

University of Otago news writing style guide

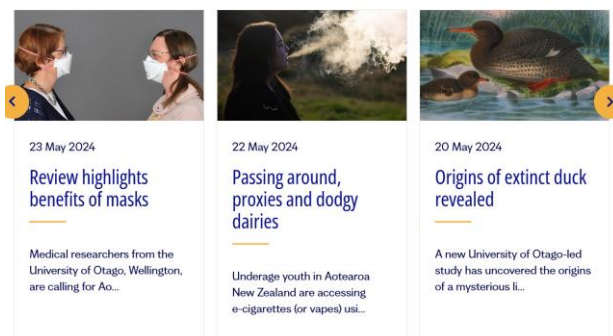
General guidelines

Clarity and Conciseness

- **Keep It Simple:** Use simple, straightforward language. Avoid jargon and complex sentences.
- **Brevity:** Be concise. Every word should serve a purpose. Trim unnecessary words.

Structure

- **Inverted Pyramid:** Start with the most important information (who, what, when, where, why, and how). Follow with supporting details in order of decreasing importance.
- **Paragraphs:** Keep paragraphs short, ideally 1 sentence. This enhances readability.
- **Headlines:** Create clear, compelling headlines that capture the essence of the story in a few words. Ideally headlines should be no more than about 8 words – we try to not have headlines go over more than two or three decks (a deck is a line in a headline)



Tone and Style

- **Objective and Neutral:** Maintain objectivity. Report facts without inserting personal opinions or biases. There is a little flexibility here when writing for Bulletin or internal channels; we can and should sell our successes. This means using words such as “prestigious”, “inspiring” etc (when it is fact!)
- **Active Voice:** Use active voice to make sentences more direct and livelier. Passive voice should be minimised.
- **Present Tense:** Use present tense for immediate actions or situations to create a sense of immediacy.

Attribution

- **Credible Sources:** Attribute all information to credible sources. Ensure quotes are accurate and attributed to the correct person.
- **Quotations:** Use quotations to provide direct statements from sources. Include the full name and title of the person quoted the first time they are mentioned. For all stories, except media releases, refer to the person by their first name on second and subsequent mentions.

Accuracy and Verification

- **Fact-Checking:** Verify all facts before publication. Double-check names, dates, statistics, and quotes.
- **Proof-read:** Have your copy proof-read by a colleague/manager before it is sent out or for publication
- **Sign-off:** Ensure your story is signed-off. Sign-off lines will be different for each story, but will always include all those quoted, and at times their manager and higher.

Grammar and Punctuation

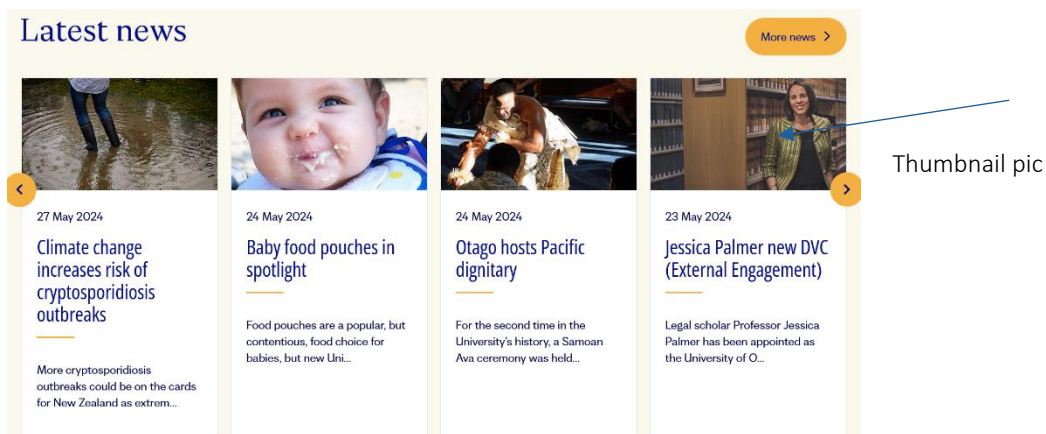
- **Grammar and punctuation:** <https://www.otago.ac.nz/writing-style>
- **Consistent Punctuation:** Use consistent punctuation throughout the article. Avoid exclamation points.

Engagement

- **Lead:** Craft a strong lead to hook readers. The first sentence should grab attention and encourage further reading.
- **Human Interest:** Include elements of human interest where appropriate to engage readers emotionally.

Visual Elements

- **Images and Captions:** Use relevant images to complement the text. Due to the way to the website is laid out, all stories to be loaded to the UoO website must contain at least a high resolution horizontal photograph. While other high resolution images, including headshots are also ideally provided, the image that people see on the website that makes them click through to the story (the “thumbnail” image) must be horizontal/landscape.



- If you don't have a good quality horizontal photo to go with your story, you can check sites for stock images. Some common sites:

- <https://unsplash.com>
- <https://pixabay.com/>
- <https://www.pexels.com/>
- <https://www.freeimages.com/>
- <https://www.rawpixel.com/search?amp%3Bpath= topics&%3Bsort=curated&page=1&path= topics&sort=curated>
- <https://www.shopify.com/stock-photos>

Names and titles should be provided for photos when people are identifiable. No two captions should be the same. If you are supplying four photographs, four captions should be provided with your copy.

Writing the story

The introduction

- The introduction should summarise what the story is about in a catchy way. It is this sentence that hooks the reader. It should be one sentence, but no more than two. It doesn't need to contain all the information; make use of the second paragraph also.
- Avoid using questions or direct quotes. It is very rarely that these are more interesting or impactful than you paraphrasing the facts.
- Try to avoid using numbers, lengthy words or names (particularly if they are not a well known person). All of these make it harder for the reader to take in what is being said.

Attribution

- Speakers need to be introduced before they are quoted. Readers need to know who is speaking before they get to the end of a sentence or quote. This is particularly important when there is more than one source in a story.

- **Correct:** *University of Otago Chief Cake Maker Vera Sweet* says the competition is expected to be fierce.
“We have 30 cooks entered and I know it will be hot in the kitchen,” she says.
- **Incorrect:** The competition is expected to be fierce, *University of Otago Chief Cake Maker Vera Sweet* says.
- **Incorrect:** “We have 30 top cooks entered and I know it will be hot in the kitchen,” *University of Otago Chief Cake Maker Vera Sweet* says.

- After the introduction, attribution come at the end of the sentence – definitely not the middle and preferably not at the beginning. Putting it at the end means the news is first, and the sentence is not broken up.

- **Correct:** The research is an important step in finding a cure for the virus, which kills about 2, 000 people every year, *she says*.
- **Incorrect:** The research is an important step in finding a cure for the virus, *she says*, which kills about 2,000 people every year.
- **Avoid:** *She says* the research is an important step in finding a cure for the virus, which kills about 2,000 people every year.

- The “says” comes after the name.

- **Correct:** It will be a long day for everyone, Bob *says*.
- **Correct:** “It will be a long day for everyone,” Bob *says*.
- **Incorrect:** It will be a long day for everyone, *says* Bob.
- **Incorrect:** “It will be a long day for everyone,” *says* Bob.

Quotes

- Direct quotes are used for impact and to add legitimacy.
- Full quotes should be used when possible over partial quotes.
- The grammar goes on the inside of the quote marks for a full quote and the outside of the quote marks for a partial quote.

- **Full quote:** “It was a beautiful day that we will never forget.”
- **Full quote with attribution:** “It was a beautiful day that we will never forget,” she says.
- **Partial quote:** The day went without hitch and is one they will “never forget”.
- **Partial quote with attribution:** The day went without a hitch and is one they will “never forget”, she says.

- Quotes stand alone as their own paragraph.

- **Correct:** The full impact of the event was not yet known.

“It could be several days before we have all the details, but we believe it will be positive for the university,” she says.
- **Incorrect:** The full impact of the event was not yet known: “It could be several days before we have all the details, but we believe it will be positive for the university,” she says.