



# NZIS

## WRITING STYLE GUIDE

A GUIDE TO WRITING IN THE NZIS VOICE



# NZIS WRITING STYLE GUIDE

This style guide aims to help unify the NZIS brand, bringing consistency to everything we produce in writing, in all formats, and enhancing the professionalism of our work. It will save time and resources by providing an instant answer when questions arise about preferred style. It goes hand in hand with the Brand Style Guide and Social Media Guide and is intended as a living document.

## Who we are

Wherever possible, do not spell out the full title of NZIS. Use **NZIS Surveying and Spatial** or **NZIS**. If the material is intended for a public audience, ensure there is enough context to avoid NZIS being mistaken for other organisations such as the New Zealand of Sport.

The full formal title (New Zealand Institute of Surveyors) should only be used for legal and other official purposes when referring to the registered organisation. Include our spatial members in any references to our members.

## How we communicate

To produce concise, clear writing that reaches its audience, you must:

- Know your reader.
- Know your purpose and desired outcome.
- Write clearly and concisely.
- Use active, easy-to-read sentences.
- Avoid cliches, jargon and overly technical language.
- Review your work.
- Have someone else peer review/proofread it before distribution.

## Abbreviations

Abbreviations are written without full points or spaces. Do not use apostrophes with the plural form, eg, MOUs and SIGs. Although abbreviations are mostly capitalised, often the long version is not, eg, memorandum of understanding. Spell out uncommon abbreviations, eg, Advanced Survey and Titles Services (ASaTS), then use ASaTS thereafter. For communications within the industry, abbreviations can be used from the outset, but if in doubt, spell it out, especially if the material can be accessed by the public.

## Active v passive

Use the active voice wherever possible. It should be the default, eg:

The President wrote the report **NOT** The report was written by the President.

## Apostrophes

Apostrophes are used to indicate possession, eg, the surveyor's pen (singular) and the members' reports (plural). Apostrophes are also used to indicate contractions (shortened words), eg, won't and it's. Note that the possessive form, its as in its furry coat, does not have an apostrophe.

Plural forms such as MOUs, 1950s etc do not take apostrophes.

## Books, reports or publications

Use italics without quotemarks for the titles of books, reports or publications. Do not use italics for emphasis.

## Bulletpoints

There are two type of lists. Both use a colon before the first bullets. They are:

- Lists comprising full sentences. In this case use initial capitals and full points are each entry, eg:

Office rules:

- Once a week, bake a cake.
  - Take it to the office.
  - Share with staff.
- Lists comprising partial sentences or single items. These should be lower case with only a final full point, eg:

Please pack the following:

- socks
- shoes
- jacket.

## Capitals

Capitals should be used for the names of current NZIS title holders, eg, the President, the Chief Executive and the Board and Council. Use lowercase for generic job titles such as surveyor and office manager. Only cap if the full title is used, eg:

Office Manager Mary Contrary, but Mary Contrary is an office manager.

Capitalise the full title of streams, branches etc, eg, the Otago Branch, but lower case all second references, eg, the stream or the branch.

Cap the current Government, but lower case previous governments (the Savage government) and the adjective, eg, government department. Cap the name of government acts and bills when the full title or generic title is used, eg, the Resource Management Act, but refer to it as the act or RMA in subsequent references. Acts and bills are not italicised.

Cap the full title of territorial authorities, etc but use lower case in subsequent references, eg, Waikato District Council, then the council. This is useful in differentiating councils from the NZIS Council, which is always capped.

## Captions

Photographs should be captioned in most instances except when the content matter is blindingly obvious, eg, a map of New Zealand or when images are used purely as graphics. People should be identified wherever possible. Captions should be sentence case, succinct and end in a full stop, eg, The disputed pipeline to the property.

Use left or right, with commas, only if it's not obvious who's who, eg:

Spatial consultant Peter Piper, left, and John Rivers give the CEO a box of chocolates.  
Spatial consultant Peter Piper and Joan Rivers give the CEO a box of chocolates.

Joan is most likely to be a woman and it should be obvious who is giving and who is receiving. Make your captions active but add extra information rather than state the obvious, eg,

John Brown points at the road.

This is too obvious, so say instead:

John Brown at work on the highway which took him three years to complete.

## Time and dates

Write dates as Thursday 28 July 2015 and the 3 April election (no commas). For a range of dates, use 15-20 November 2007. For time, use numerals with am and pm, eg, 4am, 7pm and 12.30pm.

## Headings

Keep headings short, concise (fewer than 10 words), and consistent. Do not use a full stop at the end. Use title or sentence case for most headings, depending on context. All caps can be hard to read and should only be used for very short headings. In title case, all words have an initial cap except for articles, prepositions, and conjunctions, eg, the, on, up and. eg:

Title case: Engineer Forgets to Bring Lunch OR

Sentence case: Engineer forgets to bring lunch

## Hyphens

Use hyphens to indicate a numeric range, eg, 15-25 delegates and 5pm-10pm. If a compound adjective can be misread, use a hyphen. Note the difference between:

The 90-year-old was an old car enthusiast.

He was an old-car enthusiast.

Hyphenate long term, short term, etc when used adjectivally, eg, long-term outlook, but in the long term. Do not hyphenate commonly understood phrases where the linkage is obvious, eg, a public sector employee, interest rate rise.

Use hyphens if the key word is capitalised, a number or an abbreviation, eg:

- pro-North Island
- post-2013
- pre-FIG.

Use a hyphen to split to like vowels, eg, re-enter, de-escalate, but note that most re- words do not require a hyphen, eg, rewrite, reconfigure, resign (but re-sign if you are a Man U player renewing your contract). Use hyphens if a word could be misread without it, eg, miss-hit.

## Less v fewer

Less is used with nouns that are not countable – if you could use much to describe having a lot of the noun, use less.

Fewer is used with countable objects – if you could use many to describe having a lot of the noun, use fewer, eg, I need less stress and fewer interruptions.

## Numerals

One to ten are spelt out. Use figures for 11 and upwards unless beginning a sentence with a number, eg, Twenty-five oranges fell from the tree.

For percentages, always use numerals, eg 4 per cent. In most text, do not use the percentage sign, unless in a table or graph. Also use numerals for tables and graphs.

## Punctuation

Use a colon, not a semicolon, to start a bulleted list. Colons are also used for ratios, eg 1:6 and in introductory clauses, eg, Jones said he believed in only two certainties: taxes and death.

Use an en dash, not a hyphen, with a space on either side to separate thoughts in a sentence and to separate a title for its subtitle, eg, My Life as a Surveyor – All Pain No Gain. The shortcut key in Word is CTRL plus MINUS on the numeric keypad, or cut and paste it from somewhere else.

## Singular v plural

Organisations, companies, committees, political parties and teams (collective nouns) are single entities and take a singular verb and pronoun, eg:

LINZ is making progress with its mapping project.  
The Ethics Committee has had its final meeting for the year.

## Quotes

Use single quotation marks for:

- short quotations, fragments of quoted speech, idioms, etc.

Use double quotes for:

- full sentences.

If a quote is a full sentence, the final quote marks go after the final full stop. If the quote is only a part of a sentence, place it before the full stop or comma, eg:

Take the day off," the CEO told everyone.  
The CEO picked up his hat, before telling everyone to "take the day off".

## A-Z of words often misspelt, or with alternative versions

acknowledgment  
advice (noun), eg, I took her advice.  
advise (verb), eg, She advised me to leave.  
adviser  
car park (two words)  
coordinate (no hyphen)  
cooperate  
email  
judgment  
licence (noun), eg, I have my licence.  
license (verb), eg, I am licensed to practise.  
practice (noun), eg, Time for a practice exam.  
practise (verb), eg, I practised for the exam.  
percentage (one word)  
per cent (two words)  
program, for computer programs

programme, for non-technological references, eg, the conference programme  
southeast, northwest, etc (one word, no hyphen)  
stationary, for not moving  
stationery, for pens, paper, notebooks etc  
subdivision  
subcontractor  
Trans-tasman  
webpage, website – both one word