen reader users list links on a page to find what they need quickly.

Documents with single continuous columns of text are easier to make accessible than documents with a complex layout, for example a table.

Only use tables for data. Keep tables simple: avoid splitting or merging cells.

Do not use things like colour or shape alone to show meaning. Instructions like 'click the big green button' rely on the user to see the page and someone who is colour blind may not see the green button.

If you're using images or charts, think about how you'll make the content accessible

to people with a visual impairment. Two options are:

- make the same point in the text of the document (so people with visual impairments get the information they need - the image or chart is there as an extra for people who are able to see it)
- give the person converting or uploading the document for you alt text ('alternative text') for the image or chart

Do not use images containing text, as it's not possible to resize the text in the image and screen readers cannot read text which is part of an image.

Avoid footnotes where possible. Provide explanations inline instead.

10.5. Give the document a structure

Break up your document to make it more readable. Use bullet points, numbered steps and meaningful subheadings.

Create a hierarchy of headings: 'heading 1', 'heading 2' and so on.

Do not skip a heading level, for example 'heading 2' and then 'heading 4'.

10.6. Forms, complex documents and other office formats

Build forms in HTML where possible. Avoid using attachments where possible, because these can be difficult to navigate.

If you cannot use HTML, [publish forms in OpenDocument \(.odt\)](#) (English).

If you're creating another type of office document (for example a spreadsheet or presentation), there's guidance on how to make it accessible on the [Accessible Digital Office Document Project](#) (English) website.

10.7. Making non-HTML documents accessible

HTML documents are better for accessibility than Word or PDF.

If you need to publish a Word or PDF document, include a video or audio file alongside the document and make sure you:

- use headings instead of bold text
- do not skip heading levels
- use table headers
- use meaningful link text
- run an accessibility check on the document

Avoid using:

- short link text
- decorative images, including those used for layout purposes such as horizontal line separators

10.8. Spreadsheets

If you are creating a spreadsheet, make it as accessible as possible.

To improve the accessibility of your spreadsheets, you should avoid freezing rows and columns as this can limit how much space a user has to navigate the spreadsheet. For example, this can affect users who are using an increased zoom level, a low resolution or a device with a smaller screen. If your spreadsheet is read-only, users might not be able to adjust frozen row and column sizes to suit their viewing needs.

You should also:

- use the first row on your sheet as the header row containing all the column names
- avoid blank or empty rows - if you need more whitespace, adjust the line spacing, row height and column width
- avoid merging cells - every cell should contain a value
- avoid using colour alone to convey meaning, for example using red to highlight important values or cells - use text labels wherever possible
- use only one header row - if you need to group data into further categories, create new columns or use separate tabs for each category

10.9. Run an accessibility check

Most software comes with a basic accessibility checker. Use this feature to make sure your document is accessible before uploading it to GUP.

If you are not sure how to do this, search 'run an accessibility check [name of software]' in your search engine.

10.10. PDFs

Avoid using PDFs where possible. Either:

- Convert the PDF into HTML
- [Convert the PDF into an accessible format](#) (English) and [check it is accessible](#) (English)
- Use an open format if the PDF needs to be edited

Documents created in open formats can be opened with either free or paid-for software.

This means they:

- can be read and used by more people
- help people to share their work more easily
- make it easier and cheaper to do business with government

10.11. Create an editable document in an open format

To build a form or a document which needs to be edited, you need to publish it in .odt.

If you have access to proprietary software, such as Microsoft Office, use it to create your source document then convert to an OpenDocument (.odt).

Creating a form using .odt format has limits. You will not be able to add graphics or complicated steps in your form. If your form is complex, you could build it as a service instead.

11. Video

Find out when to use video on GUP, and how to make sure your video will be accessible.

11.1. Why we use video

GUP is for everyone, so it's important to use a format that everyone can understand.

Many users struggle to understand information in plain text. These users may prefer to access information in an alternative format, for example video or audio.

11.2. When to use video

You can include a video alongside plain text when there is a user need showing that your users:

- prefer video, or
- cannot access information in plain text

You can either create a video from scratch, or you can use an artificial intelligence (AI) tool to convert plain text into a video with sign language. To do this, search for 'AI text translator' and choose a supplier.

If you are creating your own video

11.3. How to structure your video

Your video should convey the same (or similar) information, in the same order as the plain text.

If you can, split the video into small files so that they are:

- quick to load
- follow the same structure as the plain text (each video answers a user need)

When you are creating a video:

11.4. Write a descriptive title

Write a descriptive title for your video file. This will:

- make your video search-friendly
- help the user understand if the video will answer their question

11.5. Choose a video-hosting platform that supports accessibility needs

Your video-hosting platform, for example YouTube, should allow videos to play:

- in all screen sizes
- in all supported browsers

It should also be actively maintained and quick to load.

The video player should ideally allow users to:

- operate the video using only a keyboard
- play a description of elements in the video player,
for example 'Play this video'

Where available, it should also allow the user to:

- use closed captions and/or subtitles
- turn captions/subtitles on and off
- use multilingual captions/subtitles
- switch to sign language videos

11.6. Avoid using visuals to convey information

Some users will not be able to see your video, so avoid relying on visuals to convey information. For example, showing a graph on screen.

Some users will not be able to hear your video, and will rely on captions or transcripts to understand what the video is telling them. These users will struggle to process visual information because they must read the captions at the same time. This means that their attention will be split between reading the captions and watching the visual on screen.

With this in mind, focus on speech in your video. Make sure you include a transcript and (where possible) captions.

11.7. Add a transcript

A transcript is a plain text version of the speech in your video file. It should provide a written record of any audio or visual content in the video.

You can use either:

- Verbatim transcripts (a record of every single word on the video)
- Plain word transcripts (a record of most words on the video)

A transcript is useful because:

- It's good for search engine optimisation (helps users to find the video)

- It's a good backup option when you cannot access the video file, for example because the video is slow to load
- It helps users who cannot hear or are hard of hearing
- If you are working in a noisy environment, you will struggle to hear a video or audio file
- you can translate a transcript if you are a non-native speaker
- You can search the transcript to jump to the information you need

You can use a service to create a transcript of a video or audio file. Just search for 'create a transcript' to find a suitable supplier.

If your video hosting platform supports it, you can also:

11.8. Use closed captions

A caption is when you display text on a video at certain times.

The captions reflect key parts of the video. For example, they can cover dialogue, sound effects and descriptions of music and song lyrics.

These captions help people who are deaf or hard of hearing to have full access to video content.

They are called 'closed' captions because you can switch the captions on or off while watching the video. In other words: not everyone needs to see them, just the people that need them.

Not all video platforms support closed captions. Where possible, choose a platform that supports closed captions.

11.9. Use open captions if the video-hosting platform you use does not support closed captions

Open captions are hard-coded into the video. They are a permanent feature and cannot be turned on or off.

You can use open captions if you publish videos to a platform which does not support closed captions.

12. Links

Find out how to write descriptive links, make them accessible, and when you can use anchor links.

12.1. Using links in content

Do not duplicate information. If it exists elsewhere on GUP or can be better supplied by an organisation outside government, link to it instead.

12.2. Provide links in context

Make sure all links are provided in context, when they're useful. Do not put all the links together at the bottom of the page.

Do not use unsorted lists of related links to point users to content you think they might be interested in. These are sometimes known as "further reading" or "more information".

12.3. Writing link text

When writing a link, make it descriptive and put the most relevant words at the front (front-loading). Do not use something generic like 'click here' or 'more'. Generic links do not make sense out of context or tell users where a link will take them. They also do not work for people using screen readers, who often scan through a list of links to navigate a page. It's important the links are descriptive so they make sense in isolation.

Bad example: 'Education data' (CSV)

Good example: 'Number of schools in Oman that teach Danish language' (CSV)

If your link takes the user to a page where they can start a task, start your link with a verb. For example, 'send a tax return'.

If your link leads to information rather than starting a task, explain what information they will see. For example, 'Find out how much it costs to renew your passport'.

When you write link text, consider the other links on the same page. Do not use the same link text more than once on a single page. Avoid linking to the same place more than once if you can. If you have more than one link on a page to the same place, use similar link text - these do not need to be identical but should convey the same meaning.

Links help people scan content, so do not swamp them with too many or link to the same tool or webpage throughout your page. Link to online services first, unless an offline alternative is better for your users.

12.4. Avoid very short links

Very short links can create problems for users with limited dexterity. One-word links, for example, should have at least 3 syllables. Including more words in your link text also makes it more descriptive and user friendly.

12.5. Anchor links

Anchor links are used to take a user to a particular section of a page.

They can take users to either:

- another section on the same page
- a section on a different page

Try to avoid using anchor links in your content. Anchor links can be disorientating for some users with access needs who may have problems getting back to the previous page.

For example, screen magnifier users and those with motor function impairments. People using assistive technology may find it hard to see what they've missed or realise that they've skipped forward.

Avoid using anchor links to content on the same page, unless you are using an index

at the top of the page. Instead, rearrange the structure of your content so that people can navigate the content more easily.

There may be instances where an anchor link to another page is needed. For example, if people only need to read an annex of long, complicated guidance. If you have to do this, make it as accessible as possible by making the link as descriptive as possible. This is so that users know what they will see on the destination page. For example, 'read Annex A of the spouse visa guidance to check your eligibility'.

The link text must give clues to:

- where you are sending them - 'spouse visa guidance'
- what they need to do when they get there - 'read Annex A of the spouse visa guidance'
- why they are going there - 'to check your eligibility'

Your anchor link should make it clear that you're sending users to a different piece of guidance - it's often useful to include the title of the page they're going to.

You can add links anywhere in body text, but not in titles, summaries or subheadings.

12.6. Do not link directly to attachments

Link to the page the attachment is added to, not to the attachment itself.

You should not link directly to attachments because:

- users might miss important information or context by going straight to the attachment (even if the attachment is a HTML)
- links to file attachments, such as PDF or ODS, can break when pages are updated

If the page you are linking to has more than one attachment, be clear which one you are directing the user to.

12.7. Linking to documents on other sites

Link to the page that hosts the document and give the full title of the document you're linking to. Do not link to the document itself because: links to documents are more likely to break

- it's harder for users to navigate back from documents to the page they were on

If you cannot avoid linking to the actual document, add the file format and size to the link.

12.7.1. Example

Application form (PDF, 19.5KB)

12.8. Linking to a page in another language

If you are linking to a page in a different language, you must signpost the change in the link text and language of the origin page.

For example, 'Application form (in Arabic)'.

If linking to a non-Arabic page from an Arabic page, you must signpost this as well.

Users will expect a linked page to be in the same language as the origin page. It's good practice to prepare users for a language change in their journey. It's also important for accessibility so that screen readers can correctly pronounce content on the origin and destination page.

12.9. GUP external linking policy

You can link to an external website in one of these situations:

- you're linking to a government service or website
- a user can only complete a task using a third party website, for example finding a driving instructor
- there is evidence a user needs something that cannot be published on GUP, for example information or advice government cannot or does not provide
- a trustworthy source can support users better than GUP can, for example it has a tool or feature that GUP does not

12.10. Rules for linking to external websites

Users must be able to access the content without having to pay or register to see it.

You can link to commercial websites, but GUP must be impartial. You must have reason for linking to one commercial website instead of another if they provide similar information. Linking to one commercial website instead of another can look like endorsement, or give one company an advantage over the other.

Check if the site is usable and accessible (especially on mobile) and if it's a safe place to send a user. Read the site's privacy and cookie policies.

Plan how you're going to maintain the link. The content on the website can stop being useful. Links break and the design, content and privacy can change without warning.

12.11. How to link

You can put a link:

- in the body of the text (inline)
- as a related link in the navigation

Link to a specific page, not the website's homepage.

If you're using inline links, you must make it clear when users are leaving GUP.

13. Images

You can use images if they are either:

- informative
- decorative

- charts, diagrams, infographics and scientific equations

13.1. Informative images

Do not use images alone to provide information. This will exclude users who cannot see or access the image.

Text is easier to read than images when scaled up by people using screen magnifiers. Images may become pixelated and need to be scrolled vertically and horizontally when zoomed in.

Only use images if they help users understand information in a different way.

Avoid images with text. Write it in the body text.

Informative images can help users understand the written text in a different way. You must leave the 'Alt text' field empty and write a description in the body of content. This means the description is available to everyone.

Screen reading software will ignore images without alt text. If you can, describe the content of the image as though there is no image on the page. For example, write "the minister tweeted...", instead of "an image of a tweet by the minister".

Another way to make sure you are describing the image properly is to imagine that you're reading out the content of the page on a telephone. When you get to the image, what would you say to help the listener understand the point the page is making?

When using photos or logos, use simple images that can be explained easily with text.

You can use the caption and credit field to name a person in an image.

13.2. Decorative images

Decorative images are generic images which do not give any additional information to the content. For example, an image of laptops in a blog post, or featured content on departments' organisation pages.

You do not need alt text for decorative images.

13.3. Diagrams, infographics and scientific equations

13.3.1. Format

Upload the image in SVG (scaleable vector graphic) format. SVGs allow users to magnify images without losing any quality.

13.3.2. Colours

Do not use colour alone to convey information. Some visually impaired users will not be able to see colour differences. Ensure there is a high enough colour contrast ratio between segments, lines, text and background colour.

13.3.3. Diagrams

Only use a diagram if it makes the content clearer, or summarises a large amount of information.

Diagrams need to be clear and easy to understand. For example, use one idea per diagram.

When you're creating the diagram, try to:

- follow normal reading direction - users want to read from right to left (Arabic) or left to right (English)
- avoid overlapping connector lines
- use simple shapes - and as few different types as possible
- make it clear where the starting point is for process and flow charts
- use black and white as a default

Include a detailed explanation of the processes and relationships explained in the diagram in the body text. This is helpful for users who cannot see the diagram.

Leave the 'Alt text' field empty.

13.3.4. Infographics

An infographic is an image which usually displays data, graphs, charts or text to explain a complex process or overview of a subject.

Infographics can be hard to make accessible if they're too complicated. This is because screen magnifier users may need to scroll horizontally and vertically across the image. This may make them hard to understand when not seen all at once. It can also be difficult to describe in text. The image may also become blurred and pixelated when magnified if you're not using an SVG format.

If you choose to publish an infographic you should provide a plain text version of the content. This should explain everything that is shown in the infographic and be in the body text next to the infographic.

13.3.5. Scientific equations

Describe the equation in the body text and leave the 'Alt text' field blank.

14. Tables

When to use tables and how to make them accessible.

14.1. When to use tables

Tables should only be used to present data.

Do not use tables for cosmetic changes to layout, for example to present a list because you think it looks better that way.

14.2. Consider the alternatives

A table may not always be the best way to present your content.

A simple table can often be replaced with a:

- series of bulleted lists with headings and subheadings
- single bulleted list, using commas to separate the information

14.3. How to make tables accessible

14.3.1. Use headers

Tables must always have a header row, which explains the content of the columns.

Headers appear in bold and help people understand the table's structure.

You must capitalise headers.

Row headings must be in column one. If your table has heading information in a different column from column one, you need to rearrange your table.

Tables with 2 columns do not usually need headings in the first column. This is because there is less to scroll so the content will be clear enough without headings to explain the content.

You can use links in table headings.

14.3.2. Help the user

Carry out any calculations, for example include totals or differences between amounts at the end of columns or rows.

14.3.3. Make your table easier to read

Try to use more rows than columns. A tall, narrow table is easier to read than a short, wide one.

14.3.4. Put important information first

Put the information that most people are looking for at the top or in the first few columns.

14.3.5. Size

The size of a table affects how easy it is for people to read it and understand it.

The minimum size for a table should be 2 columns and 3 rows (including a column header), but if your table is this small it may be better as normal text.

Four column tables can be comfortably displayed on a smartphone screen, depending on how much text you have in the table cells. If it looks like too much, think about splitting your data between tables.