

Introduction

This style guide is aimed at all departmental employees who write material that Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT) will publish or put online. It briefly covers elements of style and usage, such as spelling and abbreviations, from the specific point of view of departmental requirements and conventions. It is not intended to be comprehensive and it does not deal with grammar issues. For detailed information on English style and usage, please refer to the publications and websites listed in Section 10, "Resource list."

In any attempt to establish consistent standards for publications, it must be acknowledged that no guideline will cover every situation. Context is everything. This style guide is therefore presented as exactly that—as a guide, not as a rule book.

This guide will be expanded and updated as needed. We welcome your suggestions.

The English editors can be reached by email at bc-editor@international.gc.ca or by telephone at 996-2215. The French editors can be reached by email at bc-reviseur@international.gc.ca or by telephone at 992-4884.

News releases and speeches published since 1996 and media advisories published since 2001 can be found on the Department's [website](#). The complete archives (since 1940) are kept at the Jules Léger Library.

Please note that the English and French versions of the style guide are not equivalent. Only the appendices are the same in both languages.

Effective writing: keep it simple!

Generations of English teachers and authors of books on how to write effectively have told us to omit unnecessary words and avoid meaningless jargon. Yet readers are drowning in unneeded words and superfluous abbreviations. They are often bored and confused by what they read. Unfortunately, many of the offending pieces of writing are published by the Canadian government.

Effective writing is not cluttered: it is clear and concise. It cannot be misunderstood. It does not use two words when one will do.

Use simple sentence construction. Sentences should not be longer than three lines; paragraphs should deal with just one topic. One trick is to say each sentence aloud to yourself. This will reveal possible ambiguities or weak constructions. If you can say it easily, the reader will be able to grasp your meaning easily.