

# Content Design - Content patterns

Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information

Technology - Sultanate of Oman

# Table of Contents

## 1. Start pages

.....	5	1.1. Before you start writing your start page.....	5	1.2. What to include.....	5	1.3. Naming your service.....	6	1.4. Keep important information above the button.....	6	1.5. Use a URL that matches the name of your service .....	7	1.6. What not to include on a start page .....	7	1.7. Accessibility.....	7
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## 2. Guidance

.....	8	For example: Export an endangered species: check if you need a permit. ...							
8	2.1. Audience .....	9	2.2. Title .....	9	2.3. Summary .....	10	2.4. Structure.....	10	3.

Documents.....															
11	3.1. HTML .....	11	3.2. Other formats.....	12	3.3. Forms and editable documents.....	12	3.4. PDFs .....	13	3.5. Titles.....	13	3.6. Summary .....	14	3.7. Body copy.....	14	4.

Statistical dataset.....					
14	4.1. What to include.....	14	4.2. Formatting requirements for statistical datasets.....	15	5.

Collection of documents.....	
------------------------------	--

16 5.1. Structuring a document collection.....16

6. News article

..... 17 6.1.
Deciding what to publish.....17 6.2.
Avoid duplicating other organisations' news stories .....18
6.3. Make sure it's information that users can act on (or cannot get from other sources) 18
6.4. Do not publish guidance on news stories or press releases.....18 6.5. Make sure it adds something to existing content.....19 6.6. Article length.....19 6.7. Titles.....19
6.8. Summary .....20 6.9. Body copy.....20

7. Organisation

page..... 21 7.1. Writing and formatting requirements for organization pages .....21 7.2. About us/What we do.....21 7.3. Responsibilities.....21 7.4. Priorities .....22 7.5. Who we are .....22 7.6. Our ministers and management.....22 7.7. Contact details.....22

8. People and roles.....

22 8.1. Writing and formatting requirements for people and roles.....23 8.2. Biography .....23 8.3. Management biographies .....24 8.4. Ministerial biographies .....24 8.5. Writing copy to describe a role.....25

# 1. Start pages

Use this pattern when you are designing a service start page.

## 1.1. Before you start writing your start page

You should:

- conduct user research to find out how your audience describes the task
- check that users will be able to find your start page in the information architecture

Once you start drafting, check that users can understand what you have written. You can do this by interviewing the people who will use your service and showing them your designs.

## 1.2. What to include

Your start page needs a:

- service name: this helps people understand what your service does and whether they need to use it, like 'Get a birth certificate'
- list of things most users need to know: for example, what your service is, what will happen, what users will get or how much it'll cost
- call-to-action button, for example 'Start now'
- list of other ways to access the service: for example, phone or text

Keep your start page focused on helping users get started and successfully complete the service.

A good start page:

- lets users know they're in the right place
- sets expectations: users know what to expect before clicking

anything, including whether they're eligible and what the outcome will be • helps users succeed by telling them what information they must give or documents they need to have

- is easy to find and ranks highly in search engines, because it uses the language of its users

### 1.3. Naming your service

Good service names:

- use the words users use
- are based on analytics and user research
- describe a task, not a technology
- do not need to change when policy or technology changes • Are verbs, not nouns: 'Apply for a divorce', not 'Divorce' • do not include government department or agency names • are not brand-driven or focused on marketing

### 1.4. Keep important information above the button

Many users do not look at information below the start button.

If information applies to everyone and they need it to complete the service, put it above the button.

Sometimes it's necessary to put information that only some users need below the button to stop the page getting too long for the majority of users.

### 1.5. Use a URL that matches the name of your service

Set up a URL that embeds your start page in the wider service, topic or website.

**For example:**

Service name: Book a doctor's appointment

URL: <https://www.gup.gov.om/health/book-a-doctors-appointment>

If you need to, create a short vanity URL to promote the service in letters or other offline activities which direct people to the service start page.

**For example:** [https://www.gup.gov.om/doctors-](https://www.gup.gov.om/doctors-appointment)

[appointment](#) **1.6. What not to include on a start**

**page**

Avoid telling people all about the service on the start page. Too much information will distract them.

If you can, check eligibility as part of the service to avoid overloading the start page with criteria.

## 1.7. Accessibility

It's particularly important to keep your start page brief for users with access needs. Consider:

- how a screen reader will read out the content
- how much time it takes for the user to get to the main call to action
- how much information they have to process

Lots of people miss information below the start button, especially:

- people who zoom in or magnify content on the page
- people with screen readers who navigate the page by headings and interactive elements (such as buttons)

## 2. Guidance

Guidance is usually aimed at a specialist or professional audience. For example a lawyer or teacher.

Your audience will be trying to complete a task, so provide steps that are easy to follow. For example:

- How to apply for an export licence
- Licence processing time
- Exporter responsibilities
- Penalties and fines

If you're writing guidance, make sure that it:

- answers a user need
- helps the user to complete a task

**For example:** Export an endangered species: check if you need a permit.

### 2.1. Audience

Guidance is aimed at specialists, for example accountants or medical staff. If your audience is something else, for example parents, consider designing a service instead.

## 2.2. Title

Make titles active if you use the page to do the thing (for example, 'Submit employee expenses').

If the page is about doing the thing but you do it elsewhere, use the present participle (for example, 'Using and submitting employee expenses').

Use a colon as a separator, if you need one. For example, Importing goods: licences, sanctions and embargoes.

If the guidance does not involve a direct action and is information-led:

- put the most popular search terms at the front
- make sure the title provides a full context (use 'guidance for potato growers', not 'potatoes')

If there are a number of guides with a repeated phrase in the title (for example, Manufactured goods: automotive, Manufactured goods: electronic), change it so the most important information or phrase comes first, like 'Automotive sector: import and export regulations' or 'Chemical sector: import and export regulations'.

## 2.3. Summary

Use the summary to explain the point of the guide, what it will help users do or understand, and who it's for.

### **Example:**

Title: Organic produce: how to become an importer

Summary: Find out which organic products can be imported into Oman, how to register as an importer and how to get import authorisation.

## 2.4. Structure

Make section titles active (so, 'Apply for a licence' not 'Applying for a licence') **Do not use:**

- technical terms in section titles unless unavoidable - and then only if you've already explained them
- 'introduction' as your first section - users do not want an introduction, they want the most important information
- questions in section titles
- FAQs - you will not need them if your content is concise and well structured
- 'we' - users can arrive at your page from anywhere, so 'we' may not be clear to them

### 3. Documents

If you're publishing a document, keep the page short and straightforward. Your aim is to help the user find the document that matches their needs as quickly as possible.

Users need to know whether they should open the document and if the information within meets their needs.

**Think about:**

- search and SEO (i.e. include relevant keywords and phrases that users are searching for)
- providing clear, concise information about what a publication is (so users can tell at a glance whether it will tell them what they need to know)
- context (government often publishes lots of documents which look superficially similar - how will you help the user to find the right one?)

**Do not:**

- summarise what the document says (you're just repeating what's in the document)
- include general information about the topic covered by the publication (this is not the place for it)

### 3.1. HTML

You should publish in HTML wherever possible. HTML is the most accessible format on mobile devices and for assistive technology because:

- text automatically fits the page width as a user zooms in (it 'reflows')
- markdown ensures that elements are tagged correctly for screen readers
- users can change the colours they use on GUP

If your document is designed to be read but not edited or interacted with (read only), publish in HTML.

As well as static content you can use HTML for living, evolving documents that get updated. It is much easier to maintain one version of a publication in HTML than multiple versions in different formats.

### 3.2. Other formats

If you cannot publish in HTML, you must publish your documents in an open format.

Include an email address in the body copy for users to request an alternative version of a document. Even if you publish accessible versions, some users will need formats like audio or braille.

If you publish a PDF or other non-HTML format, you must also publish an accessible version of your document.

### 3.3. Forms and editable documents

If users need to provide information or edit an attachment, for example complete a form, you should:

1. create the document in Word, Excel or PowerPoint
2. convert to an OpenDocument
3. publish your OpenDocument

Alongside your OpenDocument, publish the form in at least one other format. Whichever other format you choose, you must make it as accessible as possible.

### 3.4. PDFs

Avoid publishing PDFs on GUP, unless it's a document which is designed to be printed and read on paper, for example, promotional material, a booklet or a leaflet.

PDFs are not as accessible as HTML or OpenDocuments. For example, they do not allow users to change the colour of the background to meet their needs.

They are also more difficult to magnify because users will have to scroll horizontally and vertically. Text does not reflow to the width of the screen as it gets bigger like in HTML.

### 3.5. Titles

Titles do not have to reflect the official publication title. Keep them short and search- and user-friendly.

Put the most important keywords at the front of the sentence.

**Good example:** 'Artificial intelligence in business: impact assessment'.

**Bad example:** 'An assessment of the impact of artificial intelligence on businesses'.

You can mention the report title etc. in the summary or page copy if you think users will search for that term.

**Good example:** 'Improving government online services'

**Bad example:** 'The Varney report'

### 3.6. Summary

Give a short summary (up to 160 characters) and end with a full stop.

### 3.7. Body copy

Describe the document in plain, neutral language, to reassure the user that it is (or is not) what they're looking for. Include what the document is about and its purpose.

You can link to related documents, but if there is more than one related document you should group them into a document collection.

Good example: 'These reports describe the effect of government proposals to reduce the amount of money spent on legal aid. The aim of the reforms is to make sure legal aid is still available for support and representation in cases where it is justified.'

## 4. Statistical dataset

How to publish statistical data sets.

## 4.1. What to include

Describe what the statistics are about and their purpose. For example:  
Banana prices

Provide context if there are statistics with similar titles. For example:  
Banana prices, June 2011-July 2012

Tell your users what the release is about. For example:

This series gives the average wholesale prices of bananas by country of origin. The prices are national averages of the most usual prices charged for bananas at wholesale markets in Muscat. This data set is updated weekly.

You should also say whether the method or classification of the statistics has changed since the last publication. For example:

Please note that for the following two updates the prices dataset will be published on Tuesday 3rd October 2023 and Tuesday 10th October 2023. Following these two updates, publications will return to the regular publication on Mondays.

Do not repeat the title of the data set in the title, unless you think users will search for it.

Avoid summarising what the publication says.

## 4.2. Formatting requirements for statistical datasets

Where possible, data sets should be attached as .csv files or an open format (for example .ods, .odt). Avoid proprietary formats (for example Excel or Word).

# 5. Collection of documents

Use a document collection for grouping related documents on a single page:

- for a specific audience
- around a specific theme

A collection could be used to publish:

- a set of forms
- publications in the same series
- a mix of document types related to the same task or

event You can add a document to more than one

collection.

**Do not create a collection:**

- for documents that users do not need, or would not expect, to find together
- for a single document

## 5.1. Structuring a document collection

To help users find specific content on your collection page, you can:

- change the default headings to something more descriptive of the content you're linking to, for example 'Annual reports 2019 to 2020'
- add a one-line introduction under a heading, for example 'These reports give an account of activity and services for each year, including financial statements.'

## 6. News article

**Make sure your news story:**

- gives users information they can act on (for example a

- government grant scheme opening for applications)
- gives information users would expect to get directly from the organisation rather than through the media (for example information about how changes to public services affect them as public sector employees)
- includes information users need and cannot get from other sources
- is genuine news content
- adds something to existing content
- is self-contained - it should be possible to delete it from the site without affecting anything else

**Do not publish a news story if:**

- it's mostly about putting the organisation's views on record (it should probably be a press release)
- it's duplicating a press release
- it's duplicating another organisation's news story
- it's actually a general purpose content page
- you're just promoting the publication of other content (for example, statistics)

## 6.1. Deciding what to publish

Most users will not look at news content - some news content gets as little as 2% of site traffic, and only a few get more than a third.

Be selective when deciding what to publish. Think about what users need to know rather than what the organisation would like them to see.

## 6.2. Avoid duplicating other organisations' news stories

Any duplication is very obvious, so stick to your remit. If there's more than one organisation with an interest in a topical issue, think about producing a joint story - it's likely to have more impact.

But if 2 organisations are covering completely different angles and/or addressing different audiences, it's okay to issue separate stories.

### 6.3. Make sure it's information that users can act on (or cannot get from other sources)

For the most part, government is a source, not a provider, of news. That's what media organisations do.

Content that's about providing comment or explaining the government's position on a matter of policy is more suitable for a press release.

### 6.4. Do not publish guidance on news stories or press releases

If you publish guidance in a news story or press release, it might confuse the user because it could:

- conflict with guidance that's already on GUP
- go out of date - this may cause users to act on something wrongly

You should use news stories to announce changes and link to the relevant guidance if you're referring to something a user can act on.

### 6.5. Make sure it adds something to existing content

Do not publish news items just to provide a link through to other GUP content - it confuses user journeys and complicates search results, without adding any benefit for users.

### 6.6. Article length

There's no lower limit, although the value of a story under 150 words

should be questioned. News articles should be no longer than 750 words.

## 6.7. Titles

What's the story? Tell the story in a few words:

- headlines: aim for 65 characters max
- use a colon not a dash to separate: Google does not recognise dashes

'Minister visits factory' is not a story. 'Minister tells factory workers about workplace law reforms' gives the reader a sense of what the story is about.

Avoid 'teasing headlines', puns or wordplay - these make your story hard for people to find. Use the words most people use for the situation. This helps your search ranking.

Avoid print conventions/'journalese', such as 'Minister in youth homelessness bid' ('bid' is used in print where headline space is in short supply).

## 6.8. Summary

Get across the main point of the story, expanding on what you've said in the title. Use up to 160 characters including spaces: this is all people searching Google see in the page summary. The summary is also the first sentence of the story, so it should make sense when read continuously with the rest of the page. End with a full stop.

## 6.9. Body copy

Do not repeat the summary. Aim to tell the story in 1 or 2 sentences, for

example who, what, where, when, why. Do not include more than 3 consecutive sentences of quotes.

Break up long news stories with subheadings. But remember that subheadings add to the text, they're not part of it: the text should still make sense with the subheadings removed.

How to write effective body copy:

- the first paragraph should lead on from the summary paragraph, not repeat the information
- use the 'inverted pyramid' approach with the most important information at the top tapering down to lesser detail
- paragraphs should have no more than 5 sentences each
- ensure copy includes keywords to boost natural search rankings
- use video and images

## 7. Organisation page

Use an organisation page to give an overview of your organisation's work, responsibilities and priorities.

For example: The Ministry of Education is responsible for children's services and education, including early years, schools, higher and further education policy.

### 7.1. Writing and formatting requirements for organization

**pages** All content should follow the GUP style guidelines.

Organisation pages also use specific headings and a set structure.

## 7.2. About us/What we do

Lead with 'We' - it will be very obvious who the 'we' is on this page.

Aim for no more than 30 words and give a broad overview of your department's work. You may want to highlight areas that users might not assume are within your remit.

## 7.3. Responsibilities

Lead with 'We are responsible for' and then a short, bulleted list of your responsibilities. Keep them active, clear and not too detailed - you can cover more detail in the content on your policies. Use a maximum of 7 bullets.

## 7.4. Priorities

Lead with: 'From 2023 to 2024, our priorities will be...' Make sure you keep this information, and the years referred to, up to date.

Use a maximum of 7 bullets.

## 7.5. Who we are

Include a few lines about the number of staff you employ and where they're based.

## 7.6. Our ministers and management

Ministers should always have an up-to-date photo and biography.

Your organisation page should also include photos of all management members featured on your page.

## 7.7. Contact details

Include a point of contact for general enquiries. Additional contact details are optional.

# 8. People and roles

Use to create profiles for:

- ministers
- the organisation's most senior official
- the organisation's top tier of management
- senior officials with a public leadership role (for example Chief Scientist, Chief Medical Officer, military chiefs, ambassadors, high commissioners)

Do not create people pages for anyone else.

## 8.1. Writing and formatting requirements for people and roles

All content should follow the GUP style guidelines. Read these to find out how to write your title, summary and body copy.

## 8.2. Biography

Keep it short. One or 2 short paragraphs (one or 2 sentences each) or a single lead sentence with 5 bullets or fewer will do. If it's a long career, just provide the highlights.

The first paragraph should cover:

- the person's full name (without title and letters, as it will appear directly above the text)
- their current job title, and when they were appointed

In the second paragraph, provide a little information about the person's background. You can either:

- list up to 5 previous roles as bullet points, with the most recent at the top (if it's long career, just provide the highlights)
- say something more general about the types of role they've had in the past

At first mention use the full name. After that, use the first name. So 'Philip Rutnam' at first mention, then 'Philip' after that.

Do not include information about their personal life, for example marital status, children, hobbies etc.

Do not use headings or subheadings.

### 8.3. Management biographies

Use a maximum of 3 sentences to explain what the manager is doing and 5 bullets on career highlights.

### 8.4. Ministerial biographies

#### **Remember to:**

- keep it short: half a page is plenty for a biography
- lead with: '[name] was appointed [title] in [date]. [He/she] was elected [name of party] MP for [constituency] on [date of election] when the minister first became an MP'
- education: avoid 'read', use 'studied'
- political career: a few sentences of career highlights in chronological order, if this is long, use bullet points, with an introductory sentence
- career outside politics: if none, use 'political career'
- personal life: do not include children's names; delete this section if you do not need it

## 8.5. Writing copy to describe a role

Give a brief description of the role: no more than 5 bullet points. Do not use headings or subheadings.

Be specific when listing responsibilities. **For example, do not**

**use:** The minister is responsible for:

- drugs
- alcohol

Instead, use:

The minister is responsible for:

- reducing drug misuse
- reducing harmful drinking

## 8.6. 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.

## 8.7. 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