



The Regionalist Style Guide

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Writing for *The Regionalist*

Writing for *The Regionalist* is different from academic writing or journalism. *The Regionalist's* audience are generalists – mainly policymakers and national security leaders – grappling with real tasks and decisions. They need clear information as a basis for action. For your perspective to inform their thinking, your product should be written with their needs in mind. Your *Regionalist* product must adhere to four simple principles.

<i>Principle</i>	Customer-focused	Convincing	Organised	Easy to read
<i>Minimum Requirements</i>	Identifies a relevant regional security issue	Supports argument with evidence and reasoning	Leads with assessment and implications; answers “so what?” for issue identified	Writes clearly and concisely
	Scopes the issue and provides necessary context	Builds a case for policy recommendation	Structures products clearly and logically; headings to guide the reader	Uses simple, precise words: avoids vague, ambiguous terms and jargon
	Provides implications to Australia and solutions to policy-makers	Free of value-laden or emotional language	Avoids redundancy: each section and paragraph advances the case	Avoids awkward constructions and assumed knowledge

Principles and minimum requirements

Customer-focused

With any communication method, you must place your audience (your ‘customer’) at the centre. Understanding your customer means you can tailor your style and your argument to present the most powerful message – one that triggers action.

The customer for *The Regionalist* typically works in Australia’s foreign policy or national security policy areas and is able to advise, direct or change policy. They are often time-poor, future-focused and surrounded by subject matter experts. They want solutions, not problems.

Minimum Requirements:

Identify a regional security issue relevant to Australian policy-makers	As the names suggest, <i>The Regionalist</i> , and its parent organisation, The Institute for Regional Security, focus on issues that impact regional security. Your product must identify an issue that is relevant to regional security and linked to Australia’s national interests.
Scope the issue and provides necessary context	Explain what the issue is and provide enough context for the reader to understand its importance and relevance. A history lesson is not necessary, but clarifying where we are now helps set the scene for where you believe we should go.
Provide implications to Australia and solutions to policy-makers	Explain why the issue you have raised matters to Australia and provide your reader solutions. Often they are craving innovative ideas. Leave history lessons for the academics and other commentators.

Convincing

To convince your customer of your original argument, you must, by definition, present either new evidence or old evidence in a new way. Make bold judgments and explain how you came to that conclusion using clear evidence and reasoning. Building a sound case allows you to justify your policy recommendations.

Avoid language that is value-laden or emotional - which often diminishes your message and fails to convince customers. Using sweeping statements and exaggerations is also sure to turn your reader off.

Minimum Requirements:

Supports argument with evidence and reasoning	Justify your arguments with clear evidence and reasoning, not with assumptions and generic statements. Use references of other commentators to underpin your argument sparingly.
Builds a case for policy recommendation	The policy recommendations should be justified and clearly linked to the overall argument. Outlining risks of action or inaction would also be highly valuable to readers and persuade readers that you have considered the issue from all angles.
Free of value-laden or emotional language	We encourage bold statements, but we suggest you avoid language that is highly emotive - which often diminishes your message and fails to convince reader.

Organised

If you want your message to break through and resonate, you must present your argument in an organised manner.

Divide the body of your product into sections that flow logically without overlapping. Each section needs to advance the case of your overall argument.

Each paragraph should follow the same organisation, with the key sentence leading the paragraph, and each sentence thereafter advancing the case.

Minimum Requirements:

Leads with assessment and implications; answers “so what?” for issue identified	The opening paragraph should present the key insight of your product, not introductory remarks. Provide your most important finding in the product’s first sentence. And use the paragraph to explain the implications of the issue you have identified for Australian policy community
Structures products clearly and logically; headings to guide the reader	Use headings to clearly delineate each section of your product. The headings can be a simple title or even a short sentence – as long as the reader receives a snapshot of the upcoming section. Each section must logically flow from the previous section.
Avoids redundancy: each section and paragraph advances the case	Each section and paragraph should have distinct arguments that advance the overall case. Often providing more detail or information does not serve your argument - consider what is crucial and what is interesting, and only keep the former.

Easy to read

Your product should be a pleasure to read. The more difficult you make the task of reading, the less effective your message. A sophisticated idea does not need convoluted or complex language, and making your language simple does not mean your idea is basic. On the contrary, clear and concise language ensures you communicate potentially complex concepts for policy-makers to implement.

The Regionalist welcomes products that authors have repurposed from their academic efforts. We strongly suggest you take time to edit the products to meet our style guide, including our A-Z guide below.

Minimum Requirements:

Writes clearly and concisely	Use active, not passive, voice. Use only as many words as you need. Aim to write sentences of 15-25 words and paragraphs of no more than 100 words.
Uses simple, precise words: avoids vague, ambiguous terms and jargon	Avoid long words where a simple word would suffice. If you must use technical terms, ensure you define them clearly. Use precise words - be wary of words with broad or imprecise meanings: <i>affect, impact, significant, limited</i> .
Avoids awkward constructions and assumed knowledge	Write for a generalist, whom may be aware of the issue, but does not have the same level of understanding as you. Sentences should be constructed to avoid confusion. Consider syntax, punctuation, word length and sentence length when self-editing.

A-Z style guide

Active and passive voice

Use the active voice – it is concise and direct. Structure your sentences so that the subject performs an action through the verb, rather than receiving the action of the verb. *Jill wrote the article* rather than *the article was written by Jill*. Only use the passive voice when you want to emphasise the verb's object (*the convoy was attacked by a submarine*) or when the subject is unknown (*the photo was taken on 1 January*).

Avoid sentences beginning with *it*, which can usually be re-written to be active. *It is likely the regime will collapse* can be re-written as *the regime is likely to collapse*.

Brackets

Use brackets sparingly. You should only use them to enclose material that is not essential to the meaning of your sentence or your argument. The sentence should still be complete if the brackets and the material within them are removed. You can use brackets to introduce an acronym, for ease of reference later in your product. For example: *The Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) reported on 1 January 2017 that...*

Collective nouns

Groups and organisations should be referred to as singular entities, rather than plural. For example: *Defence is revising its style guide* or *The Taliban has suffered a setback, but is likely to recover*.

Commas

Use commas as an aid to understanding. Too many in one sentence can be confusing, but so can too few.

The Regionalist does not use the so-called serial comma or Oxford comma, which comes before the *and* separating the last two items in a list. Sentences which list things should usually read like this: *The Government set policy relating to security, health and education*.

But you should use a serial comma before the last item when one of the items includes another *and*, or when omission would result in confusion. For example: *We met representatives from Defence, Industry, Immigration and Border Protection, and Finance.*

Concision

Use only as many words as you need. Don't omit steps in logic that the reader might need in an unfamiliar subject, but cut superfluous words and phrases.

You may find that using a verb instead of a noun helps to condense your phrasing. For example, *The government will allow the provision of more aid* becomes, through the use of a verb, *The government will provide more aid.*

Avoid words that have broad or imprecise meanings: *affect, impact, significant, limited*. For example: *The overseas deployment affected the Navy's capability*. The effect is unclear – was it good or bad? Specify your meaning: *The overseas deployment improved/reduced the Navy's capability*. Words such as *significantly* or *limited* can work well when followed by an explanation that serves to define and clarify their effect. For example: *Contrary to expectations, this event did not significantly affect policy, due to X and Y*, or *The prospects for peace are limited, as the parties are unwilling to engage in talks.*

Contractions

The Regionalist does not use contractions such as *isn't, can't, won't* or *didn't*.

Currency

Amounts of money should be expressed as follows: A\$700 (not \$A 700). When using foreign currencies, either convert into Australian dollars or place Australian dollar figure in brackets immediately after, rounding to the first decimal place. Denote million as *m*, billion as *bn*, and trillion as *tn*. For example: *The US's new aircraft carrier cost US\$13bn (A\$16.4bn)*

Effect and affect

As a noun, *effect* means *result*: *the effect was to halt the motorcade.*

As a verb, *effect* means *to bring about, produce* or *accomplish*: *the policy will effect savings over five years.*

Affect is used mainly as a verb, meaning *to have an influence on*: *his absence affected the team's performance*. The verb *to affect* is uninformative. Try to find a more descriptive verb to convey the influence you are discussing.

Ellipsis (...)

An ellipsis (three full stops, preceded and followed by a space) show that something has been left out of a quotation. If you leave something out in the middle of a sentence, or leave a whole sentence or string of sentences out of a paragraph, you should enclose your ellipsis in square brackets: [...] For example: *Australians all let us rejoice [...] Our home is girt by sea*. When using an ellipsis at the end of a sentence (that is, you are leaving out what comes next) do not include an extra full stop: *Our land abounds in nature's gifts of beauty rich and rare...*

Foreign geographic names

Generally, you should use the English form of foreign place names. There are exceptions, however, in places where former English names are no longer used: *Mumbai* not *Bombay*, *Myanmar* not *Burma*, *Timor-Leste* not *East Timor*.

Foreign words

Foreign words, if they are necessary for your argument, should be written *in italics*. A plain English equivalent will usually be more useful to your reader than a foreign word. Some common Latin or foreign words that have been adopted into English (*status quo*, *de facto*, *fait accompli*) do not need to be italicised. For plural forms of common words of Latin or Greek origin, use the first listing in the dictionary, For example, use *criteria* or *forums*, not *criteriae* or *fora*.

Homonyms

Homonyms are words that sound identical but are spelt differently and have different meanings: *compliment* and *complement*, *principal* and *principle*, *discreet* and *discrete*, *dependent* and *dependant*, *effect* and *affect*. Always check that you have used the correct word in the context.

Hyphens

The hyphen is important in clear and concise writing, as it shows that two or more words belong together. Expressions such as *high level*, *well educated*, *last minute* and *small scale* are hyphenated when used adjectivally and not hyphenated when used as a noun or after a verb: *a high-level decision* (adjective), *a decision made at a low level* (noun); *a last-minute submission* (adjective), *a submission made at the last minute* (noun).

Use the following combination of hyphens and spaces to express compound hyphenation: *air-, sea- and ground-launched missiles*. Hyphens are used for platform and equipment designators such as *F-5* or *MRH-60*. Hyphenate *mid* (*mid-June*, *mid-2017*) but only hyphenate *early 2017* or *mid June* when you use them adjectivally: *a mid-June storm*.

Italics and underlining

Use *italics* rather than underlining to indicate a document title: the *Defence White Paper 2016*.

Jargon

Avoid using jargon, which is language confined to a specialisation. Find a plain English equivalent.

Numbers

The numbers one to nine are written as words: *one helicopter and two frigates*. Numbers 10 and above are not usually spelt out, except at the start of a sentence (*Eight hundred ships use the port every year...*). When adjacent numbers might be confusing, the first should be spelt out (*eleven 8-tonne trucks*).

Paragraphs

A large slab of text may discourage your reader. Try shortening your sentences or splitting large paragraphs.

Quotation marks

To highlight quotations, use 'single quotation marks.' Use double quotation marks for quotes within quotes: *'The officer explained this is a "classified" operation,' she said.* Try to avoid quoting large slabs of text. Paraphrase the information instead.

Semicolons

Semicolons provide a stronger pause than a comma, but a weaker one than a full stop. Semicolons may be used to link two independent clauses that could be treated as separate sentences but have a closer logical link than such separation would imply. The part of the sentence after the semicolon requires its own verb. For example: *This Division is the most efficient in the department; it accounts for more than 90 per cent of productivity.* Do not overuse semicolons, however. Using shorter sentences is likely to be more effective.

Symbols

Measurement symbols (for example, *km, kg, nm*) should be in lowercase and should not contain full stops. A space should separate the numeral and the symbol: *600 nm*. Spell out *million* and *billion* except when referring to currency (*A\$6bn*).

Which and that

When choosing between *which* and *that*, you should use *that* as a defining pronoun and *which* as a non-defining pronoun. *The department objects to restructures that will reduce its personnel* tells your reader the *specific* restructures to which the department objects. *The department objects to restructures, which will reduce its personnel* tells your reader that the department objects to *all* restructures. The fact that restructures threaten to reduce personnel is extra information.