Style Guide Health Check

Background

The Comms Team for RoadTek, a commercial road-construction/maintenance arm of Queensland's Department of Transport and Main Roads, made a single-page, quick-reference writing style guide for users who are not trained in writing or editing but who need to write for their roles.

Incidental feedback told us that the guide is being used as intended and users love the single-page format, but there is room for improvement. The next revision will be user-centred, with less of a top-down approach.

Our style guide is a bit crook! What can we do about it?

Further testing

We're sending this thing for a full medical. This means …
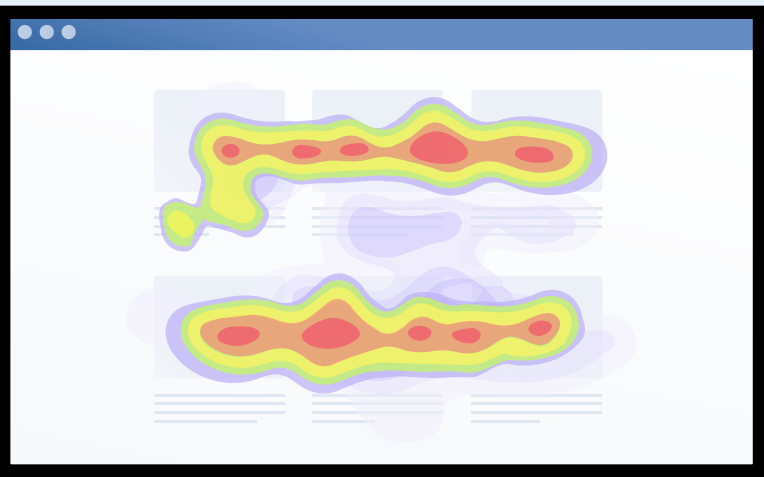
Analytics

We'll use the following tools.

Built-in PDF accessibility checkers

Built-in SharePoint tools for:
- page-level insights – traffic to the webpage where the document is hosted
- content engagement – downloads, shares, interactions

Heatmapping (e.g. Mouseflow or Hotjar) for:
- clicks, scrolls, time spent on different parts of the page

Heatmapping visualisation example

Conversations

We'll track down users, actually ask them what they think, and actively listen to what they have to say.

User survey

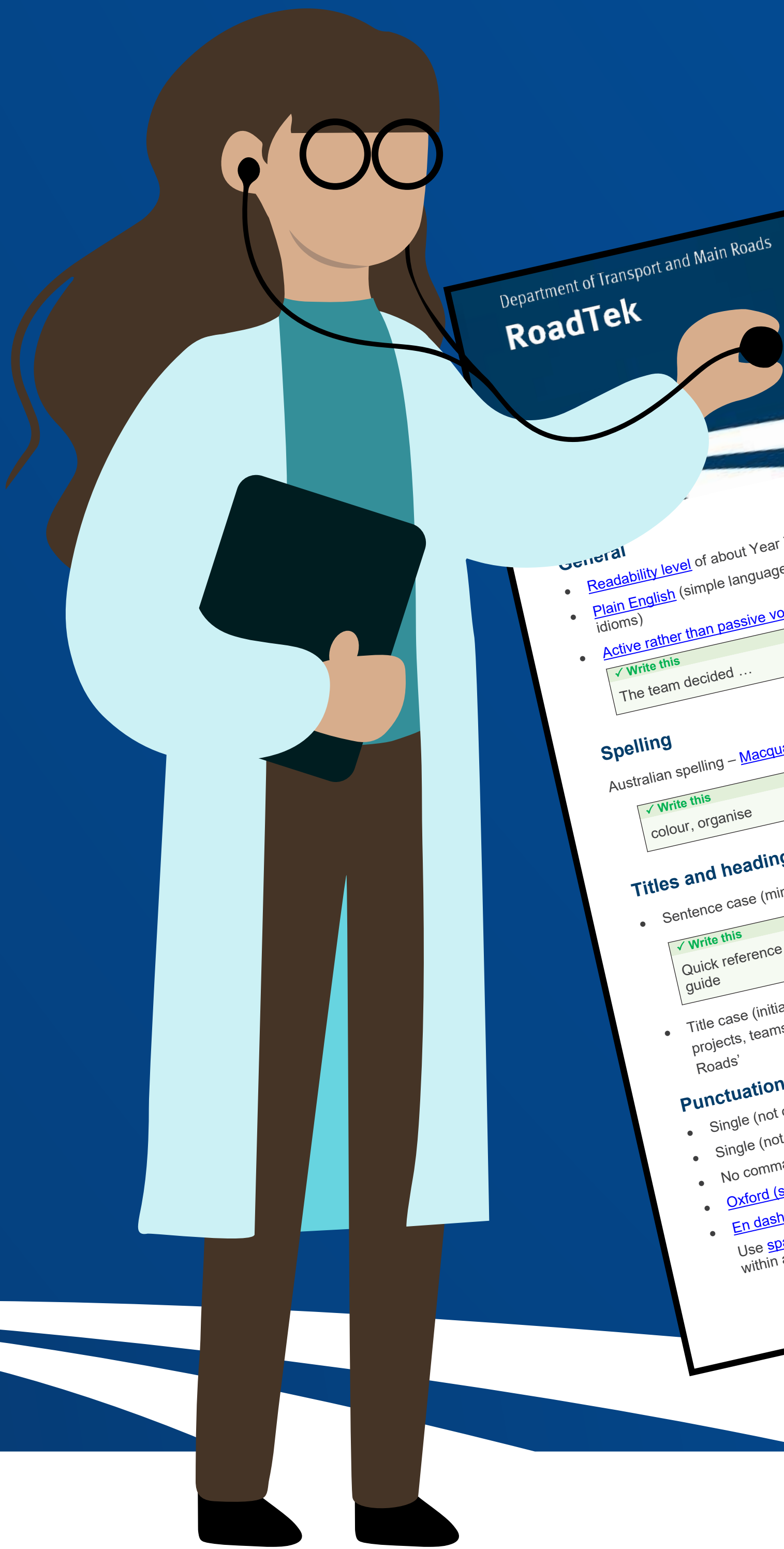We'll write and send out a survey to capture what we missed from the conversations.

Error audit

We'll look closely at draft material that comes to us for editing, raw content in Viva (internal social media) posts, and emails, to identify the most common errors.

Patient: RoadTek Quick Reference Writing Style Guide

History: PDF, single page, A3, uploaded to intranet, based on the Australian Government Style Manual
- Used by: E.g. HR, WHS, finance, admin personnel.
- Used for: E.g. reports, policies, procedures, safety alerts, toolbox talks, operations unit newsletters.

Signs and symptoms: User reported a broken hyperlink in the doc, which led to further anecdotal feedback indicating need for full review.

Existing problems with (mark X for all that apply):

- ☒ Accessibility compliance
- ☒ Unnecessary/unused content
- ☒ Hyperlinks
- ☐ Ease of use
- ☐ Completeness
- ☐ Consistency
- ☐ Document length
- ☒ Esoteric linguistic terminology 😜

Recommendations:
- Further testing
- Treatment to be confirmed pending results

Treatment options

We won't know until results are in, but we're pre-empting:

- Less content – we'll probably cut some items that aren't so relevant.
- New items – we'll need to cover the most common errors.
- More examples – showing more than telling.
- Plain English – this resource is for people who don't know editing lingo.
- Layout and format – clearer sections and consider HTML format (webpage as an alternative to PDF).
- Contact details for questions/comments.

BEFORE

AFTER

Comments, questions, criticisms? Ideas, opinions, advice?

Get in touch!

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