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**Unit of Competency Writers Guide**

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# Purpose

This document provides guidance to technical writers on (re)writing units of competency.

# Background

Artibus Innovation helps Industry Reference Committees review and renew training packages. We talk to employers, workers, trainers, regulators and other industry stakeholders to see what is and isn’t working, and—based on this—we make recommendations for change.

Training packages include a number of different qualifications (e.g. Certificate II in Shopfitting, Certificate III in Painting and Decorating), and qualifications are made up of units of competency (units).

Units outline the skills and knowledge needed to perform work tasks. They have a code number and a title (e.g. CPCCPD3021A Prepare surfaces for painting). Units break a task down into elements (e.g. ‘Remove wallpaper’) which are, in turn, broken down into performance criteria.

# Overview

Units must comply with the 2012 [Standards for Training Packages](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/standardsfortrainingpackages.pdf),[[1]](#footnote-1) and with the Artibus templates ([Unit of Competency](#_Unit_of_competency) and [Assessment Requirements](#_Assessment_requirements_template)).

In the past, Artibus used a different template; consequently, many units need to be updated. The primary structural difference is that we are now not using the Range of Conditions field. Content from that field is now contained in the Knowledge Evidence field (in Assessment Requirements). There are also a lot of changes to the standard text we use (see [templates](#Templates)).

As a technical writer, you may have to transfer content into the appropriate section, or you may have this done automatically by the template generator. In many cases, the content will require significant adjustments and removal of duplication in order to be incorporated into the new fields.

In previous templates, key terms were marked in bold italics, with further explanation of these terms provided in the Range of Conditions field. We no longer do this. You need to remove this bold italic formatting. Further explanation for the terms is still usually provided (in the Knowledge Evidence field) but the meaning of the key terms should be clear enough in isolation. Rephrase them if this is not the case.

# Process for updating a unit

Read through the unit. Does it make sense? Are the Elements and Performance Criteria clear? They should follow a logical (generally chronological) sequence. Are there too many or too few? Do the Title and Application fields align with the rest of the unit?

Do some quick online research on the task to get an understanding of what it involves and see if the unit is missing anything. Have a look at current and superseded equivalent units. These can be viewed at [training.gov.au/Home/Tga](http://training.gov.au/Home/Tga).

The Project Register contains industry advice and feedback on qualifications and units. Examine this to see what changes have been recommended. You may need to check with the project manager to establish how these recommendations should be addressed.

As you update the units, corrections and minor changes can simply be made without the need for any further record. The Writer’s Issues Register is the place to record any more substantial changes, proposed changes or requests for further advice.

In all sections, aim for clarity, accuracy, precision and brevity. Remove any unnecessary words or repetition. If any sentence takes more than one read-through to understand, it needs restructuring. Correct any spelling, punctuation or grammatical mistakes.

Aim for simplicity and plain English. If you can convey the same meaning in fewer words without reducing clarity, do so.

In many cases, specialist industry knowledge is required. For example, in the Performance Evidence field (Assessment Requirements) we need to provide specific details of the assessment task(s)—size of task, number of repetitions, etc. If the existing unit has only vague details, you may need industry advice to identify what would be appropriate. See the [Writer’s Issues Register guidelines](#Issues) at the end of this document for information on how to flag issues such as these.

# Templates

## Formatting

Try to achieve consistency in format—font size, spacing, dot points, indents, etc.—but don’t waste too much time on this. We will standardise formatting when the finished unit is uploaded to training.gov.au.

## Unit of competency template

Red has been used to mark text that is used in all or most units, black is used to provide examples of typical text or as a placeholder, and blue is used for comments. A template with just the core text is available [here](https://artibusinnovation.imeetcentral.com/artibusoperations/folder/WzIwLDg1NzExMzld/WzIsNTUzMjgzNTNd/).[[2]](#footnote-2)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| UNIT CODE | CCCCXX2222 |
| UNIT TITLE | Do xxx and yyy |
| APPLICATION | This unit specifies the skills and knowledge required to do xxx and yyy ↑This first sentence can be a simple copy-and-paste of the title, but you could choose to add some more detail. For example, a title ‘handle xxx materials’ could be paraphrased/expanded into ‘safely transport and store xxx materials’. It includes … doing this first bit of the task, doing this second bit and doing the final bit.↑ A succinct breakdown of the task. These can be (but don’t have to be) the chronological sequence of steps. This part is typically a summary of the Elements/Performance Criteria - but don’t try to include everything from that section. This part can be kept to a single sentence, but use more (and/or dot points) if needed.This unit is designed for those working under close supervision on residential or commercial building projects …↑ Provide some useful information on *how*, *where* & *who* – (the work environment and work role this unit is designed for). There should be alignment between the unit’s AQF level and how much supervision, support, independence is specified here (i.e. higher levels = more independence). Some of this info could be added in the first part of this section if you can do it neatly (‘This unit specifies the skills and knowledge required to do xxx yyy in the residential or commercial construction industry’.)No licensing, legislative or certification requirements apply to this unit at the time of publication. ↑ If they *do* apply, then delete this and specify what they are. (Note that this sentence is not in italics) |
| PREREQUISITE UNIT | Nil |
| ELEMENTS | PERFORMANCE CRITERIA |
| Elements describe the essential outcomes. | Performance criteria describe what needs to be done to demonstrate achievement of the element. |
| 1. Prepare for task. | 1.1 Obtain and clarify task requirements with client or supervisor.↑ Active and usually starting with a verb. (i.e. *not* ‘Task requirements are obtained and clarified’) Use capitals and full stops as these are full (imperative) sentences. Note that we are no longer marking key terms using bold italics.1.2 yyy1.3 zzz In some cases, the level of performance required for each criterion (i.e. how well this aspect of the task should be done) is clear from the context. Otherwise, specify this—perhaps by describing the purpose of this aspect. For example, ‘2.2 make sure lifting equipment is clean enough to be inspected for defects …2.3 inspect lifting equipment for defects, including …’  |
| 2. | 2.1 xxx2.2 yyy2.3 zzz |
| 3. | 3.1 xxx3.2 yyy3.3 zzz |
| FOUNDATION SKILLSA person demonstrating competency in this unit must have the following language, literacy, numeracy and employment skills: (Standard categories we use are *writing*, *reading*, *speaking and listening*, and *numeracy*. Some units won’t include all these categories)* writing skills to update xxx records

↑ no capital at start or full stop for list items that are not sentences* reading skills to interpret:
	+ written policies, procedures and requirements for workplace health and safety (WHS) and environmental protection
	+ manufacturers’ instructions for tools and equipment
	+ safety data sheets (SDS)

↑ Use dot-point sub-lists if required, but simple, short lists don’t have to be in dot points: ‘speaking and listening skills to aaa, bbb and ccc’. * speaking and listening skills, including the use of questioning, to clarify and confirm client requirements.

↑ Use ‘language skills’ if a skill includes more than one of these above categories, e.g. ‘… to interpret and use xxx-specific terminology’. * numeracy skills to calculate material quantities and mix xxx in correct proportions.

↓ Standard employment skills categories we use are *communication*, *teamwork*, *problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management, learning*, and *technology*. (From here: <https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/csfw20-20bridging20document.pdf>) Some skills cut across a few of these categories—use your judgement as to what labels work best. Industry stakeholders have advised us that employment skills are important, but many units don’t have a lot of detail in this section, so there is some opportunity to add new content.* communication and teamwork skills to ensure that anticipated delays in task completion are conveyed to team members likely to be affected
* technology skills to update online xyz records

Avoid just cutting and pasting a list of identical skills into all units. Some skills apply to a number of units across a sector or qualification, but try to also include skills that are specific to a unit.  |
| UNIT MAPPING INFORMATION | Supersedes and is equivalent to …orNo equivalent unit. |
| LINKS | Companion volumes to this training package are available at the VETNet website: http:/ |

## Assessment requirements template

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| TITLE | Assessment Requirements for CCCCXX2222 Do xxx and yyy |
| PERFORMANCE EVIDENCE |
| To demonstrate competency in this unit, a person must prepare the following surfaces for painting, including the removal of any coatings and wallpaper:* a new plasterboard surface of at least eight square metres
* a previously-coated metal or masonry surface of at least one square metre …

↑ Be specific about the activity, the frequency, and the amount or quantity. Dot points can be used, but they’re not required.Performance evidence should align with what is in the elements/performance criteria field, but there is no need to repeat all the detail from there. The statement below makes it clear that performance criteria must be addressed.In doing this, the person must meet the performance criteria for this unit. |
| KNOWLEDGE EVIDENCE |
| ↓This section contains detail that was previously in other sections. (Details previously in Range Statement / Range of Conditions are now here.) It will likely take a bit of time to organise this content in a clear and logical fashion and to remove repetition. To be competent in this unit, a person must demonstrate knowledge of: This wording implies demonstrating the knowledge through task performance (a core principle of VET assessment). However, it’s not always possible for everything listed in KE to be demonstrated this way. The wording is designed to give *some* wriggle room to RTOs, allowing the candidates breadth of knowledge to be tested through questioning (e.g. in a security unit, the assessor might ask ‘how would you have dealt with that situation if the person seemed [drunk/a minor/non-English speaking/angry]’ rather than the assessor having to assemble all these types of people.* requirements for safe performance of this task under WHS laws, regulations and codes of practice. [or, if relevant to the unit: WHS *and environmental protection* laws]
* hazards typically encountered during performance of this task, including:
	+ overhead wires
* principles and processes of hazard identification and management, including the hierarchy of control
* equipment for hazard management, including:
	+ signs
	+ barricades
	+ xxx
* the use and limitations of paint-stripping chemicals
* the use and limitations of materials and tools and equipment used to prepare surfaces for painting:
	+ drop sheets
	+ duster brushes
	+ xxx
* techniques for removing coatings:
	+ chemical stripping
	+ grinding
	+ sanding
	+ xxx
* techniques for removing wallpaper:
	+ dry stripping
	+ soaking
	+ steam stripping
 |
| ASSESSMENT CONDITIONS  |
| Assessors must satisfy the requirements for assessors contained in the Standards for Registered Training Organisations. Assessment must be conducted in the workplace or in a simulated workplace environment. Tasks are to be performed to the level of proficiency and within the time limits expected in a workplace. ↑ If there are more specific requirements, include them.Assessors are responsible for ensuring that the person demonstrating competency has access to:* industry-standard tools and equipment used for preparing surfaces for painting:
	+ xxx
	+ yyy
* materials used for preparing surfaces for painting:
	+ zzz
* manufacturers’ specifications and safety data sheets (SDS) for materials.

↑ Specify tools and equipment (& materials) that must be present. Make sure all items listed in Performance Evidence are included (e.g. if candidates have to prepare a type of surface, list that surface). It’s not usually necessary to list ‘instructions for assessment task’, but do list any plans or diagrams or other essential paperwork or information required. |
| LINKS | Companion volumes to this training package are available at the VETNet website: http:// |

**Language style**

## General principles

We generally follow the recommendations of the [*Commonwealth Style Manual*](http://www.australia.gov.au/about-government/publications/style-manual) and the spelling used in the [*Macquarie Dictionary*](https://www.macquariedictionary.com.au/), but you don’t need access to these to write or update units. Some frequently encountered issues of spelling, punctuation and word choice are looked at in the following sections.

## Consistency

Use consistent wording and general structure across units, especially those within a particular sector or qualification. Don’t use *plans* in one unit and *strategies* in one unit if you’re referring to the same type of thing. If you are using different terms for different things (e.g. *plant*, *equipment* and *tools*) make sure you are doing this accurately and consistently and in ways that are commonly understood by industry.

This point of the spelling and punctuation advice in this section is to provide uniformity. We not saying, for example, that ‘single’ quotation marks are better than “double” ones or that *program* is better than *programme*, but—just like deciding which side of the road to drive on—it’s best when we’re all doing the same thing.

## Spelling

Use Macquarie Dictionary spelling. Sometimes alternative spellings are given. Use the first spelling that is provided, not the alternative spellings following ‘also’ or ‘or’:

* program not ~~programme~~
* per cent not ~~percent~~ (but more often we’d use the symbol, %)
* a licence, a licensing authority
* You need to practise. She has had a lot of practice.
* usually -ise not -ize (realise, organisation, etc.)
* traveller, travelling not ~~traveler~~, ~~traveling~~
* focused, focusing

There is a lot of variety between dictionaries as to whether compound words are open, hyphenated or closed (e.g. time frame, time-frame or timeframe) (it’s the first one, apparently). If you don’t have Macquarie Dictionary access, pick the option that seems most standard in Australian English, and be consistent.

**Punctuation**

* Use ‘single’ quotation marks.
* Generally, don’t use a comma before *and* in a list of items: apples, oranges and bananas.
* Full stops with e.g. and i.e. They had fruit (e.g. apples, oranges and bananas). Don’t use e.g. and etc. in the same list.
* Generally, don’t use apostrophes for plurals. 1990s, IRCs. But there are some cases where they may be necessary for clarity. A’s are better.

## Numbers

* Generally, use words for numbers up to nine rather than using numerals, but keep a consistent style when numbers are close together. Courses run for 4, 8, 12 or 16 weeks.
* Use numerals for numbers that have a symbol or abbreviated unit of measurement: 3%, 8 km

## Bullet points

The phrase introducing the bullet points ends with a colon. If the bullet point items are not full sentences, don’t start them with capitals, and don’t end them with commas or semicolons. Leave them blank. The Commonwealth Style Manual says to use a full stop after the last dot point item, but we do not do this. Leave them without end punctuation.

The process involves:

* consulting stakeholders
* providing feedback
* making recommendations

Use normal sentence punctuation for bullet point items that are complete sentences.

## Capitals

Capitals are not used for states, territories, units of competence, training package, real estate sector.

Use a capital for Commonwealth.

Use capitals for the specific names of standards, policies, agreements: The case will be assessed by the department against the activity order as well as the Standards for Training Packages and …

## Plain English

Simple words are often better—clearer, more precise, just as correct. Use concrete terms rather than abstract, and specific terms rather than general.

~~Implement safety equipment.~~ Put safety equipment in place *or* Erect barriers and signs to …

~~Situate panels in an area appropriate to the job task.~~ Position panels ready for use

## Parallel structure

Use parallel construction where possible—that is, use the same grammatical construction for two or more joined or listed items.

Rather than ~~processes for~~ *~~risk assessment~~* ~~and~~ *~~controlling risks~~* [two items with different grammatical forms], use processes for risk *assessment* and *control* ✓ or processes for *assessing* and *controlling* risks ✓

Parallel structure should be followed in dot points.

Strategies include:

* Industry focus [= noun phrase]
* ~~Incorporate small business development~~ [= sentence] incorporation of …✓
* ~~Collaborative~~ [= adjective] collaboration✓

## Precision

relating to / in relation to / relevant to / in the context of / associated with: These words convey that there is *some* kind of linkage between two things, but don’t say much more. Sometimes these words are the best option, but often the link can be more specific.

Must have all PPE ~~relevant to~~ [required for] the task.

## Redundancy, repetition and wordiness

Don’t use a list of synonyms when there is no need to. For example, don’t write ‘perform tasks/processes/activities’ unless you—and the reader—have a reason for differentiating between these.

## Muphry’s Law

This guide contains mistakes and inconsistencies and breaks its own rules.

## Word choice

The [Glossary](https://artibusinnovation.imeetcentral.com/artibusoperations/folder/WzIwLDg1NzExMzld/WzIsNTU0NzM4Nzld/)[[3]](#footnote-3) has notes on terminology commonly used in units of competency and recommendations for standard phrases to use.

# Writer’s Issues Register guidelines

| **Unit section** | **Issue** | **Action** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Record Issue** | **Recommend Action** | **Make change** | **Do not make change** | **Record rectification** |
| Code & Title | Title does not reflect the content of the unit | Record & describe issue | Recommend Action: e.g. new title wording / change to other part/s of unit |  | Do not make change |  |
|  | Any other issues with Title | Record & describe issue | Recommend Action |  | Do not make change |  |
| Application | Application content does not align with title | Record & describe issue | Recommend Action: e.g. new title or application wording / change to other part/s of unit |  | Do not make change |  |
| Application wording is clumsy, poorly constructed, unclear and/or imprecise | Record & describe issue |  | Edit to improve readability without changing intent |  |  |
| Application does not cover all of: * summary of unit content
* application of unit (where & who)
* licensing
 | Record & describe issue |  | Edit in line with intent of unit title and content |  | Record & explain rectification |
|  | Any other issues with Application | Record & describe issue | Decide whether to recommend action or make change and record rectification |
| Elements | An element is described generically with a tenuous link to the unit focus | Record & describe issue |  | Decide whether the element can be aligned to the unit:* make simple changes to clarify the element focus if this aligns it with the unit content & the associated performance criteria
* If the ‘fix’ is complex, make recommendation/s for rectification but do not make change
 | Record & explain rectification |
| An element is included inappropriately | Record & describe issue | Recommend action |  | Do not make change |  |
| An element does not provide the focus addressed by the related performance criteria  | Record & describe issue |  | Decide whether the element can be re-written to cover the PCs & make simple changes to clarify the element focus OR leave unchanged & flag for consultation | Record & explain rectification |
| The title, application, structure and/or content of the unit indicate that an element may be missing  | Record & describe issue | Recommend action |  | Do not make change |  |
|  | The elements appear to be in the wrong order | Record & describe issue | Recommend action |  | Do not make change |  |
|  | Any other issues with elements | Record & describe issue | Decide whether to recommend action or make change and record rectification |
| Performance Criteria (PC) | The wording of a PC is clumsy, poorly constructed, unclear and/or imprecise | Record & describe issue |  | Improve readability without changing intent |  |  |
| A PC includes redundant words are used (e.g. ‘relevant’ in ‘select relevant equipment) | Record & describe issue |  | Improve readability without changing intent |  |  |
| A PC has a tenuous link to the element  | Record & describe issue |  | Decide whether the PC can be re-written to link to the element & make OR leave unchanged & flag for consultation | Record & explain rectification |
| A PC is wrongly placed within an element or is part of the wrong element | Record & describe issue | Recommend action |  | Do not make change |  |
| The title, application, structure and/or content of the unit indicate that a PC may be missing  | Record & describe issue | Recommend action |  | Do not make change |  |
|  | The PCs appear to be in the wrong order | Record & describe issue | Recommend action |  | Do not make change |  |
|  | Any other issues with PCs | Record & describe issue | Decide whether to recommend action or make change and record rectification |
| Performance Evidence (PE) | The source unit does not specify product &/or process evidence | Record & describe issue (could be generically) |  | Suggest wording based on unit title |  | Record rectification (could be generically) |
| The source unit does not include ‘frequency or volume’ of evidence | Record & describe issue | Recommend action (number of tasks or products) |  | Do not make change |  |
|  | Any other issues with PE | Record issue code & item | Decide whether to recommend action or make change and record rectification |
| Knowledge Evidence (KE) | One or more PCs are not underpinned by appropriate KE | Record & describe issue |  | Create suggested KE item/s based on PC/s |  | Record all new KE items  |
| Items in ‘Required Knowledge’ in source units appear not to link to PCs | Record & describe issue |  | Delete items |  | Record deleted items |
|  | Any other issues with KE | Record & describe issue | Decide whether to recommend action or make change and record rectification |
| Assessment Conditions | Assessment Conditions in source unit appear inappropriate/ unworkable | Record & describe issue |  | Do not include items in Assessment Conditions |  | Record items not included (could be generically) |
|  | Any other issues with Assessment Conditions | Record & describe issue | Decide whether to recommend action or make change and record rectification |

1. https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/standardsfortrainingpackages.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://artibusinnovation.imeetcentral.com/artibusoperations/folder/WzIwLDg1NzExMzld/WzIsNTUzMjgzNTNd/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://artibusinnovation.imeetcentral.com/artibusoperations/folder/WzIwLDg1NzExMzld/WzIsNTU0NzM4Nzld/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)