



# **WRITING FOR THE WEB**

**A practical approach to content creation**

# Objectives

1. Digital.nsw – the home of digital transformation for NSW Government
2. Why writing for the web is important
3. How to write for the web
4. Where to go for more help
5. Walk away with skills to bring your content to life

# Digital.nsw – what is it and what does it do?

- Digital.nsw was launched in November 2017 as the home of NSW government's digital transformation
- Digital.nsw is more than a website. It is a platform that:
  1. Reports on digital government progress
    - Data visualisation of DGIPS
  2. Builds digital government communities
    - Policy Lab
    - Digital.nsw community of approximately 10,000 subscribers
  3. Houses resources
    - Guidelines, toolkits that support teams to design and deliver digital services
  4. Shares information about digital initiatives across government
    - Regular newsletter updates
    - *In Focus* to feature topical content

# Digital.nsw – what's next?

- Digital.nsw is being released in stages – we will add new functions and content overtime based on user feedback.
- We are decommissioning [www.finance.nsw.gov.au/ict](http://www.finance.nsw.gov.au/ict) and migrating relevant content to digital.nsw.
- But we must practice what we preach:
  1. Customer-centric
  2. Data-informed
  3. Digital-first

# **WHY WRITE FOR THE WEB**

# What do we mean by writing for the web?

**When we say “writing for the web” we mean a whole raft of channels, including:**

- Websites
- eDMs (electronic direct mail)
- Social media
- Videos
- Online surveys

....Basically anything digital!



# How we consume online content

## Eye-tracking studies – how we read online

- Sweep eyes across page (roughly in F pattern)
- Make lightning fast decisions about whether a page is worth reading
- 80% only look at information above the fold
- Only 20% scroll
- 70% look at left half of webpage and 30% view the right
- Only read 20% of text

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for 'Eye tracking'. A heatmap is overlaid on the page, showing areas of high user attention. The most intense areas are in the top left corner, covering the navigation menu and the search box, and in the top center, covering the article title and the first paragraph. There is also a smaller area of attention on the right side, near the 'Contents' table of contents. A red box highlights a notice about insufficient inline citations. The 'History' section is visible at the bottom of the article content.

### Sources:

<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/scrolling-and-attention/>

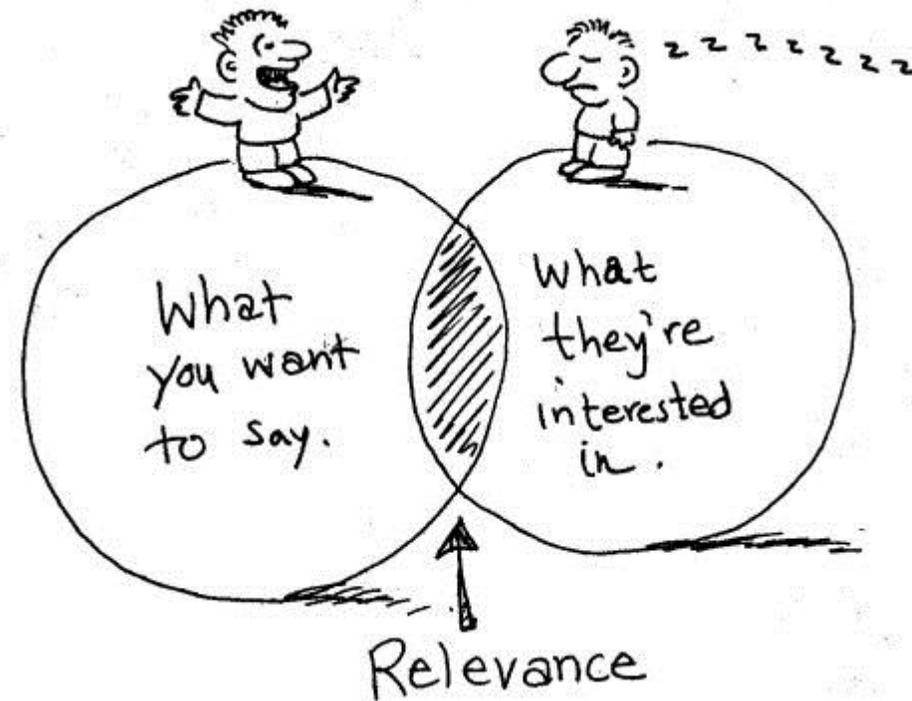
<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/percent-text-read.html>

# Keep your audience in mind

When you are writing you should always keep your audience in mind.

## Key things to consider:

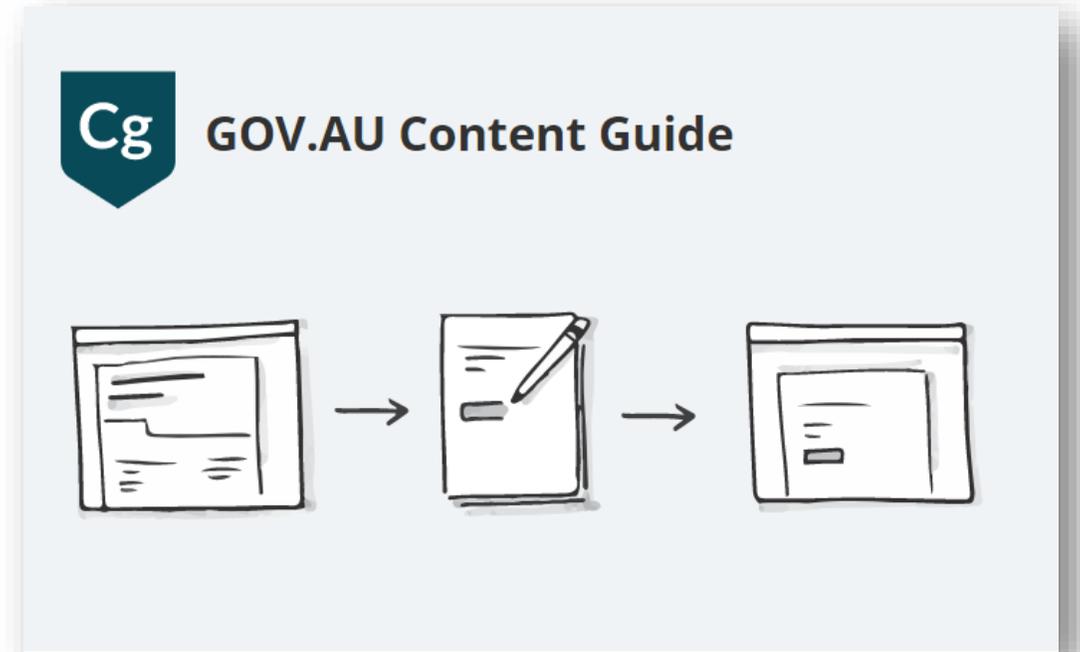
- Who are you talking to?
- What do they care about?
- What do you want them to know/do/feel?



# **CONTENT BEST PRACTICE**

## Achieving best practice and compliance

1. Use the DTA's [Digital Service Standard](#) and [Content Guide](#)
2. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA (more information about this on slide 23)



## Design for mobile first

This is in the DTA guidelines and is a good habit to get into. A responsive website is one that changes structure depending on what device it's viewed on.

- Think about how the page will stack when it's on a mobile
- In the case of fiance/ict most of our traffic is from desktops but this doesn't mean we shouldn't follow best practice guidance



## Content structure

- Structure the content around meeting the user's needs first, then meeting requirements around mandated information.
- Design content to:
  - give the user only the information they need to complete the job/task
  - lead the user to the information they need
- Use simple language and get to the point quickly
- Communicate with text first, don't rely on images and videos



# Content structure best practice - example

## Example of good page structure

The screenshot shows the Australian Government Digital Transformation Agency website. The header includes the Australian Government logo, the agency name, and a search bar. A navigation menu lists 'What we do', 'Who we are', 'Digital Service Standard', 'News', 'Blog', and 'Jobs'. The breadcrumb trail is 'Home > Digital Service Standard > Meeting the Standard > Becoming an assessor'. The main content area features the title 'Becoming an assessor' and a list of two requirements for becoming an assessor. A right-hand sidebar contains a table of contents with the following items: 'Digital Service Standard', 'Scope of Standard', 'Moratorium', 'Meeting the Standard', 'Staged assessment process', 'Becoming an assessor' (highlighted), 'Assessment reports', and 'Design principles'.

**Australian Government**  
**Digital Transformation Agency**

Search dta.gov.au

What we do Who we are Digital Service Standard News Blog Jobs

Home > Digital Service Standard > Meeting the Standard > Becoming an assessor

## Becoming an assessor

All services that fall under the [scope of the Standard](#) must be assessed by a team of assessors.

Assessors help services to [meet the Standard](#) and provide assurance that the criteria have been met.

To become an assessor, you will need to:

1. Be currently working in product management, delivery or agile, technical development, user research, service design or a related digital role
2. Be nominated by the team responsible for digital transformation in your agency, usually a digital transformation coordinator or team

**Digital Service Standard**

- Scope of Standard
- Moratorium
- Meeting the Standard**
- Staged assessment process
- Becoming an assessor**
- Assessment reports
- Design principles

When drafting content, make sure it is clear:

1. Who the information is for
2. What this content helps the reader do

## Writing style

When writing, think like a journalist – think about how to front load the important information and make the content compelling.

As a guide try to do the following:

- Use pronouns (You is the user and We are NSW Government)
- Use short sentences
- Lists and bullet points – use an intro sentence and short lists for effect
- Use active voice



# Writing style best practice - example

## Example of good copy

The screenshot shows a website page with a dark teal header. The main content area is white with a teal sidebar on the right. The page title is 'Going to a public school'. Below the title, there is a search bar and a breadcrumb trail: 'Public schools > Going to a public school > Our schools at a glance'. The main heading is 'Our schools at a glance', followed by a sub-heading 'Learn more about NSW public schools by exploring the following topics.' Below this is an 'Index' section with a list of topics: 'Our public schools', 'Finding a public school', 'Enrolment', 'Operational directorates', 'Calendars', 'Our schools at a glance' (highlighted in teal), 'Translated documents', and 'Privacy information'. The 'Our schools at a glance' section is expanded, showing a paragraph: 'Students will achieve their educational best and increase their career and life options through regular attendance at school.' followed by a bulleted list of requirements for school attendance in NSW.

The screenshot shows the Hemingway Editor interface. The main text area contains the same paragraph and bulleted list as the previous screenshot. The text is color-coded: the opening sentence is pink, 'legally' is blue, 'be registered' is green, 'home schooling' is blue, and 'equivalent' is purple. The right sidebar shows the readability score: 'Readability Grade 7 Good' (circled in red). Below this, it says 'Words: 126' and 'Show More'. There are five colored boxes with feedback: a blue box for '2 adverbs, meeting the goal of 3 or fewer.', a green box for '3 uses of passive voice. Cut to 2 or fewer.', a purple box for '1 phrase has a simpler alternative.', a yellow box for '1 of 11 sentences is hard to read.', and a red box for '1 of 11 sentences is very hard to read.'

- Use [Flesch–Kincaid](#), [Hemingway App](#) or other readability tests to help determine how readable your writing is.
- Remember, the easier it is to read, the more likely it will be read, understood and actioned.
- Aim for Grade 5 reading level.

## Headlines

Users scan pages so headlines act as important sign-posts to help understand what content is on a page.

Keep in the mind the following:

- Write a clear title and lead summary (e.g. what is the page about and who is it for)
- Headings are the first words users read to check the relevance of content before they commit to reading it
- Make headings short and succinct, and enough to stand alone when read out of context (e.g. in search results and on social media)
- Google searches only show 55 characters of the page title.
- Use only 1 top level (H1) heading



# Headline best practice - example

## Example of an effective headline



**Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan**

Have your say now on the future of Australia's seventh largest city

Greater Newcastle metropolitan planning

Headline is short, succinct and let's the reader know what the content is on.

Engaging call to action – entices the reader with urgency to find our more about Aus' 7th largest city.

Click through link says what it will take you to specifically and avoids generic calls to action like "Find out more"

## Hyperlinks

- Make the destination of the link clear (e.g. if I click on this, I know what I will get X)
- Think about the user and their context when reading the information.
- Don't use meaningless terms such as 'click here', 'read more' or 'useful links'.
- Don't make the link text too long, only link the keywords

# Hyperlinks best practice - example

## Example of hyperlinks as a Call to Action (CTA)

The screenshot displays the Service NSW website interface. At the top left is the Service NSW logo. To its right is a navigation menu with links: BROWSE SERVICES, NSW GOV DIRECTORY, ABOUT US, LOG IN, SIGN UP, and SELECT LANGUAGE. Below the navigation is a search bar with the placeholder text "Start your search here..." and a red "Search" button. To the right of the search bar is a "Locate us" button with a location pin icon. A central banner features the text "Renewing your licence is easy. Do it online." and an image of a person using a laptop. Below the banner are three columns of service categories, each with a list of services and a "More" button:

- Pay, Renew & Replace**
  - > Renew rego
  - > Renew driver licence
  - > Reprint a NSW Driver Licence Receipt
  - > Auto-renew Pensioner rego
  - > Replace driver licence
  - > Pay a Toll Notice

More Pay, Renew & Replace
- Apply, Order & Book**
  - > Apply Birth Certificate
  - > Apply NSW Seniors Card
  - > Book licence test
  - > Apply Marriage Certificate
  - > Apply for a recreational fishing licence
  - > Working With Children Check

More Apply, Order & Book
- Change & Check**
  - > Find the billing number for a vehicle
  - > Check rego
  - > Check demerit points
  - > Submit notice of disposal
  - > Transfer rego
  - > Change details with RMS

More Change & Check

## Intext hyperlinking

- Hyperlinking relevant words only.
  - Remove superfluous words
  - Make content more trustworthy e.g. user less likely to think it will be a scam/virus/take them to a random site

Use this

“ Attend next month’s [workshop for developers and writers in Brisbane](#). ”

Not this:

“ Attend a [Brisbane workshop for developers and writers next month](#). ”

Never this

“ Attend a Brisbane workshop for developers and writers next month.

[Click here for more information](#). ”

## White space

White space (or negative space) is a useful design technique to:

- Not overload the user with too much information
- Help users process information
- Help content stand out



# White space best practice - example

## Example of good use of white space

The screenshot displays the NSW Department of Industry website. The header includes the NSW Government logo, the Department of Industry name, and navigation links: Home, About us, Contact us, Media releases, and All news & events. A search bar is located on the right side of the header.

The main content area features five service tiles arranged in a grid:

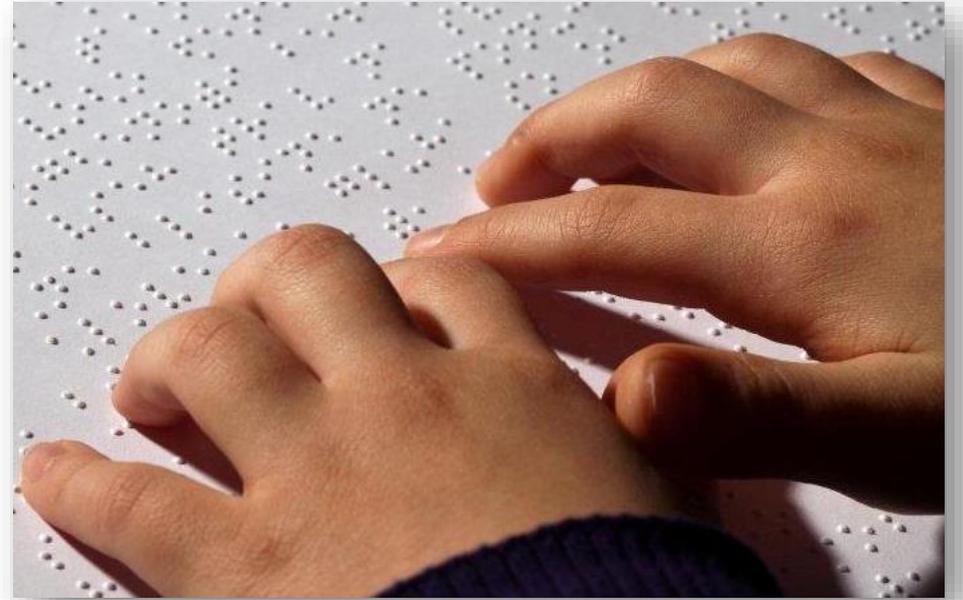
- Invest in New South Wales**
  - ▶ Why Sydney & NSW
  - ▶ What regional NSW has to offer
  - ▶ Guide to investing in NSW
- Export from New South Wales**
  - ▶ Getting started in export
  - ▶ Expand into new markets
  - ▶ Learn about our key export sectors
- Buy from New South Wales**
  - ▶ Understanding the buying process
  - ▶ Find a supplier
  - ▶ Our regulations and trade agreements
- Business in New South Wales**
  - ▶ Small business strategy
  - ▶ Find a Business Connect advisor
  - ▶ Help for disrupted industries
- Live & Work in New South Wales**
  - ▶ Working in NSW
  - ▶ The NSW lifestyle
  - ▶ Visas & migration

The tiles use a clean, minimalist design with clear headings, sub-headings, and bulleted lists of services. The background images for each tile are high-quality and relevant to the service. The overall layout is well-organized and easy to navigate.

## WCAG compliance – what is it?

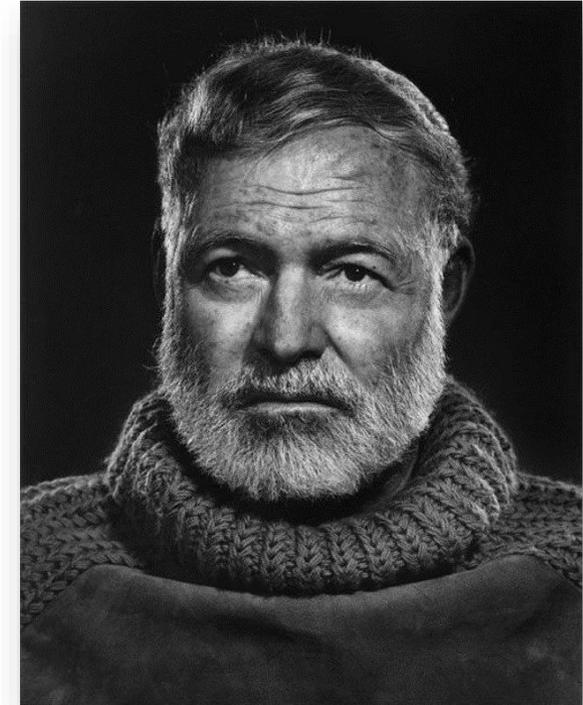
As a government agency it's mandatory that our websites are WCAG 2.0 AA compliant. The WCAG standards are designed to help people with hearing and sight impairment to easily access information online.

- A recent report\* found 66% of sites documents don't meet accessibility standards
- Navigation labels are crucial
- Use tools like the WAVE Chrome plugin to check content
- Use ALT tags on images
- Make sure PDFs (which shouldn't be used anyway) are accessible



## Test your content

- There are online tools where you can test the readability of pages
- You can use Microsoft Word's Readability Statistics feature
- Flesch-Kincaid readability test - <https://readable.io/>
- Hemingway App - <http://www.hemingwayapp.com/>
- Ask your users!



Ernest Hemmingway

# **UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE**

## Understanding your audience

- The first criteria in the DTA's Digital Service Standard is understanding user needs.
- It is the first criteria for a reason...

*“If we can capture in data what really matters to you, and if we can understand more the role that our work plays in your actual life, the **better content we can create for you**, and the **better that we can reach you**.”*

Dao Nguyen, BuzzFeed's Publisher

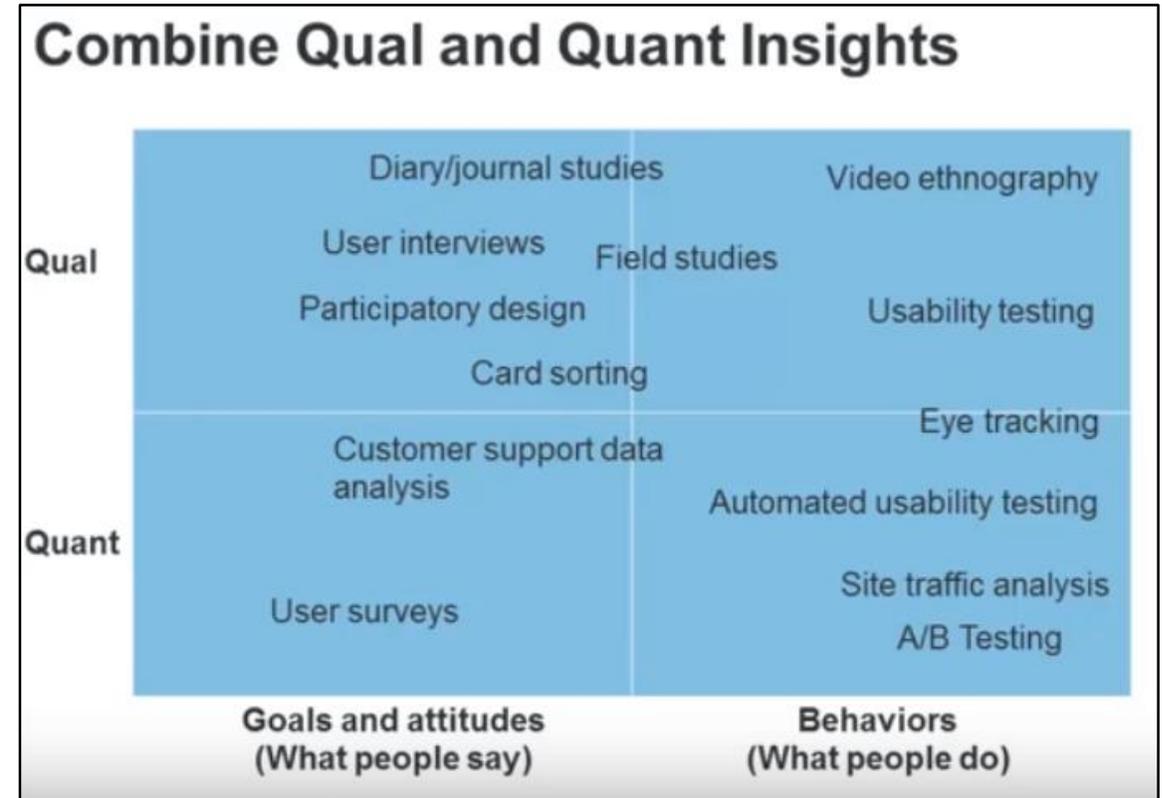
# Tools to understand your audience

## So how do you find out about your audience?

- There are many qualitative/quantitative research techniques available
- To get the most complete understanding of who your audience is, you ideally want research from each quadrant

## What do you do once you have this information?

- Create job stories



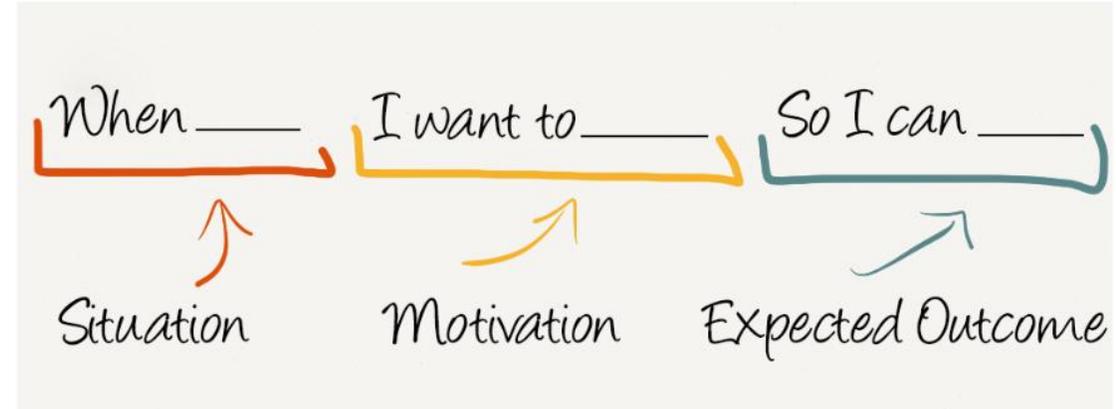
# What is a job story?

We can write content better if we understand what our audience wants to do and why they want to do it.

What job does your audience want to do?

Why do they want to do it?

What information do they need to do it?



E.g. **When** I have a \$20M ICT project **I want to** know what I have to report to the IAF on **so I can** comply.

E.g. **When** I'm drafting content **I want to** know best practice standards **so I can** write great content.

Job stories don't have to be from a single point of view.

E.g. **When** I'm looking for an ICT provider **I want to** find out who I can use **so I can** procure them.

**When** I'm looking for an ICT provider **I want to** find out what the technical standards are **so I can** procure them.

TIP: Be as specific as possible, make the problem as defined as you can.

**RECAP**

## Recap

Keep a checklist in mind when working with content. Make one that works for you. As a guide we recommend:

- Find out about your target audience
- **Always** keep your audience front of mind and what their purpose/goal is for visiting your page
- Use short sentences, front load the important info and use lists where appropriate
- Use hyperlinks as call to actions and avoid using “read more”
- Do **not** use PDFs – keep the content on the page and searchable
- Use white space
- Plan your content (ideally as a page plan) prior to writing
- Test your content with colleagues and with online tools prior to publishing

# RESOURCES

## Links

Here are links to online resources mentioned in this training session:

- [Google analytic basics](#)
- [Hemingway app](#)
- [DTA content guidelines](#)
- [WCAG 2.0 guidelines](#)