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Institute of
Professional Editors

# *Australian manual of style* (AMOS): IPEd review

## Introduction

Under the terms of IPEd's MOU with Biotext–Macquarie, IPEd has user-tested *Australian manual of style* (AMOS) to assess its suitability as an approved, official all-purpose style manual for IPEd members and generalist editors.

## Review team

There were four people on the review team:

- Helen Bradford AE, member of IPEd Accreditation Board
- Ted Briggs AE, member of IPEd Accreditation Board
- Ann Philpott, member of IPEd Communications and Style Committee
- Julia Sudull, member of IPEd Communications and Style Committee

## Review process

During June and July 2022, the review team used AMOS in their day-to-day work and recorded their observations about its strengths and weaknesses as a resource for generalist editors. In particular they considered:

- readability (natural information flow; tone and voice; and clear, consistent, and appropriate language)
- structure (logical; consistent across the manual; intuitive headings; appropriate use of content types, such as examples and infographics; accessibility guidance; and compliance information)
- content (omissions; major errors; and completeness)
- ease of finding information (by browsing; by search; and by other methods).

The review team has presented its observations in two main sections: "General comments" are comments on the whole manual and "Comments on specific sections" provide feedback on most, but not all, sections of the manual.

Overall, the review team finds the manual is well structured and easy to navigate, and the content is comprehensive, useful and easy to read. There are a few areas where the team has noted potential omissions, inconsistencies or unclear content, and have presented some suggestions for possible improvements.

# General comments

### Features

The review team particularly like these features of AMOS:

- links to extra resources
- the ability to bookmark pages
- breakout boxes containing extra interesting information or quick tips
- the long lists of useful material in each of the subject-area sections (listed in "Other relevant sections").

### Layout

Overall, the review team thinks the AMOS layout works well. In particular the team likes:

- the clear, simple, uncluttered look of the main page
- the menu always visible on the right-hand side, with expandable links, so users can see at a glance what is covered in each section
- the layering of information – a brief introduction at the top of each page and a list of contents with clickable links
- the simple, informative subheadings.
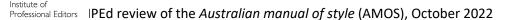
### Content

The review team likes the tone and language used in AMOS. In particular the team likes:

- the direct, objective, accessible tone. The content is easy to read and respects the reader's professionalism
- the history of updates. These give users confidence that the content is not static, but is updated as English usage changes, which gives the information more credibility
- the acknowledgement that there is no established consistency in how some terms are used (for example, "Receptors" in "Health and Medicine")
- the simple, clear way of explaining things in words, examples and boxed information. This means even complex information is easily understood by a generalist editor.

### Navigation

The review team finds AMOS extremely easy to navigate. It's no wonder that the content in "Making content usable" is so comprehensive. In particular the team likes:

- "Contents" – all the main headings are visible at a glance and the entire table sits "above the fold" (all headings are visible without having to scroll down to see more headings "below the fold")
- the menu sidebar on the right of the page – the menu is very helpful to contextualise where you are, how you got there, and what else is to come on the topic you're looking up

- the "sticky" menu that comes with you as you click on a link in a topic – this means you don't get lost at the bottom of the page wondering what you were looking up in the first place
- the breadcrumbs at the top of the page – these keep you oriented as to where you are and how you got there, and offer an alternative way to retrace your steps
- the search box at the top of every page – this "remembers" past searches so you can find previous search results easily
- not too many links from the text to other places in the site – the links are also well named, so it is clear what information you'll find when you go there
- the ease of navigating to subject areas from "Contents".

## Suggestions

- As editors, the distinction between the categories "writing" and "editing" is not always clear. So, when an editor looks up a particular topic (such as passive or active voice) they may not know whether to look for it under "editing" or "writing". Consider cross-referencing the topics that could be in either category.
- When images are hard to read (for example, the diagram showing Australian NAPLAN bands and reading skills in "School grades"), it would be useful to indicate if the reader can click on the image to see a higher resolution version
- When the team searched for "instructions", one of the pages presented, called "Help", leads to a page that reads "Access denied". This may be a page used by people maintaining AMOS, but it should be hidden from readers.

# Comments on specific sections

## Introduction to AMOS

The purpose of this section is clear, and it is well written. The information flows well.

## How to use the manual

This section is easy to read. The heading hierarchy is clear and the information flows well. There is a good description of the various ways to find information and the extra resources that are available.

In "Navigation", it would be useful to add a note about links to other pages and how to navigate back to where you were (i.e., explain that you have to use the back and forward browser buttons).

## Engaging

This section has good content and is easy to follow. Although generalist or specialist editors will already be familiar with a lot of the information in this section, it is useful for other AMOS users.

### Knowing your audiences

The information in "Developing audience profiles", "Australian audience demographics" and "Different types of audiences" is useful. Some information could possibly be updated using statistics from the 2021 Census.

In "Different types of audiences", the content on reading skill levels, special access needs and layering is all useful, but the review team suggests giving real-world examples of some of the recommended strategies. For example, AMOS could refer readers to its own page structure, which is an excellent example of layering.

Another area that would benefit from examples is Roles, under "Developing audience profiles". Developing roles is a very useful technique in usability design but is not one that many editors have been exposed to.

### Connecting with your audiences

This section has good content. The review team particularly likes:

- "Writer's voice and style" – the distinction between individual voice and institutional voice, and when to use them
- "Personas" – this is very thorough and helpful for anyone creating content for a diverse audience, and there are good tips on how to create individual personas and good examples of the different types of people a communication may need to reach
- "Behavioural insights" – this contains useful information for target-driven, persuasive writing.

In "Writer's voice and style", under "Style", the team is not sure that the links to abstract nouns and indirect verbs are very useful.

### Making content usable

The content contains helpful reminders for specialist and generalist editors and is a useful resource for those newish to digital or online publishing. The section is easy to read and, once again, the subheadings are very good.

The information about personas and scenarios, and how to use them, is comprehensive. As one of the longer pages, this part may benefit from a few more subheadings, although it is easy to read.

In this section the review team particularly likes:

- "Delivery modes for digital content" – this contains useful information on flexible presentation; considerations for responsive and adaptive design; and mobile, screen-friendly and printer-friendly content
- "Navigation for online content" – the links to logical structure and information architecture, in the introduction, are well placed; the section on menus, sidebars, menu icons and expandable menus is helpful; and the team really likes that you have used your own site as the example.

### *Making text readable*

This is a comprehensive and interesting section. While many generalist and specialist editors may know and use this information in their work, it is a useful reminder of different reading proficiencies in multicultural societies like Australia.

The review team likes how the most important points are made early or are captured under more subheadings. They also like how the expandable menus allow you to choose the amount of information you will need. For instance, you can skim over the basics on understandable words and sentences or get right into readability metrics and reading skills with an external link to a research paper on the topic at Taylor & Francis Online.

### *Making text accessible*

This section is excellent; it is particularly useful to editors who are new to accessible content. It covers accessibility extensively, and the bookmarking feature allows you to easily find useful content again on future occasions.

### *Listening to your users*

This section is easy to navigate. It explains well the process of collecting data to better understand your audience.

This section is more relevant for inhouse editors than freelance editors.

A useful addition to "Targeted data collection" would be a paragraph on how to take care that you frame your survey and focus-group questions so you don't pre-empt the answer you wish to receive.

## Writing

Specialist and generalist editors should already be very familiar with the content in this section. Therefore, it is targeted at new writers rather than professional editors. The structure and subheadings are well done, and the content is comprehensive and sufficient.

In "Types of publications and content", the content in "News articles and press releases" includes a diagram of the inverted-pyramid structure but does not name this style "inverted pyramid". As some users may search for this term, it may be helpful to include it in the text and search function.
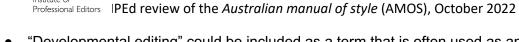
## Editing

In "Editing", the first subsection listed under "This chapter covers" is "The editing process". When you click on this link it takes you to a page called "Stages of editing" rather than "The editing process". "Stages of editing" is also the name given in the right-hand menu, whereas other subheadings in the body text are mirrored in the right-hand menu.

### *Stages of editing*

The three main levels of editing are mentioned; however, the review team thinks the following updates would be helpful:

- "Developmental editing" could be included as a term that is often used as an alternative to substantive or structural editing, particularly in fiction but also in some types of non-fiction.
- "Line editing" could be included as an additional term to copyediting. A line edit addresses the creative content, writing style, and language use at the sentence and paragraph level, whereas a copyedit addresses technical – to make sure the writing that appears on the page is in accordance with industry standards.
- "Proofreading" refers to a "verification edit" to check final page proofs or transfer data from print to screen. It would be helpful to mention that editors should clarify whether they are being asked to strictly proofread (check that material has been correctly edited and laid out) or copyedit (change material that could be written better).
- IPEd's *Australian standards for editing practice* are available on the IPEd website, so it would be useful to add a link to the site.

The three stages of editing listed (substantive, copyedit, proofread) are similar to the explanation given on IPEd's website. You could consider adding a link to this page.

The team noticed an inconsistency in the menu structure in this section. Most second-level subheadings contain a third-level subheading in the right-hand menu to match/mirror the third-level subheadings in body text. For example, "Grammar" is a second-level subheading that has "Words", "Phrases", "Clauses and sentences" and "Common grammar questions" as third-level subheadings. These appear as links in the body text as well as links in the right-hand menu. However, some second-level subheadings have their third-level subheadings only in the body text (for example, "Substantive edit", "Copyedit" and "Proofread").

### *Grammar*

This section is very comprehensive. Although most editors will already be familiar with the content, it will be useful to writers who are new to grammar discussions. The section is clearly structured and presented in a logical order; the examples and diagrams are well done.

"Common grammar questions" is a helpful subsection. The questions address many of the tricky or outdated points of grammar the team would expect to see. For example, singular they; that and which; who and whom. The quotation commonly attributed to Winston Churchill about ending sentences with a preposition, "This is the type of arrant pedantry up with which I will not put", is commonly cited but is a good one.

### *Punctuation*

This section provides a comprehensive summary of Australian English punctuation and gives good examples. However, while the style preferences are clearly stated, the reasons for those choices are not mentioned. For example, using single quotation marks, using plural (three weeks time) rather than apostrophe (three weeks' time) to express adjectival time, using a spaced en dash, and not adding a serial comma unless it is needed for clarity.

### Spelling conventions

This section is comprehensive, well structured and easy to understand.

### Compound words

This is a useful section for experienced and novice editors alike. When to use hyphens, unspaced en dashes or no hyphens is clearly explained with pertinent examples. The content in "Colours" in "Special cases of compound words" is particularly detailed.

### Capital letters

This section follows conventional style, punctuation and grammar approaches. It is comprehensive, illustrated well with examples and explained well in words.

### Font styles

This section follows conventional style, punctuation and grammar approaches. It is comprehensive, illustrated well with examples and explained well in words.

The review team suggests that you could explain that the terms "font" and "typeface" are often used (incorrectly) interchangeably.

### Lists

This section follows conventional style, punctuation and grammar approaches. It is comprehensive, illustrated well with examples and explained well in words.

### Shortened forms

This section follows conventional style, punctuation and grammar approaches. It is comprehensive, illustrated well with examples and explained well in words.

### Numbers and units

This section follows conventional style, punctuation and grammar approaches. It is comprehensive, illustrated well with examples and explained well in words.

The review team notes there is now clear guidance on percentages, presenting numbers to indicate a statistically significant finding, and the difference between the terms "per cent" and "percent". Thank you for considering IPEd's previous feedback.

### Date and time systems

This section follows conventional style, punctuation and grammar approaches. It is comprehensive, illustrated well with examples and explained well in words.

The review team noticed an inconsistency in the menu structure in this section. Most second-level subheadings contain a third-level subheading in the right-hand menu to match/mirror the third-level subheadings in body text. However, "Date and time systems" has its third-level subheadings only in the body text.

### Cross-references

This section follows conventional style, punctuation and grammar approaches. It is comprehensive, illustrated well with examples and explained well in words.

The review team noticed an inconsistency in the menu structure in this section. Most second-level subheadings contain a third-level subheading in the right-hand menu to match/mirror the third-level subheadings in body text. However, "Cross-references" has its third-level subheadings only in the body text.

### Presenting titles

This section follows conventional style, punctuation and grammar approaches. It is comprehensive, illustrated well with examples and explained well in words.

This is a very comprehensive section that appears to cover every possible title. The summary table is helpful and easy to locate through the link in the introduction.

The review team noticed an inconsistency in the menu structure in this section. Most second-level subheadings contain a third-level subheading in the right-hand menu to match/mirror the third-level subheadings in body text. However, "Presenting titles" has its third-level subheadings only in the body text.

### References

This section follows conventional style, punctuation and grammar approaches. It is comprehensive, illustrated well with examples and explained well in words. The review team is confident that people who are unfamiliar with references could follow the guidelines in this section.

"Author – date referencing", and other places in this section, refers to the Australian Government style manual (6th edition), but its exact title is *Style manual: for authors, editors and printers*. This manual has also been supplanted by the digital *Style manual*. The Quick guide referenced from "Formatting references in a reference list" is particularly useful.

## Showing

This section has some excellent visual displays and good examples of graphs, tables, diagrams and illustrations. The "Did you know?" breakout boxes are interesting and useful.

### General conventions for visual displays

This section is very comprehensive and has lots of useful guidance and examples.

Some of the content in this section – especially on graphs – is technical and seems to be aimed at scientific writers and editors more than generalists.

Some information (for example, information on numbering, formatting, capitalisation and punctuation of title) is common to all display types, so it could be presented once only in its own section.

### Using an information design approach

This section gives a good description of how to develop the text, visual elements and look of a document or website to make it readable, engaging and effective.

### Tables

This section gives good descriptions of the different ways to present information graphically, and useful guidance on how to determine the best way for different purposes and types of information – the examples are very helpful.

Some information in the introduction to this section is repeated. For example, the importance of not repeating information that is already in the text, and not using a table for a list.

The review team finds the structure of this section, and the section on maps, is less clear than others in the manual. Other sections have a brief introduction followed by a "This section contains" block, which contains links to the next-level information. This section on tables is structured differently. After the "This section contains" block, the content continues, and actually contains information that is presented in the linked topics.

### Graphs

In "Choosing the right graph for your data", the review team thinks the list of categories in "Types of quantitative relationship" may be difficult for non-scientific readers to visualise. There are examples in "Selecting the most appropriate type of graph", but it would be more helpful to see these examples alongside the descriptions in "Types of quantitative relationships".

### Maps

This section has the same structural issue as "Tables".

## Subject areas

We reviewed some, but not all, of the subject-area sections.

### Arts and humanities

This section covers a range of topics well, especially academic, essay, literary and historical writing. It explains well how to create objectivity in your writing, and see evidence from modern and historical perspectives, and demonstrates this nicely with examples. The uses of deductive and inductive reasoning are insightful. The information on ethical considerations and permission to use evidence is particularly useful for editors.

### Biology

This section is comprehensive and useful for novice and experienced biology editors. An illustration of male and female anatomy would be a useful addition.

Editors will find particularly useful the content on when to use common and Latin names, international and Australian standards for naming, and naming of human and animal diseases that have names of people attached to them.

Although human diseases are covered in a different section – "Health and medicine" – the links to navigate there from "Plant diseases and pests" and "Animal diseases" make it easy to find what you are looking for.

### Computing

This section covers a range of topics well. "Computing terms" covers the most common terms, so it would be helpful to add a link to this page in "Resources" and "Computing style resources".

There is scope in this section to add content on how to present instructions (such as how to format and number instructions; how to communicate to users what they should see happen at each step; and how and when to use screenshots). This may be relevant to other sections of the manual too.

Many people have trouble distinguishing between "processes", "procedures" and "systems", so this could be an area to explain in more detail.

### Economics and finance

Like other parts of the manual, this section is easy to read and navigate. The content seems geared towards people who are new to writing and editing this type of material. Experienced editors are unlikely to find anything new here but may find the resources useful.

You could consider adding some examples of how to appropriately use "jargon" for generalist and specialist audiences.

### Environment

This section is comprehensive and easy to navigate. The terminology is well handled and illustrated and the examples of when to use uppercase and lowercase are good.

The review team suggests you mention both international *and* Australian standards, conventions and resources in "Environment" and the sub-sections, as you've done in "Water use and quality". This would help all users understand if there is a standard or convention to use when editing this material for different or combined audiences. If there are no international or Australian conventions or standards for one of these areas, that needs to be stated.

### Government

Another comprehensive section – the information on government requirements for accessibility is especially helpful.

As has been done in "Mathematical writing style", in "Government writing style", it would be useful to include links to more of the common problems in government writing (such as long modifier strings, list punctuation, capitalisation of government-related terms, long words, excessive nominalisations).

### Health and medicine

Overall, this section is easy to read, navigate and use. The terminology is handled well and the "Did you know?" boxes are useful for memorising and understanding terminology.

A curious omission from this section is allied health professionals, such as social workers. Social workers are also not mentioned in "Social sciences", despite that section covering children in need of protection and elder abuse.

The review team thinks that the link between Australian conventions and international standards is described inconsistently. Although the section states, "Australian conventions generally follow international standards", in the first three subsections the Australian conventions are different from the international standards listed. A possible rephrasing here could be: "Unless mentioned in this section, Australian conventions follow international standards."

### Mathematics and statistics

This is an excellent section for beginner and more experienced editors of mathematical material and statistics. It is well structured, easy to navigate and nicely illustrated.

### Media and communication

This section covers the main areas of media and communication.

### Physics

This section has good coverage of how to handle terminology. However, the team cannot find physics equations (of laws) here or elsewhere in the manual.

### Social sciences

As mentioned in comments on "Health and medicine", a curious omission from this section is allied health professionals, such as social workers, despite this section covering children in need of protection and elder abuse.

Consider adding the journal *Australian Social Work* to the resources section.

## Resources

### Terms to watch out for

This is a very useful list of words and expressions that are commonly confused or misused. The review team likes its focus on making content accessible to readers.

The navigation on this page doesn't work as some people may expect, as clicking on one of the "see" links opens to a new page without any indication of where this page is in the overall structure.

Helen Bradford AE
Review team leader
18 October 2022