Online Writing Style Guide

September 2013

1 About this guide

The Online Writing Style Guide provides editorial guidelines for text which appears at qantas.com. Writers and editors can use this document as a guide to writing style, usage, and Qantas product terminology.

In general, follow the style and usage rules in the Style Manual (John Wiley and Sons Australia).

2 Our style

We fly for you

Our language should reflect our goal to become the world's best premium airline. We're dedicated to helping our customers enjoy the journey wherever it takes them.

Less is more

Online readers scan the web looking for facts, instructions and occasionally, inspiration. So copy needs to be clean, short and succinct. Break it up with images if possible and always remember the key customer insight: 'Don't waste my time.'

Before writing copy for an online environment you need to ask the following questions: do we need it at all? Will the technology do the talking for us? If the content doesn't meet our needs, we'll move on.

Before publishing your copy, read it over and think about the words you skipped – you can probably lose them.

Use plain, simple language, short words and brief sentences.
- ✓ 'Before' instead of 'Prior to'
- ✓ 'Next' instead of 'Subsequent'
- ✓ 'End' instead of 'Terminate'
- ✓ 'Need' instead of 'Require'

First person, active voice

We always write in the first person. It's the most friendly and effective way of communicating with our customers. Refer to Qantas as 'we' and 'our' and to our customers, as 'you' or 'your', never 'they'.

Write online copy in the active voice or ensure the subject performs the action expressed in the verb. The passive voice can be unclear in meaning and tedious to read. To detect the passive voice, look out for forms of the verb "to be" or the word "by" followed by a noun. Find some examples below.

X	**✔**
Make a booking with us	Book with us
Our lounges are being renovated	We're renovating our lounges
Our seats were designed by Marc Newson	Marc Newson designed our seats
The tickets will be issued by Telesales	Telesales will issue your tickets

Australian English

As an Australian airline, we always use Australian English, followed by British English and American English. Refer to the Macquarie Dictionary as the standard reference on Australian English.

Examples of where to use Australian English:

- ✓ Practise as a verb and practice as a noun.
- ✓ Footpaths and lifts, not sidewalks and elevators.
- ✓ Travelling, not traveling.
- ✓ Walks, not hikes.

Positive

Be positive at all times. Our customers are visiting the site because they want to buy something or find information. Avoid negatives such as 'don't forget to bring your passport'. Write 'make sure you bring your passport' instead.

Beware abstractions, avoid clichés

Avoid word wasting abstractions such as 'We will give consideration to your request for a seat'. It's easier to say 'We'll consider your request for a seat'.

Where possible, try to place disclaimers in the important information rather than the body copy. For example: *The Skybed, available now between Sydney and Perth** rather than *The Skybed, available now on selected flights between Sydney and Perth*.

The travel industry is rife with clichés. Here are a few to avoid:

- ✕ A tapestry of cultures
- ✕ Whirlwind tour
- ✕ State-of-the-art
- ✕ Over and above
- ✕ All walks of life
- ✕ Sweeping beaches
- ✕ Vibrant nightlife
- ✕ Rich in history
- ✕ Majestic mountains
- ✕ Charming villages
- ✕ A city/country of contrasts
- ✕ Off the beaten track
- ✕ Live like a local
- ✕ Paradise
- ✕ A melting pot of cultures

That's not to say that they can't be used in the right context, but be aware that readers often skip over these expressions, finding them tedious and lacking originality.

Avoid the hype

Strip your copy of cheap and nasty over-hyped promotional writing, such as 'overwhelming'; 'state-of-the-art' and 'hottest ever'. This includes using exclamation marks after statements, such as 'Book now!'

Hype distracts users from the real meaning and doesn't enhance the Qantas brand. Write about benefits (not features) instead and substantiate your claim by saying why something is good, not simply that it is good.

Also avoid:

✘ Legal words like 'eligible' and 'selected', unless specifically stipulated by legal.

✘ Platitudes like 'we need to do what we can do'.

✘ Niceties such as please and thank you.

✘ Product names which customers don't understand.

✘ Outdated terms like 'air hostess' or 'oriental'.

✘ Positional terms like 'Read below', 'Click here' or 'More' which hinder the reader's ability to scan the copy and may move according to the browser or device type. That includes 'the Antipodes' when referring to Australia while in Australia – it should only be used to refer to Australia when in the UK or Europe.

✘ Tautologies like 'good benefit', 'joint cooperation', 'past history' or 'book in advance'.

3   Targeted content

Who are you writing for? Why are you writing this content? How will you get this information to your audience?

Is the target audience our Frequent Flyers or someone who has never travelled with us before? Are you trying to sell something or trying to communicate a new product? Is it for mobile or for a video voiceover?

Talk to Design, Marketing, SEO, Corporate Communications and your colleagues in the business before writing the content.

Finally, ask yourself which pages or sites should link to this content. No content should exist in a vacuum. Ensure it is connected to the rest of the site.

Start as you mean to go on

Invest heavily in the quality of your first sentence. Readers won't hang around if you don't catch their interest. Think about how some of your favourite books have started or how great journalists start their articles. Evoke, inspire, inform, alert, but whatever you do, don't bore them.

See it from the customer's point of view

Ensure every line of copy your copy has context. We can't assume that our reader has seen the page that we intended to come beforehand. Each page needs to be independent.

Avoid airline or company jargon and ensure your copy reflects the way our customers might think about a subject.

For example, you might wish to communicate something about our new Skybed but our customers might be more likely to search 'business class seat' instead.

Check Google Keywords, talk to customer facing staff and conduct competitor analysis to find out how people think about certain subjects.

This is not to say that you should write for search engines, only to bear in mind that your language should reflect the way people think about things.

Remember all content should be:

- ✓ Unique: Do not duplicate content from other pages or external websites. Third party content should be edited before publishing.

- ✓ Topical: The fresher the copy, the more regularly our site will be indexed. If you include a date in your copy, make sure you revisit it when it is out of date.

- ✓ Include a clear call to action. Tell users where they need to go next and make it stand out. Our research indicates that a link such as 'learn more about child airfares' can generate a much higher response rate than 'book now' as people feel less obliged to commit to a purchase.

Keywords are the bridge to your reader

Keywords are the bridge between what you want to communicate and what people are looking for. To maximise your traffic, you need to ensure that your content best fits their searches.

1. Find your keywords using Google Keywords or Hitwise.

2. Select keywords with the highest conversion rate and traffic. Omniture and Google Webmaster Tools can help you find this out.

3. Ensure your copy reflects these keywords.

4   URLs, titles, subtitles and more

4.1   Headers

Your header (also known as a H1 tag) contains the most important words on your page. If the header fails to contain the information they are looking for, your reader will leave the page.

Headers need to be engaging, descriptive and reflective of the page's keywords. For example, Book Flights, Qantas Masterchef Sale or Visit Rome.

Header style rules:
- ✓ Sentence case
- ✓ No more than 3-4 words
- ✓ Should include the page keyword
- ✓ No symbols such as & or !

4.2   Subtitles

Your subtitle is your chance to make your product stand out, so don't waste it. Subtitles should be sharp, short and summarise the content of the page in a nice easy sentence.

Be descriptive, or even witty, but always make sure your subtitle works in conjunction with the title and image.

For example,
H1   Qantas launches Dubai route
Subtitle   There's a new way to the old world

Subtitle style rules:

- ✓ Sentence case
- ✓ Can be longer than the title
- ✓ Includes stand out features and benefits or creative concepts

4.3   URLs

URLs should be unique, reflect the content contained on the page and include your target keywords.

URL style rules:

- ✓ Always include the keyword
- ✓ Separate words using hyphens
- ✓ Express names in full, for example cheap-flights-to-Australia

4.4   Browser page titles

The browser page title is the blue bar that appears at the top of your browser window and above the Meta Page Description in search results.

The browser page title is one of the most important factors for search engines so it will usually include a collection of keywords set by the SEO team.

Finish every page title with **| Qantas** so that people can easily identify our site when they have multiple pages open on their desktop.

Browser page title rules:

- ✓ Always finish with | Qantas
- ✓ Ensure title is unique
- ✓ Always include target keyword(s)
- ✓ Contain less than 80 characters

4.5   Meta page descriptions

The meta page description is a powerful tool for communicating key benefits of your page or product. It appears in the search results in a short snippet.

Meta page description style rules:

- ✓ Always include the keyword
- ✓ Summarise the key benefits of the page
- ✓ Contain less than 140 characters

4.6 Email subject lines and smart phone pre-headers

The subject line of your email should communicate key messages within 4-6 words. The smart phone pre-header can offer more detailed information.

Subject line style rules:

- ✓ You can use a price point, but only if it is sharp
- ✓ Use text symbols such as ✈ to break up copy
- ✓ Does not have to include Qantas as the incoming email address will communicate this clearly.

4.7 PDFS

PDFs need to be optimised as per all other content online.

How to optimise a PDF:

1. Go to File > Properties
2. Under the 'Description' tab there is:
   a. Title: This is equivalent to the page title.
   b. Subject: Equivalent to the meta description
   c. Keywords: Equivalent to the meta keywords

4.8 Links

Hyperlinks connect other web pages and can be a great way to direct customers to more information without repeating the content on multiple pages.

Your anchor text should be descriptive of the connecting page and never use copy such as 'click here' or 'read more'. Otherwise the reader is forced to read around the link to find out where they will be going.

Jump links are used at the top of the page as a means to quickly navigate to a section of the page when there is a large amount of content. Ensure that they are short, descriptive and do not wrap onto another line.

Link style rules:

- ✓ Use the header of the next page to link
- ✓ Never use 'click here' or 'read more'
- ✓ Link sparingly

4.9 Bullets and numbered lists

Bullets are a useful way to bring attention to important information. You can use numbered lists when the sequence of items is important; bullet points, if it is not.

Bullet and numbered list style rules:

- ✓ 3-9 items
- ✓ Reflect concepts, not whole sentences
- ✓ Precede list with copy
- ✓ Finish with a full stop only at the end of a sentence.

A list of dependent clauses should start with lowercase letters and be followed by a comma. A list of independent clauses should start with capital letters and finish with a full stop.

4.10 Images and alt tags

The alt tag is the text which appears when you roll over an image on a web page. It offers a signal to search engines as to the content of the page and is a fundamental part of optimising your page for search engine traffic.

Alt tag style rules:

- ✓ Descriptive
- ✓ Less than five words
- ✓ Inclusive of the page keyword

4.11 Buttons

Buttons are useful to customers who are looking to travel through the site quickly. They offer a brightly lit signpost to the next step. For this reason, button copy should be short and active.

Be careful of being too pushy in button copy at the early stages of the booking flow as it may imply a greater commitment than the customer is willing to give. Try using copy such as Search Car Offers or View Fares. Once the fares have been presented, we can move to Book Now.

4.12 Tables

Tables should have column headings and have the first row shaded. Content should be vertically aligned left and horizontally aligned to the top.

For tables that have two levels of headings they should have the first two rows shaded. For a page with more than one table, the columns of each table should align.

4.13 Important information

We often have to express important information about a product or service which is not part of the core product offering. This might include routes on which a fare or product is valid or important disclaimers.

If associated to the body copy, Important Information should be linked with disclaimers in the following order * ^ + # ~

If the information is more general, such as requirements for sitting in Exit Rows, the information can be expressed in a numbered list.

4.14 Terms and conditions

Terms and conditions should all be grouped at the bottom of the page, if they are not so substantial to require their own page. Terms and Conditions will typically be provided by legal.

If the customer has to scroll to view the terms and conditions, the last line should be followed by a 'back to top' link.

4.15 Adobe Reader plug-ins

Some features of the site require users to have additional plug-ins. You need to inform the user if a plug in is required and specify how large the file is in kilobytes.

Adobe Acrobat Reader

To view this document, you need <u>Adobe</u> Acrobat Reader. You can download this software for free from Adobe. The word Adobe should link to http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html

5 Grammar

5.1 Avoid repetition and redundancies

As readers, we scan for patterns in copy and our eye is naturally drawn to words which are repeated. Unless you are trying to emphasise a word, repetitions should be removed.

Redundancy is the presentation of a single idea in multiple ways so that the reader understands. Unless you are explaining the physics of aircraft movement, it should be avoided. Most of our products should be simple and straightforward propositions.

5.2 Simple syntax

The syntax is the way in which we arrange words in a sentence so that they make sense to our reader. In the online environment, our syntax should be simple, short and free of subclauses.

Complete sentences are not always necessary in the online retail environment. Consider the power of fragments such as 'Your chance to win' or even 'Book Now'.

Do not confuse fragments with telegraphic writing where you leave out words like 'a' and 'the', for example, 'User gets receipt in e-mail message'. This doesn't save time, as the user needs to mentally fill in the blanks.

5.3   Paragraphs

Online readers are more ruthless than readers of other media forms such as print. It is unlikely you will hold the attention of your reader after 50 words or four lines so don't waste their time or yours with long paragraphs.

Write two to three sentences, leave a blank line between paragraphs and keep punctuation to a minimum. You can even use a single sentence in a paragraph if it outlines an important point.

5.4   Do not use highlighting

Do not use highlighting such italics and bolding online. Your core message should be embodied in your subtitle and your call to action in either a button or link.

6   Punctuation

Don't display words separated by a slash. Separate the words into two different keyword phrases. For example, industrial/manufacturing jobs to 'We offer industrial jobs and manufacturing jobs'.

7 Names, capital letters, numbers, symbols and dates

7.1 Symbols

Use symbols to add information, such as legal conditions, to the bottom of the page. If the word is followed by punctuation the symbol should follow the punctuation. For example, you need to be a member to earn points.*

A symbol should only be used once on any one page.

Symbols should be used in the following order *, ^, +, #, ~. If all five symbols are used then the symbols get re-used as doubles, for example, **, ^^ and so on.

7.2 Names

Terms	Example	Capitalised
Official Geographic names	Australian Antarctic Territory	✓
Geographic designations	South-East Asia, the Balkans	✓
Unofficial geographic destinations	northern Australia, southern Italy	X
Topographic Features	the Blue Mountains	✓
Common names given to locations	the North Shore, Western Sydney	✓

7.3 Numbers and currency

One to nine should be written as words, while 10 and above can be written as numerals, except when:

✗ Starting a sentence, in which the number should always be written in words.

✗ Using symbols such as kilometres, km, which should be written as numerals.

Currency values should be preceded by a dollar symbol if expressed in numbers, such as $40 or in full form when nine or less, such as nine dollars.

7.4   Dates

Dates should be expressed in full, i.e. 12 October 2013 and Wednesday 12 October 2013 when a day is required.

8   Structuring copy

8.1   Mobile

Copy for mobile should be short, succinct and assume familiarity with smart-phone technology. Avoid instructional copy when the design is intuitive.

For example, we might ask someone to log in or tap something but we won't ask them to enter city pairs or dates. The field labels should imply these instructions.

Mobile style rules:

- ✓ Tap, not click
- ✓ Contain instructions in the call to action and field labels wherever possible
- ✓ Write in short single sentences

8.2   Email

Emails need to be brief and clearly articulate the reason for the email and the action you expect the customer to take. Try not to include multiple messages in an email. Remember that the subject line might be all your intended audience reads.

Email style rules:

- ✓ Include the reason for the email as well as the customer's flight number, destination and date in the subject line. For example, Flight Cancelled SYDMEL 19 June.

- ✓ Start with a personalised Dear [customer's title] [last name] wherever possible.

- ✓ State the reason for the email and the action you expect the customer to take in the opening line.
- ✓ Offer a place where they can find more information such as a hyperlink to qantas.com or a phone number.
- ✓ Sign off with Regards, The Qantas Team.

8.3   Voice

Always write audio copy in a relaxed conversational voice. Try reading the words aloud to see if your voice skips over certain words.

If the copy is for video, you'll need to provide a storyboard with some ideas about the types of images you imagine the words to accompany. You'll need to indicate copy on screen in a separate column.

Voiceover	Copy on Screen	Images
Did you know that you can get sale alerts sent straight to your phone with our new iPhone app?	Be the first to know	Image of someone selecting sale alerts with the iPhone app
Or that you can book over 100,000 hotels and 10,000 activities at qantas.com?	Book your trip in one place	Image of an exotic hotel in Bali

8.4   Error messages

Error messages should quickly and clearly identify what the problem is and how the user can fix the error.

- ✓ Reflect field names in sentence case.
- ✓ Finish with a full stop.
- ✓ Explain what action is necessary in plain language.
- ✓ Not use the word invalid; tell them why it is invalid. For example, the phone number entered has too many digits.
- ✓ Provide contact details for further assistance.

Error type	Error	Example Error Message

Missing compulsory fields - free format	You must enter a <item>.	You must enter a last name.
Missing compulsory fields - drop down	You must select a <item>.	You must select a state.
Incorrect data entered	The <item> is not valid. Ensure it contains <validation_for_field>.	The card holder name is not valid. Ensure it contains only letters, hyphens and apostrophes.
System error	The system is currently unavailable. Try again later or contact <Department> on <phone number>.	The system is currently unavailable. Try again later or contact Group Sales on 13 26 24.
System error - multiple contacts	"The system is currently unavailable. Try again later or contact <Department> NB: Department name is a link to relevant contacts"	The system is currently unavailable. Try again later or contact your local Qantas office.
System error - during a booking process	The system is currently unavailable. Your booking has not been processed. Try again later or contact <Department> on <phone number>	The system is currently unavailable. Your booking has not been processed. Try again later or contact Telephone Sales on 13 13 13

8.5   Outage Messages

<Product> is currently unavailable due to maintenance. Try again later or contact us on <Australian_number) (in Australia), elsewhere contact your local Qantas office. The service is expected to resume at <time> (AEST).

Example:

Arrival and departure information is currently unavailable due to maintenance. Try again later or contact us on 13 12 23 (in Australia), elsewhere contact your local Qantas office. The service is expected to resume at 0700 (AEST).' Note: During daylight saving time the message should be changed to refer AEDT.

9   Your legal obligations

9.1   Compliance

All advertising material, marketing communications, collateral and email/online content (including material produced by advertising agencies) which makes price pr product claims must comply with [Qantas Guidelines](#) and must be signed off by Qantas Legal prior to publication on the website.

9.2   Useful legal expressions

Legal expression	When to use it
Availability is limited	When fare types are limited
Selected	When product features are not common to all aircraft
Deals	For discounts of less than 10%
Sale	For discounts of 10% or more off usual price
Subject to change	Whenever we make a claim about an aircraft feature

10   Editing and Proofreading

All new pages at qantas.com should be viewed by the product owner and legal (if they include commercial claims such as benefits or prices) before sending live.

Use the following checklist to minimise errors:

1. Conduct a spell and grammar check.
2. Conduct an integrity check of all facts and claims.

3. Check all product names through the text for correct spelling and consistency.

4. Ensure claims have been submitted to legal for approval.

5. Read it aloud.

6. Ask someone from the target group to read it.

11 Qantas Corporate Communications Style Guide

The online writing style guide should be read in conjunction with the Corporate Communication Style Guide which outlines spelling of airline industry terms and product names as well as the correct style for quotes, abbreviations and other communications.

12 Further reading

1. Qantas Glossary of Terms
2. Steve Krug's Don't make me think book about online writing
3. Brand Guidelines
4. Annabel Crabb's take on tourism slogans