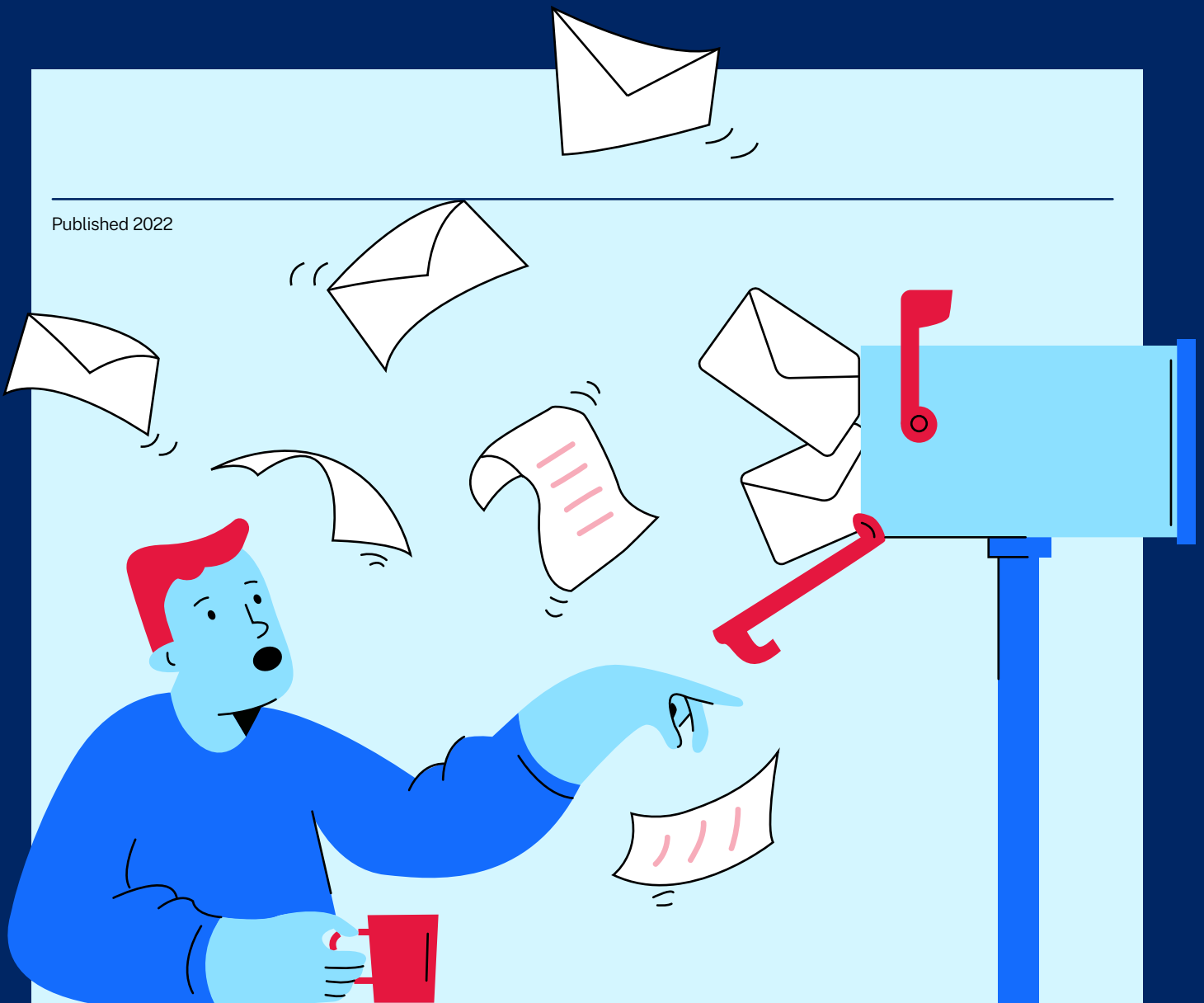


# Reducing sludge in letters and emails





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Behavioural Insights in Action

## Reducing sludge in letters and emails

Published 2022

This guide was created by the NSW Behavioural Insights Unit, with assistance from the Behavioural Insights Team, the Reading Writing Hotline and NSW Government partners.

If you have comments, questions, or feedback on the guides get in touch with us at [sludge@customerservice.nsw.gov.au](mailto:sludge@customerservice.nsw.gov.au)

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# Reducing sludge in letters and emails

Written communication is how we keep in touch with our customers. When we write to people we do so with a purpose – there is something we want our customers to know, and usually, something we want them to do.

Our communication should make it easy for our customers to do what they need to do, not confuse them or slow them down. Our letters and emails should be purposeful, clear and designed with our customers' needs in mind.

Unnecessary frictions (“sludge”) in letters and emails make it difficult for customers to understand essential information or take action. Sludge can reduce response rates, increase confusion, and worsen the customer experience.

This guide will help you improve the way you write and design letters and emails. The guide will introduce and provide examples of tools and techniques to cut sludge. These tools are based on evidence from behavioural science.

# Where to begin

There are four key elements to think about when identifying and reducing sludge in letters and emails.



## 1. Purpose and call-to-action

- Do you understand your audience and your purpose?
- Is there a clear 'call-to-action'?
- Is the purpose clear?



## 3. Language and content

- Is the letter or email personalised?
- Is the language easy to understand?
- Is the content limited to the key message?
- Have you highlighted what others are doing?
- Have you used an influential messenger?



## 2. Design and structure

- Is the structure easy to navigate?
- Does the most important information stand out?



## 4. Prompt action

- Are there clear directions on how to take the next steps?
- Are there planning prompts or checklists?
- Are there default options?
- Is it clear how much progress customers have made?
- Is any additional support provided to support customer follow through?

# Reducing sludge in letters and emails

## Quick reference guide

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### 1. Purpose and call-to-action

- ✓ Do you understand your audience and your purpose?

Clarify your purpose

- Ask yourself what the purpose of the letter is.
- Determine who your customers are.
- Assess what accessibility standards apply.

- ✓ Is there a clear call-to-action?

Identify your target behaviours

- Work through all the behaviours involved in your customers journey – determine what behaviour your correspondence is trying to prompt.

- ✓ Is the purpose clear?

Make the call-to-action clear and prominent

- Place a call-to-action among the key information at the top of the correspondence.



### 2. Design and structure

- ✓ Is the overall structure intuitive?

Divide the text of your letter or email into chunks to make it more readable.

- Place the most important information at the top.
- Break text up into shorter, digestible “chunks”.
- Use headings that are short, simple, and relevant to the reader.

- ✓ Does the most important information stand out?

Use colour, font size, and visual elements to increase the salience of your message

- Use eye-catching font colours and sizes to draw attention to the most important information.
- Use visual elements to make letters easier to understand.



## 3. Language and content



### Is the letter or email personalised?

Personalise your letters and emails to make them stand out

- Address the recipient by their name.
- Use personal pronouns in subheadings and text (where known).
- Use relevant and personalised information about the recipient.



### Is the language easy to understand?

Use Plain English (clear, concise writing, written with the reader in mind).

- Replace jargon and legal terms with easy-to-understand alternatives.
- Use the active voice rather than the passive voice.



### Is the content limited to the key message?

Focus your content on key messages, consider whether other information is truly necessary to include.

- Make the subject lines of emails short, simple, and direct.
- Direct recipients to additional information via links to outside resources, rather than including it in the correspondence.



### Have you highlighted what others are doing?

Use social norms by highlighting that others are performing the desired behaviour.

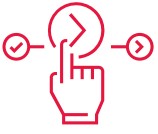
- Include data to demonstrate that most people are taking the desired action.
- Choose norms that are believable.
- Communicate a positive, rather than negative, social norm.



### Have you used an influential messenger?

Draw on the messenger effect to attract the recipient's attention.

- Add a quote from an influential or respected person.
- Incorporate user testimonials from people the recipient can relate to.



## 4. Next steps



Are there clear directions on how to take the next steps?

Give clear step-by-step instructions

- Start each step with a verb.
- Display a diagram of the step-by-step process.



Are there planning prompts or checklists?

Use planning prompts to help the recipients of your letters and emails take action.

- Prompt recipients to make a plan for how and when they will perform the desired behaviour.
- Encourage recipients to write down the time and date of key activities or appointments.



Are there default options?

Make the desired behaviour the default option.

- Make a service opt-out, rather than opt-in. (where legally and ethically appropriate)



Is it clear how much progress customers have made?

Tell recipients how close they are to achieving their goal.

- Prefill the tick boxes on completed steps in a multi-step process.



Is any additional support provided to help the customer follow through?

Help recipients follow through by reducing friction in your process

- Link email recipients directly to forms they need to complete.





# 1. Purpose and call-to-action

In this section

[Clarify your purpose](#)

# Clarify your purpose

## Ask yourself



Who is the letter for?



What is the letter trying to achieve?



What does the customer have to do to achieve that?

Before you begin making changes to your letter or email it's vital that you understand its purpose. Ask yourself: what is this letter trying to achieve? What does the customer have to do to achieve that?

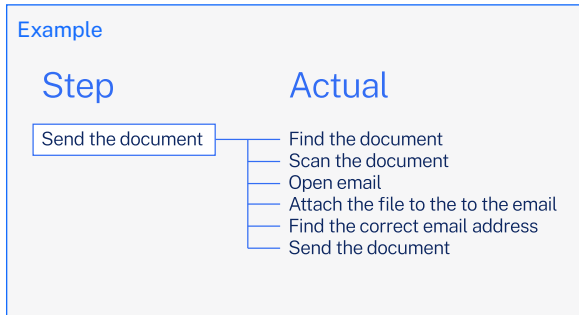
You must have a clear idea of who you are writing to, and what you are writing about. You will write an unfocused or difficult to understand document if you do not think through the audience and purpose. If you take the time to clarify the purpose to yourself, then you can make sure you get that purpose across to your customers.



## 1. Purpose and call-to-action

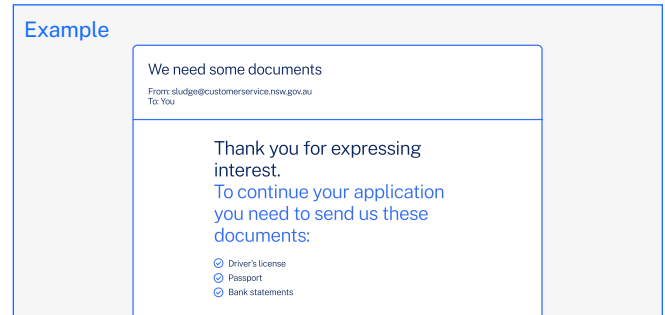
# How do I do this?

### Identify the target behaviours.



Put yourself in the shoes of your customer. Break down all the steps that they will be asked to follow. For example, if you want a customer to 'send a document', the customer has to undertake a series of behaviours like finding the document, taking a picture or scanning the document, attaching that file to the email, sending it to the right address and so on. Understanding this detail is key to reducing sludge.

### Make the call-to-action clear and prominent.



Your customer should see straight away why they have received the letter or email. For example, if they need to submit additional information then 'you need to send us these documents' should be prominent and followed by a list of what they need to send.

By putting this information upfront you attract their attention and save them the hassle of having to read the entire letter before they understand why it is relevant and what they need to do.

Your customer is more likely to take action and perform the desired behaviour if you have made that action clear to them. For example, using a clear call-to-action decreased dropout rate of apprentices by 16%. Our messages gave students timely prompts to visit specific webpages or call their local office if they needed help.

## Consider your customers' needs

When we design or update letters and emails in government we must think about the diversity of customers we are designing for.

Consider that your letter or email will likely be going out to people with different literacy levels, people who find government processes confusing, people who are time poor and people who are stressed.

Consider that a quarter of people in NSW speak a language other than English at home and that we live in a multilingual state.

We should not think of these things as deficits but as factors to plan for. Ask yourself: given our audience, how can we write best for them?

Remember – there's no downside to making your letters and emails as easy to use, as readable, and as simple as possible.



## 2. Design and structure

In this section

[Divide the text of your letter or email into chunks to make it more readable](#)

[Use visual elements to increase the salience of your message](#)



# Divide the text of your letter or email into chunks to make it more readable

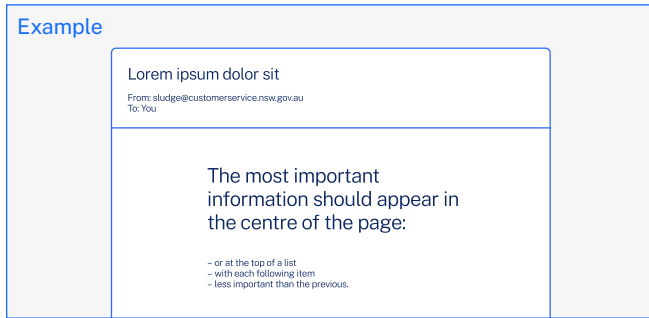


A letter or email that makes effective use of spacing, dot points, meaningful subheadings, and has logically organised content is easier for your customer to read. These small changes can significantly increase engagement and response rates.<sup>1</sup>



# How do I do this?

Place the most important information at the top.



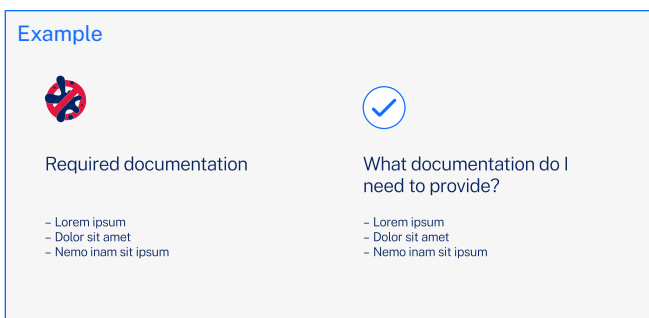
Our attention naturally gravitates toward the top of a page or list.<sup>2</sup> Use this by placing the most critical information at the top of your letter or email.

Break text up into shorter, digestible “chunks”.



Large walls of text can be hard to read. You can make it easier for your customers through ‘chunking’ information into shorter segments. Research on how people learn new information finds that chunking information can make perception, learning, and cognition easier.<sup>3</sup> Letters and emails should be short, with content separated into digestible chunks. Paragraphs should reflect the pauses a reader takes when reading the content, with one idea per paragraph and one or two sentences per paragraph.<sup>4</sup>

Use headings that are short, simple, and relevant to the reader.



One way to make headings in a letter or email relevant to the recipient is to frame them as questions written in the first person, such as “When do I need to reply to this email?” and “What documentation do I need to provide?” This technique has been used to increase comprehension of contractual terms and privacy policies compared to using topics (e.g. “Required documentation”) as headings.<sup>5</sup>



# Use colour, font size, and visual elements to increase the salience of your message<sup>6</sup>



When our customers get a letter or email, they have to take in a lot of information. To help them understand and take action we can draw their attention to the most important parts of the text, like the call-to-action. When we talk about making a message more 'salient', we mean making it stand out. To make our message stand out we can use coloured boxes or text, large or bold font, and graphic elements that visually reinforce the message.

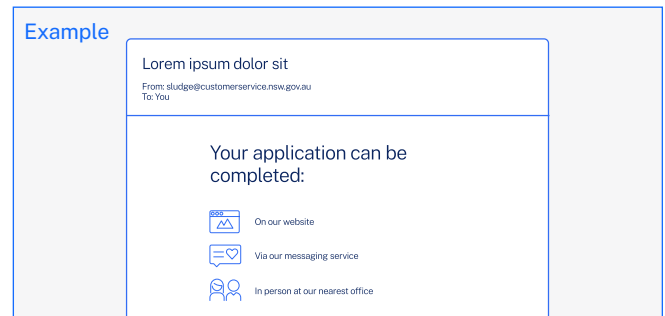
# How do I do this?

Use eye-catching font colours and sizes to draw attention to the most important information.



For example, including a red “Pay Now” stamp on fine notices drew recipients’ attention to the required action. This simple change led to a 3.1 percentage point increase in the fine payment rate compared to letters without this stamp.<sup>7</sup>

Use visual elements to make letters easier to understand.



Letters with no visual elements can be confusing and make it harder to tell what’s important. The use of symbolic icons can reinforce the meaning of the text. For example, pairing icons with a verbal explanation of key terms increased customer understanding of contractual terms and privacy policies by 34% (compared to text-only definitions).<sup>8</sup>





## 3. Language and content

In this section

[Personalise your letters and emails](#)

[Use Plain English](#)

[Focus your content on key messages](#)

[Use social norms](#)

[Draw on the messengers effect](#)

# Personalise your letters and emails to make them stand out

## Example

Payment for **your** fine is due

From: sludge@customerservice.nsw.gov.au  
To: You

Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo.

If **you** do not pay this fine in 14 days, **you** may suffer an increased penalty

Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo.

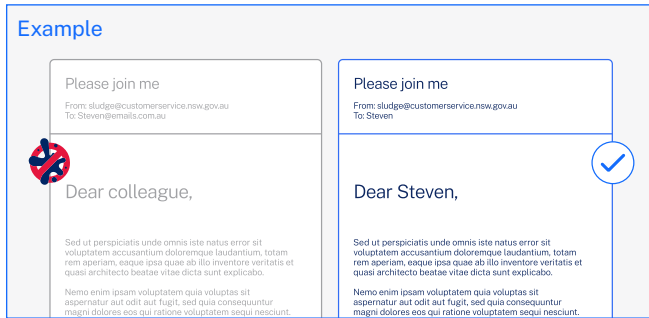
Nemo enim ipsam voluptatem quia voluptas sit aspernatur aut odit aut fugit, sed quia consequuntur magni dolores eos qui ratione voluptatem sequi nesciunt. Neque porro quisquam est, qui dolorem ipsum quia dolor sit amet, consectetur, adipisci velit, sed quia non numquam eius modi tempora incidunt ut labore et dolore

Our attention is drawn quickly and effortlessly to our name because it is important to us (personalisation).<sup>9</sup> Personalisation, tailoring content to customers using data about them (such as their name), attracts readers' attention and engages them in the content of your letter or email.<sup>10</sup>

Using personalisation helps make information more salient for our customers, as well as bringing it home to them that this is something which can impact them personally. By saying 'if you do not pay this fine in 14 days, you may suffer an increased penalty' we help customers think through the possible consequences of their choices more effectively than if we said 'unpaid fines after 14 days will incur increased penalties'.

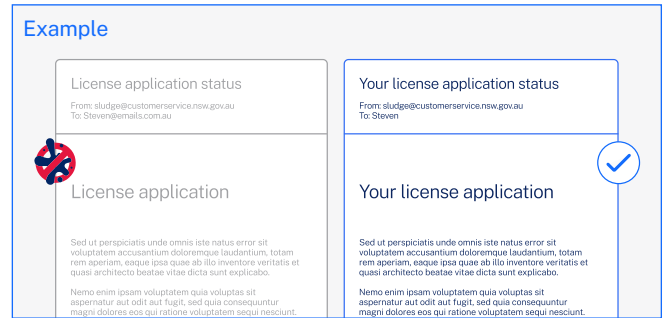
# How do I do this?

## Address the recipient by their name.



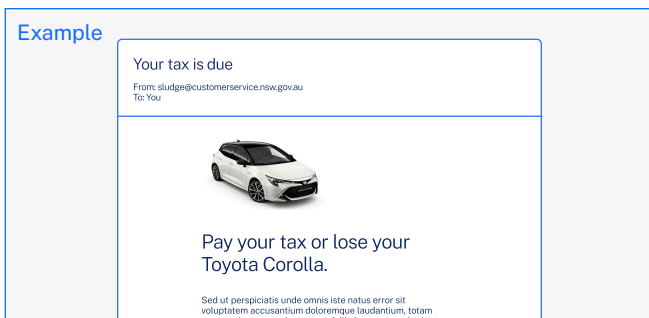
We pay more attention when we are addressed by name. For example, a UK bank wanted to increase charitable giving among their employees. A study found that 12% of employees who received a personalised email from the CEO donated a day of their salary to the bank’s designated charity, compared to only 5% who received a more generic “Dear Colleague” email.<sup>11</sup>

## Use personal pronouns in subheadings and text.



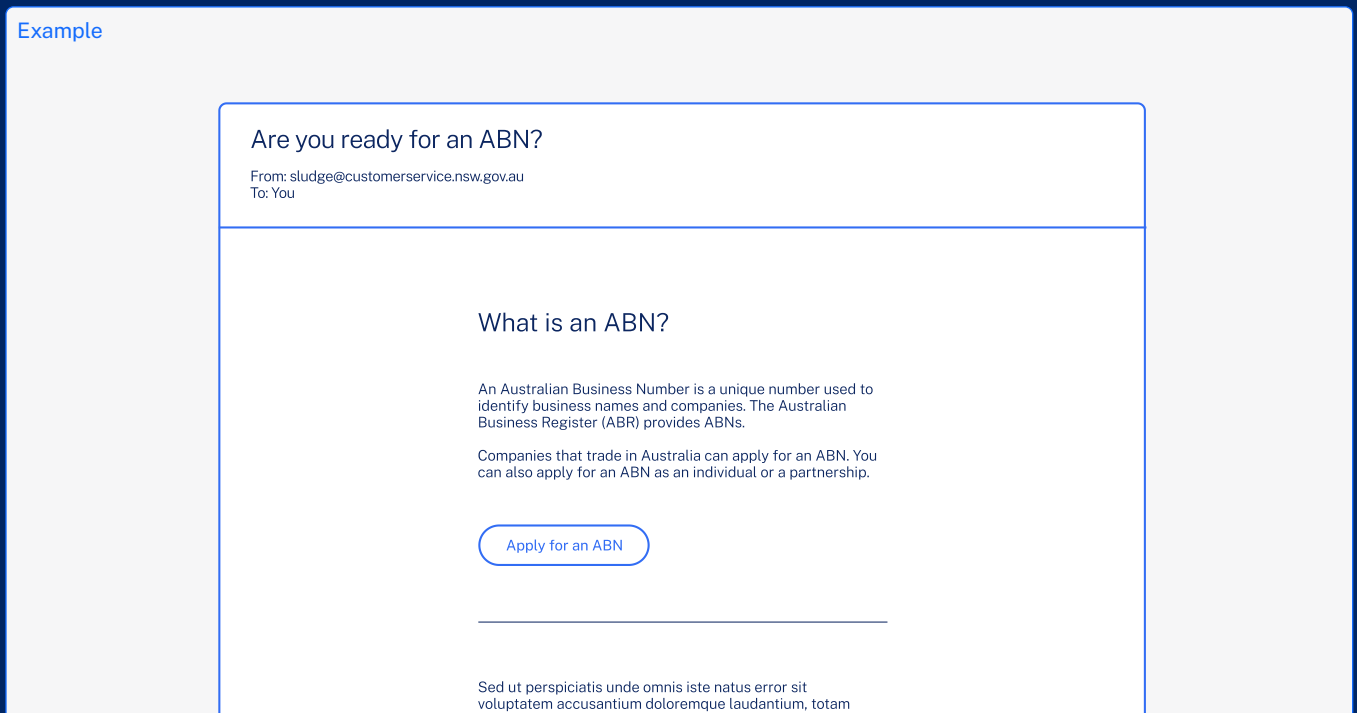
Using first (“What are my next steps?”) and second person pronouns (“What you need to do next”) in your subheadings increases their relevance to your customers. Studies show that using the second person pronoun can increase engagement with the brand using the pronoun in its posts.<sup>12</sup> Applying this in letters and emails can be very straightforward: instead of saying ‘License application’ you could say ‘Your license application’.

## Use relevant and personalised information about the recipient.



Drawing on relevant information helps make writing compelling. For example, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in the UK wanted to encourage payment of vehicle license fees. They got the best results with a letter that said, “Pay your tax or lose your [make of vehicle]” and included a photo of the vehicle.<sup>13</sup>

# Use plain english




Aim to simplify correspondence by explaining processes in Plain English. When you must use a specific jargon or legal term, explain the term with a clear, concise definition.<sup>14</sup>


# How do I do this?

## Replace jargon and legal terms with easy-to-understand alternatives.

**Example**



Applicants can utilise the customer assistance channel to enquire about the status of their ongoing application.





Once you have applied, you check where your application is up to with this link.

For example, replacing the legal term “infringement notice” with the simpler, more understandable term “unpaid fine” significantly increased the number of people paying their fine on time.<sup>15</sup>

## Use the active voice rather than the passive voice.

**Example**

<p>Your license application status</p> <p><small>From: sludge@customerservice.nsw.gov.au To: Steven@gmail.com.au</small></p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"><p>Your application has been assessed by the NSW Government</p></div> <p><small>Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo.</small></p>	<p>Your license application status</p> <p><small>From: sludge@customerservice.nsw.gov.au To: Steven</small></p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"><p>We have assessed your application</p></div> <p><small>Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo.</small></p> <p><small>Nemo enim ipsam voluptatem quia voluptas sit aspernatur aut odit aut fugit, sed quia consequuntur</small></p>
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Sentences written in the active voice (e.g. “We have assessed your application”) tend to be easier to understand, more direct and shorter than those written in the passive voice (“Your application has been assessed by the NSW Government”).

Sentences written in the active voice involve the subject of the sentence performing the action and emphasise the person or organisation who is completing the action.

Sentences in the passive voice involves the subject receiving the action. For example:

**Passive:** Your application has been assessed by the NSW Government

**Active:** We have assessed your application

**Passive:** An email was sent to you

**Active:** We sent you an email

## What is Plain English?

Plain English, or ‘plain language’, refers to a way of writing that is clear and concise and written with the reader in mind.

The International Plain Language Federation say: ‘A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure and design are so clear that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.’<sup>16</sup>

You can read more about writing in Plain English on the Plain English Foundation website.

# How do I know whether a letter or email is easy to read?

Reading a letter or email from the perspective of the recipient can be challenging, especially if you wrote it. The best way to assess readability is to test your letters and emails with customers of different literacy levels.

We understand that this is not always possible, particularly if you are rapidly developing multiple versions of a letter or email. If you can't test your work with customers, we recommend using digital tools to assess the readability of your letter or email.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test is designed to measure how many years of formal education would be required, on average, to understand a passage of text.<sup>17</sup> The fewer years of formal education required, the easier the text is to read and understand.

Note: In the Australian context these 'grade levels' and years of formal education do not apply. You should not take the results to literally indicate that a given piece of text is readable for someone with X many years of formal education.

That said – the grade levels remain as useful indicators of change. If you use the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test on a letter and it says 'grade level 11-12', then revise the letter and get a 'grade level 7-8' result, you can tell you've changed it for the better.

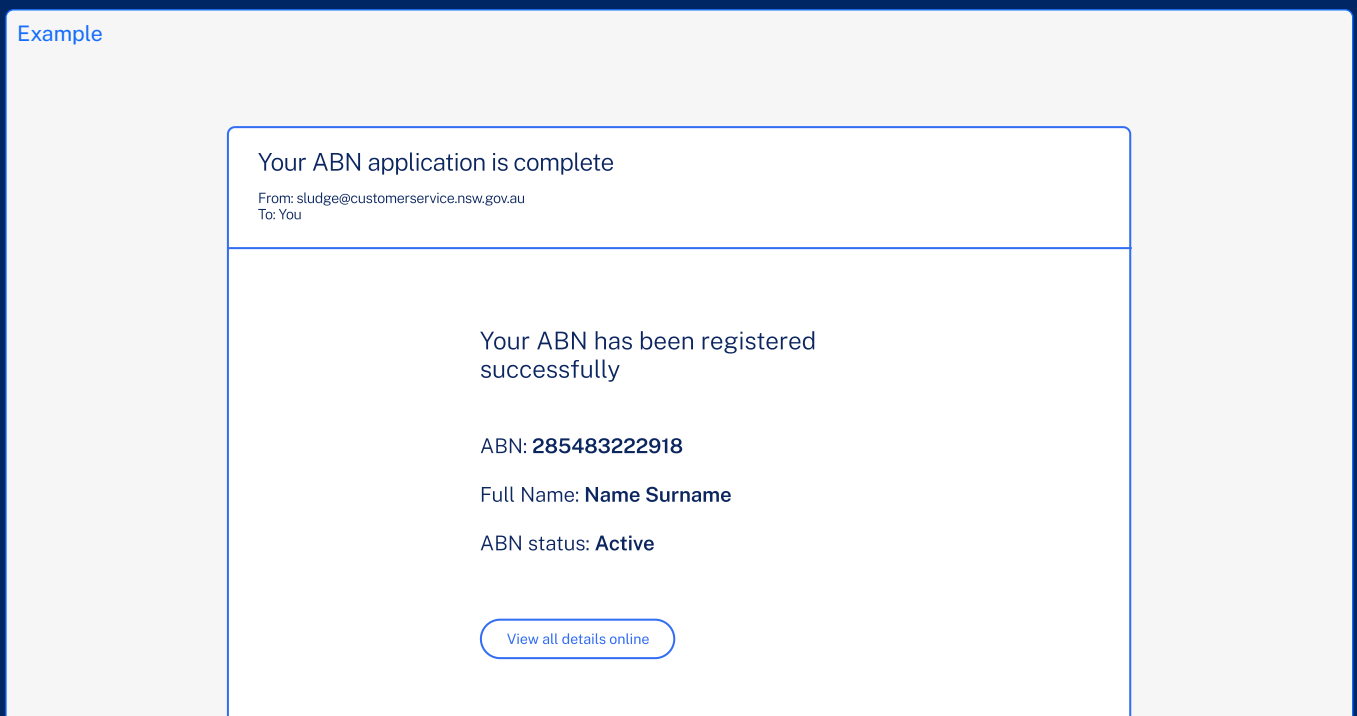
You can use online tools to conduct a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test on your own writing and it has even been built into many word processors.

The Hemingway Editor is a helpful online tool, which identifies lengthy complex sentences and common writing errors.

## Case study

We used the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test in a project aiming to reduce Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) breaches. The test showed the ADVO had a grade level of score of 13.5. Behavioural insights principles were applied to simplify the ADVO, so that the new Orders achieved a score of 8.<sup>18</sup>

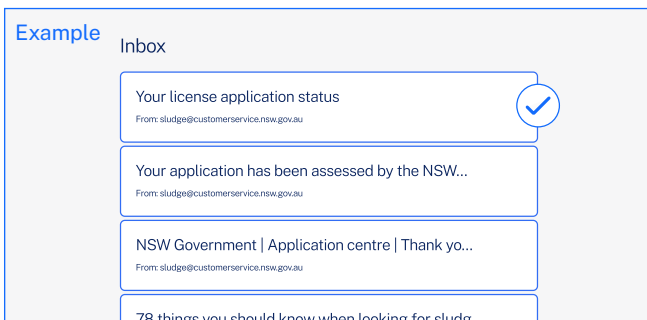
# Focus your content on key messages



People have a finite capacity for sifting through large amounts of complex information to identify what is most important. Streamline your letter or email by including only the information that the recipient needs at that time – if something does not seem necessary, cut it out.

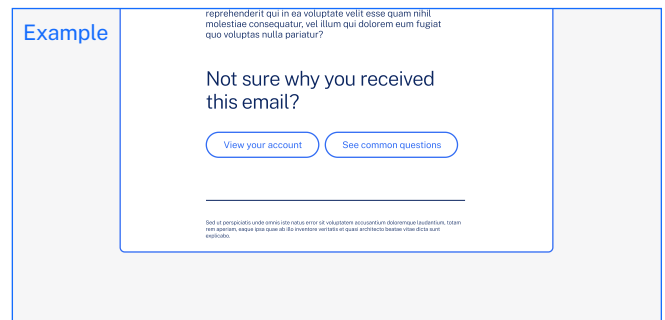
# How do I do this?

Make the subject lines of emails short, simple, and direct.



The subject line of an email has a direct impact on whether the recipient will open it. For example, an analysis of response rates to over 40 million emails found that subject lines with 3-4 words received more responses than subject lines with more words.<sup>19</sup> However, a too-short subject line can also backfire: the same analysis found that only 14% of emails with no subject line at all received a response.

Direct recipients to additional information via links to outside resources, rather than including it in the correspondence.



Recipients of your letter or email need to have sufficient information to understand what to do next. However, including too much information can overwhelm them and make their next steps unclear. Include only “need to know” information, providing links to external sources of “nice to know” information for recipients to consult as needed.

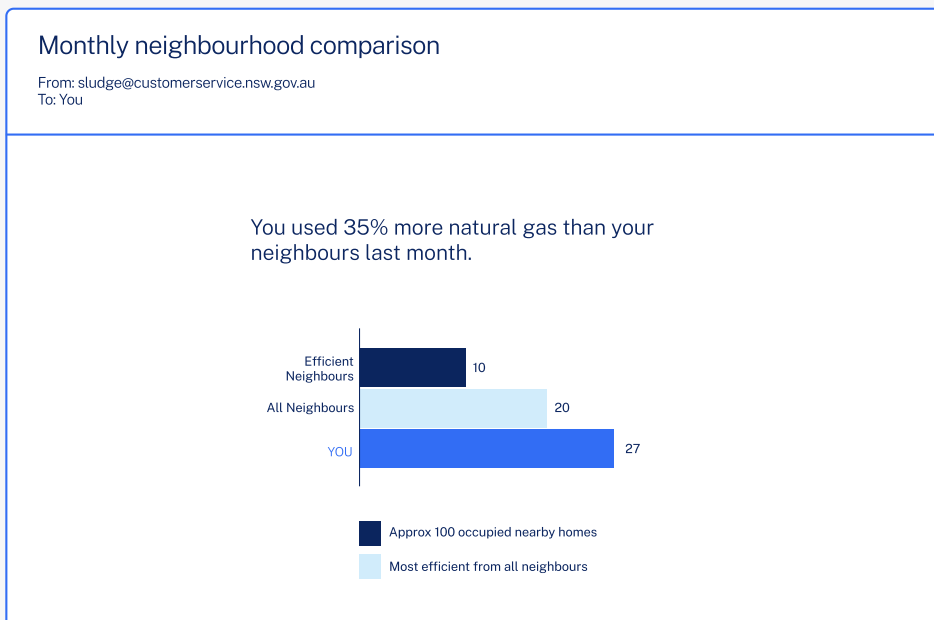
## Note

when linking to external sources you should follow Cybersecurity NSW best practice: avoid shortened links and send to a reputable source (e.g. nsw.gov.au).



# Use social norms by highlighting that others are performing the desired behaviour

## Example

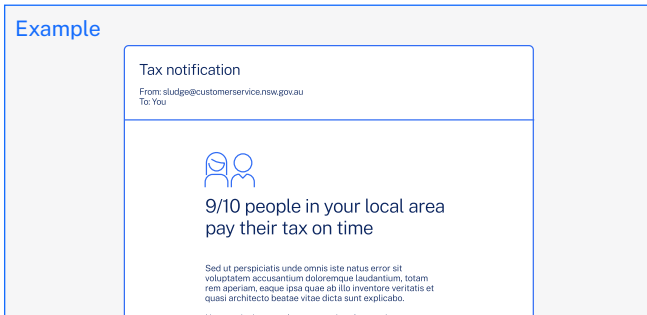


People are social: we like to do what others are doing and to behave in ways that conform to others' expectations.<sup>20</sup> If we want our letters and emails to be more compelling then we can put the action we're asking them to do in a social context and show our customers that other people are doing it too.<sup>21</sup>

When using social norms in any channel there are two key guidelines: be specific (i.e., stating a percentage, rather than just saying "a majority") and be accurate (i.e., the percentage must be a true statement about community behaviour, which you can derive from your administrative data).

# How do I do this?

Include data to demonstrate that most people are taking the desired action.



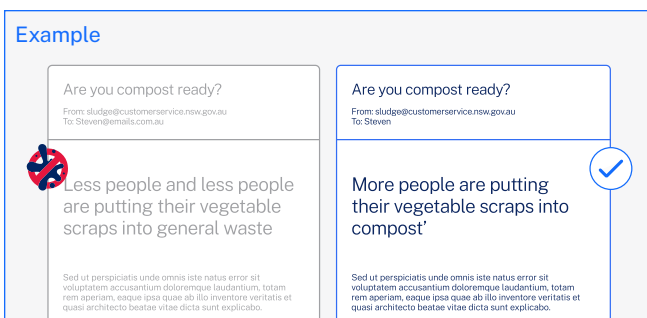
For example, including the message that “9 out of 10 people in [the person’s local community] pay their tax on time” in tax notification letters increased payment rates by 16% compared to the standard reminder letter.<sup>22</sup>

Choose norms that are believable.



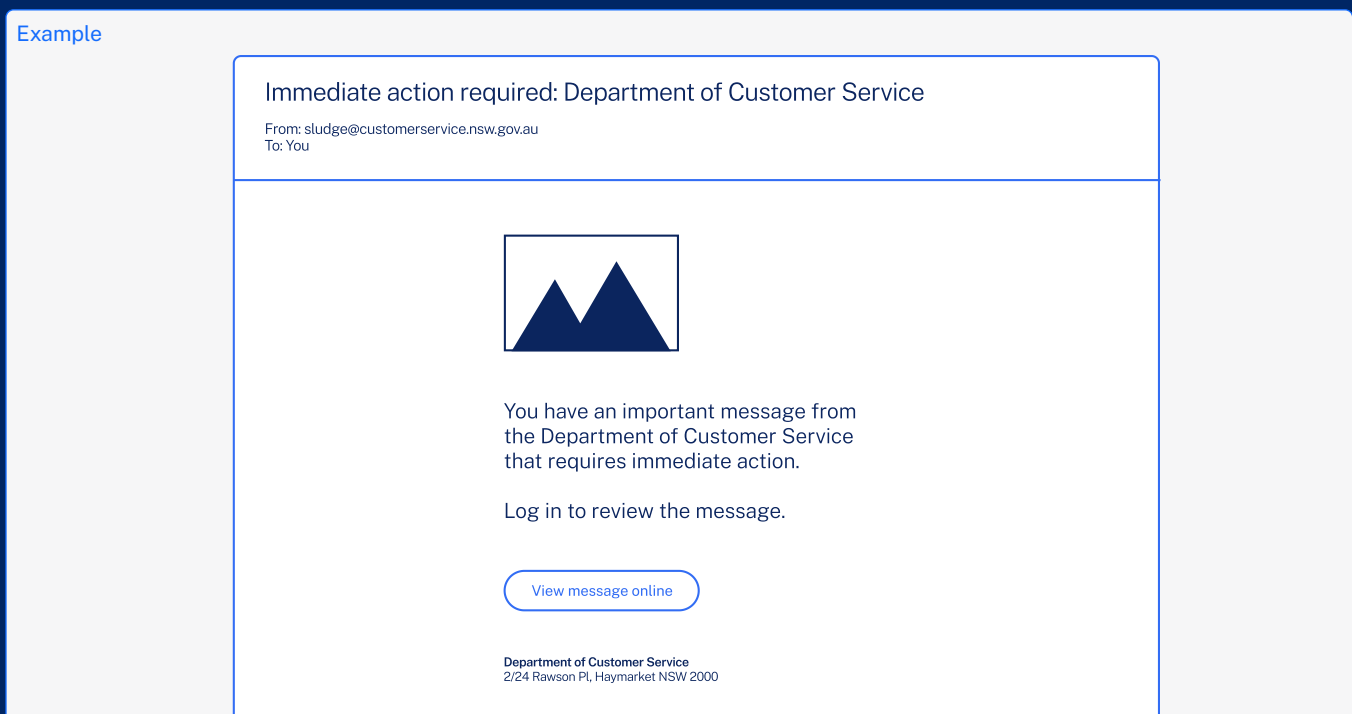
When the majority of people don’t believe the description of a social norm, it is less effective in changing behaviour. For example, a survey of college students in the United States showed that the majority did not believe the message “most students drink 0 to 4 drinks when they party.” This lessened the impact of a social norms campaign to reduce binge drinking that used this statistic.<sup>23</sup>

Communicate a positive, rather than negative, social norm.



Stating that most people do not perform the desired behaviour can inadvertently reinforce that norm. This is known as the boomerang effect.<sup>24</sup> If the desired behaviour is currently only performed by a minority of people, use dynamic social norms. Dynamic social norms highlight that an increasing number people are starting to do something.<sup>25</sup> For example, if you’re trying to encourage people to properly dispose of food waste, you could use a dynamic social norm and state that: “More and more people in your suburb are putting their vegetable scraps into compost rather than general waste”.

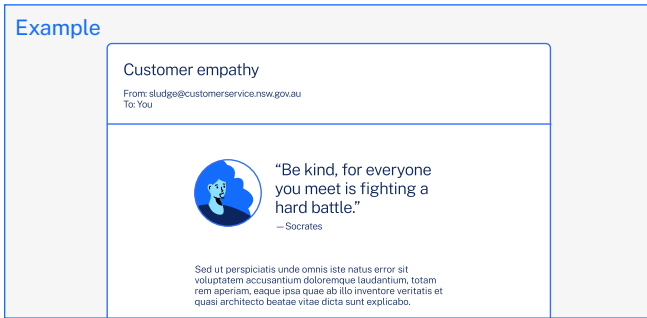
# Draw on the messenger effect to attract the recipient's attention



The sender of a letter or email has a powerful influence on the way the recipient receives it.<sup>26</sup> We want our letters to stand out and be compelling. If we can use a trusted messenger, we make our message more likely to get our customers attention and increase the odds of them acting on the message's request.

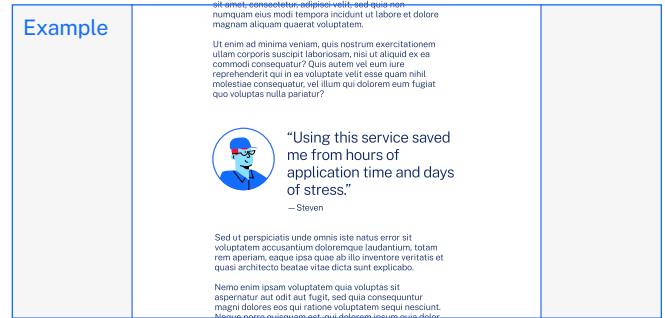
# How do I do this?

Add a quote from an influential or respected person.

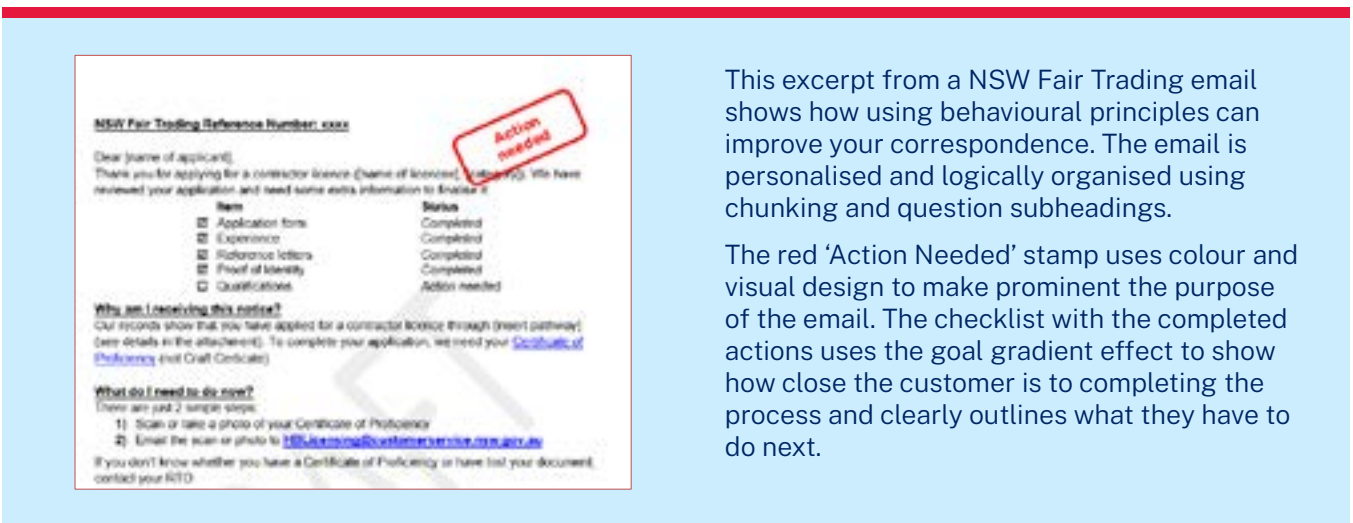


For example, the Department of Health ran a trial to test the impact of letters from Australia’s Chief Medical Officer to GPs who were prescribing more antibiotics than the norm, which reduced antibiotic prescription by 12 per cent over six months.<sup>27</sup>

Incorporate user testimonials from people the recipient can relate to.

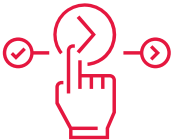
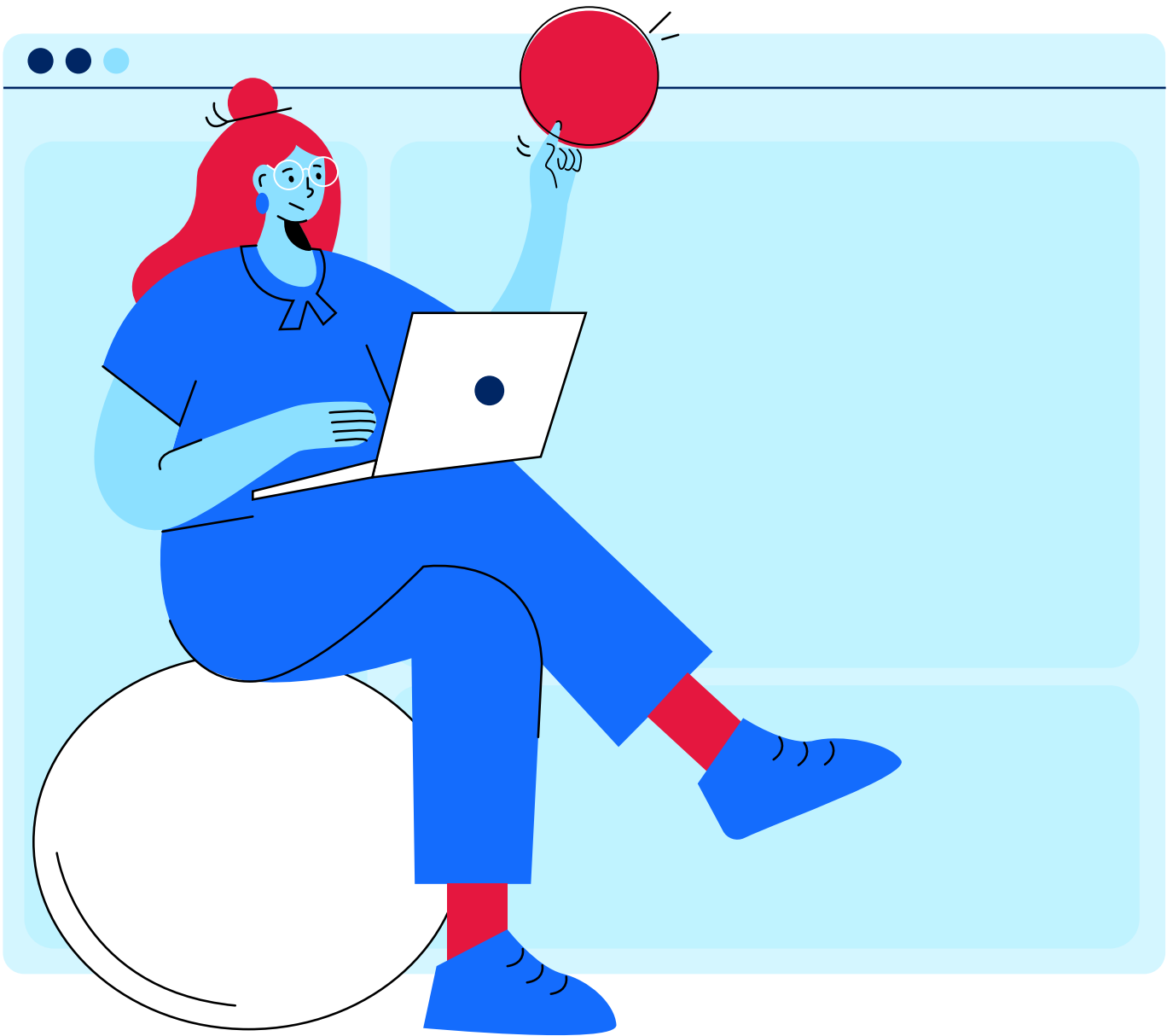


For example, police departments in nine American cities wrote to potential applicants showing a real officer in the applicant’s city accompanied by a testimonial about how much the officer valued and benefited from being part of the police force. This drove significant increases in police force applications in all cities, particularly among people who were demographically similar to the officers shown on the postcards.<sup>28</sup>



This excerpt from a NSW Fair Trading email shows how using behavioural principles can improve your correspondence. The email is personalised and logically organised using chunking and question subheadings.

The red ‘Action Needed’ stamp uses colour and visual design to make prominent the purpose of the email. The checklist with the completed actions uses the goal gradient effect to show how close the customer is to completing the process and clearly outlines what they have to do next.



## 4. Prompt action

In this section

[Give clear step-by-step instructions](#)

[Use planning prompts to help the recipient take action](#)

[Make the desired behaviour the default option](#)

[Tell recipient how close they are to achieving their goal](#)

[Help recipients follow through by reducing friction in your process](#)

# Give clear step-by-step instructions

Example

ullam corporis suscipit laboriosam, nisi ut aliquid ex ea  
commodi consequatur? Quis autem vel eum iure  
reprehenderit qui in ea voluptate velit esse quam nihil  
molestiae consequatur, vel illum qui dolorem eum fugiat  
quo voluptas nulla pariatur?

## To complete your application

- 1 Visit the website
- 2 Complete our simple form
- 3 That's all, our team will contact you in 2-3 business days

[Get started](#)

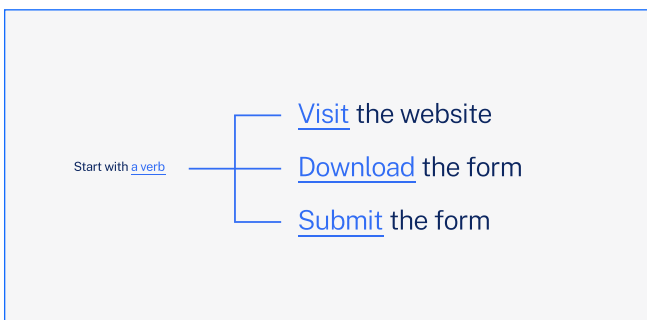
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We respond best to instructions that are broken down into steps.<sup>29</sup> When the purpose of your letter or email is to prompt the recipient to do something, tell them how to do it by giving a list of the necessary actions.

# How do I do this?

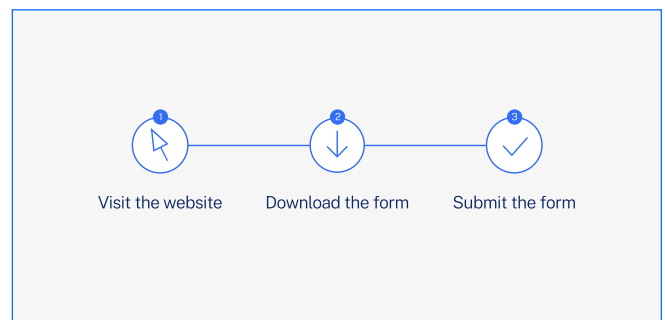
## Start each step with a verb.



Using a verb at the beginning of a step provides a clear direction and signposts the need for an action  
For example

1. Go to the website
2. Download this document
3. Submit that form

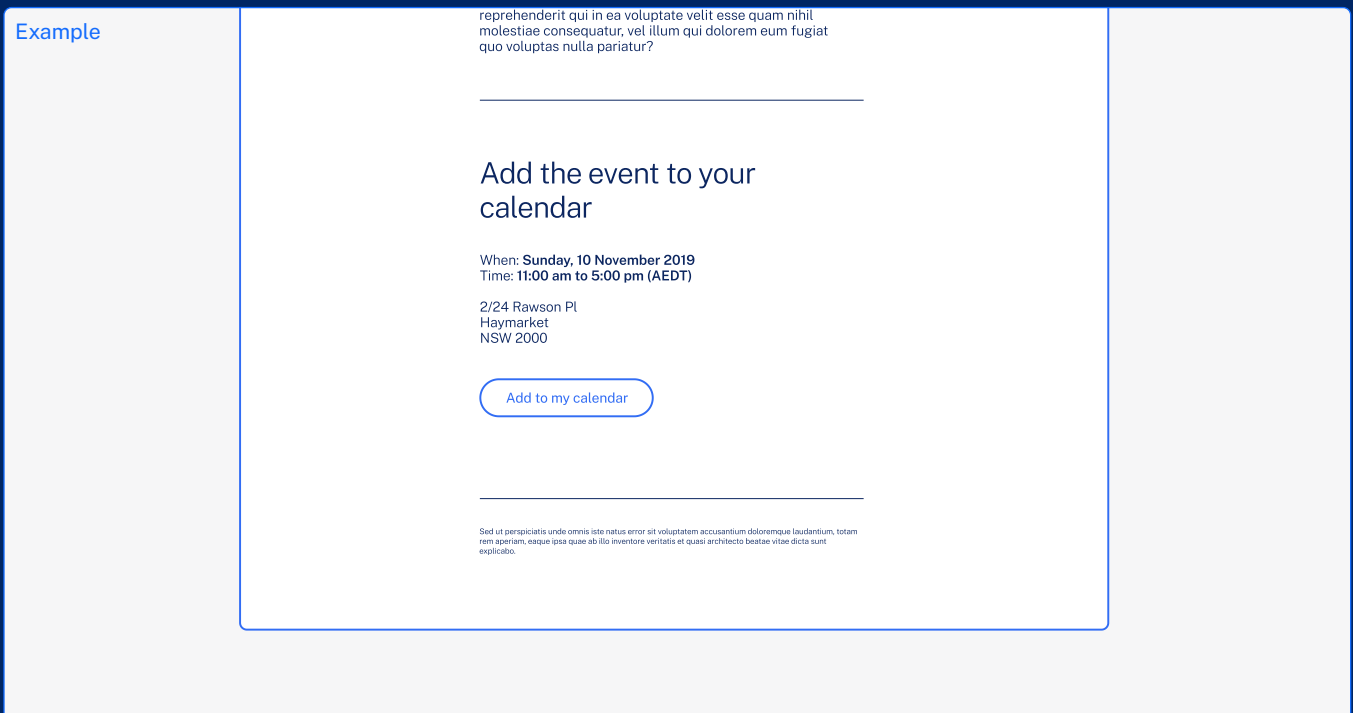
## Display a diagram of the step-by-step process.



For example, a letter with a step-by-step diagram that set out the steps required to update the electoral register increased the accuracy of modifications and deletions made to the register compared to a BAU letter.<sup>30</sup>

Keep each step simple  
by only including one  
action per step.

# Use planning prompts to help the recipients of your letters and emails take action



Planning prompts ask our customers to create a plan to complete their intended action. The more specific, clear, and personal this plan is to the individual, the more likely it is to be effective. Planning prompts work because they help customers think about how to overcome obstacles to achieving their goal, remind them of their initial intentions, and provide a tangible way for them to commit to taking action.







## 4. Prompt action

# How do I do this?

Prompt recipients to make a plan for how and when they will perform the desired behaviour.


**Example**

<p>Are you compost ready?</p> <p>From: sludge@customerservice.nsw.gov.au To: Steven@emails.com.au</p>  <p>It is recommend that people compost instead of using general waste.</p> <p><small>Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo.</small></p>	<p>Are you compost ready?</p> <p>From: sludge@customerservice.nsw.gov.au To: Steven</p> <p>What is the best time and place for you to prepare your compost waste?</p>  <p><small>Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo.</small></p>
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For example, women who were prompted to decide where and when they would conduct a breast self-examination were 4.5 times more likely to have done so after a month than those who did not receive the prompt.<sup>31</sup>

Encourage recipients to write down the time and date of key activities or appointments.

**Example**

<p>Your appointment is coming up</p> <p>From: sludge@customerservice.nsw.gov.au To: You</p>  <p>Write this down. Your appointment is set for 10am, Wednesday 1 June</p> <p><small>Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam</small></p>
--

For example, employees of a large firm in the United States were offered free influenza vaccines at an on-site clinic. Employees who received a reminder that included a prompt to write down the time and date of their appointment had a vaccination rate that was 4.2 percentage points higher than employees who received a generic appointment reminder.<sup>32</sup>

# Make the desired behaviour the default option

We have a strong tendency to go with the default or pre-set option, since it is easy to do so. Use this in your letters and emails. When you offer your customers a choice of actions to take, make the desired action the default option. Setting an option as the default makes it easier for the customer and makes it more likely that they will adopt the desired behaviour.

## How do I do this?

Make a service opt-out, rather than opt-in.

<p>Example</p>	<p><small>numquam eius modi tempora incidunt ut labore et dolore magnam aliquam quaerat voluptatem.</small></p> <p><small>Ut enim ad minima veniam, quis nostrum exercitationem ullam corporis suscipit laboriosam, nisi ut aliquid ex ea commodi consequatur? Quis autem vel eum iure reprehenderit qui in ea voluptate velit esse quam nihil molestiae consequatur, vel illum qui dolorem eum fugiat quo voluptas nulla pariatur?</small></p> <p>You have been enrolled in our grant program as you fulfil all criteria.</p> <p>Don't want to receive grant benefits? <a href="#">Unenrol here.</a></p> <p><small>Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo.</small></p> <p><small>Nemo enim ipsam voluptatem quia voluptas sit aspernatur aut odit aut fugit, sed quia consequuntur</small></p>
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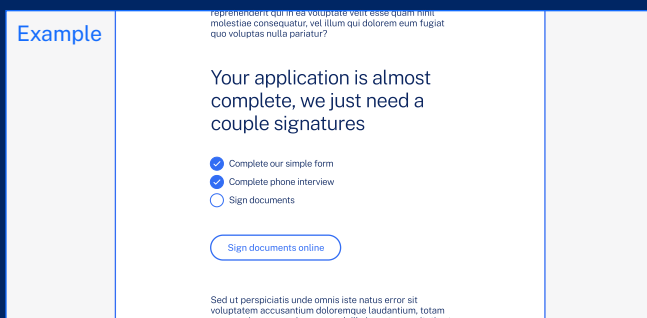
For example, more consumers choose greener energy options, when this is presented as the default option.<sup>33</sup> If you are contacting customers to let them know they are eligible for a grant or program, consider defaulting them to being enrolled in the program so they only need to act if they want to leave it.

# Tell recipients how close they are to achieving their goal

We are more motivated to take action when they are told how much effort is left to reach our goals, rather than how much effort we have already expended. This is called a goal gradient. For example, for a multi-step process, show the recipient of your letter or email how much progress they have already made toward their ultimate goal with a progress bar or a checklist.

## How do I do this?

Prefill the tick boxes on completed steps in a multi-step process.



For example, a study of coffee shop customers showed a difference in purchase behaviour with different types of loyalty cards. Customers who received a loyalty card that showed 12 tick boxes, with 2 already ticked and 10 blank, made more coffee purchases than those whose loyalty card showed only 10 blank tick boxes.<sup>34</sup>

# Help recipients follow through by reducing friction in your process

Example

commodi consequatur? Quis autem vel eum iure reprehenderit qui in ea voluptate velit esse quam nihil molestiae consequatur, vel illum qui dolorem eum fugiat quo voluptas nulla pariatur?

## To complete your application

- ① Visit the website
- ② Complete our simple form
- ③ That's all, our team will contact you in 2-3 business days

[Get started](#)

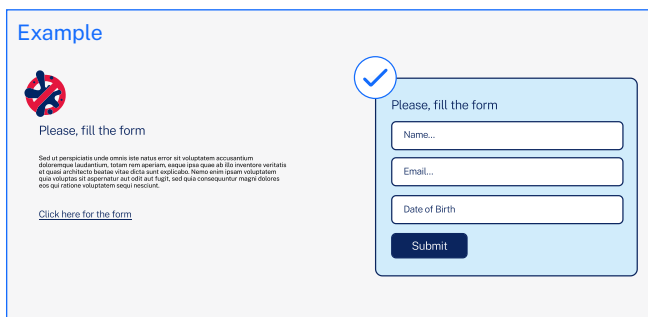
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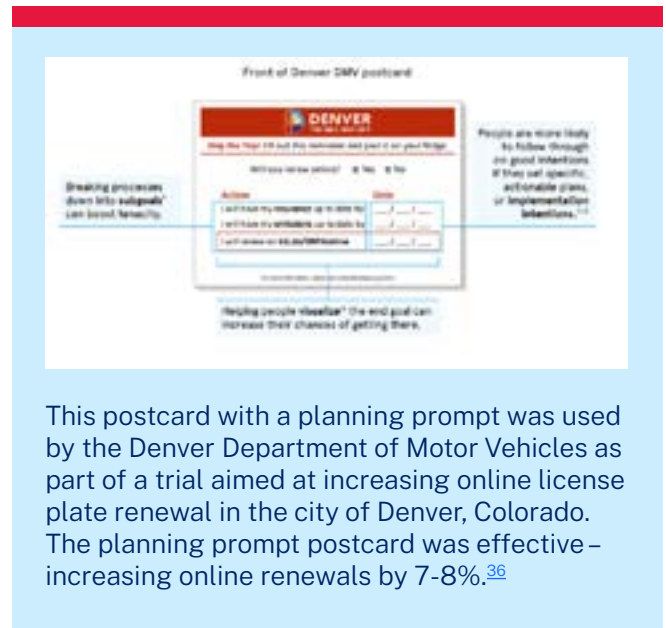
Make sure that your customers are being guided through the process in the most efficient way possible, without superfluous steps.

# How do I do this?

Link email recipients directly to forms they need to complete.



For example, the UK Government wanted to improve tax collection by making it easier for people to pay. An email that directed recipients to the specific form they were required to complete, as opposed to the web page that included a link to the form, increased form completion rates from 19% to 23%.<sup>35</sup>



This postcard with a planning prompt was used by the Denver Department of Motor Vehicles as part of a trial aimed at increasing online license plate renewal in the city of Denver, Colorado. The planning prompt postcard was effective – increasing online renewals by 7-8%.<sup>36</sup>

## How to test whether changes to your letter or email work

What works is not always consistent or certain. Even when we use evidence-based behavioural insights, we cannot always be sure what will work and what will not in a particular context. Testing proposed changes to your letters and emails is a critical step because it:

- Enables you to be confident that your changes yield the desired benefits
- Helps you minimise unintended consequences
- Helps you maximise cost-benefit because you will only implement and scale the changes that are proven to work

To learn more about testing and find a testing method which works for you read our guide to testing here.

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# We want to hear from you!

If you have comments, questions, or feedback  
on the guides get in touch with us at  
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Behavioural Insights in Action

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