

# Illustrating the Better Bills Guideline

This document contains explanatory information to be read alongside the example bills which have been published to illustrate the requirements of the Better Bills Guideline. It also refers to research commissioned by the AER and published on the AER website.

The Better Bills Guideline was published on 31 March 2022. The guideline is designed to ensure that small customers receive billing information that allows them to easily understand:

- how much, when and how to pay
- how their bill was calculated, and whether it conforms to their contract
- their energy consumption and production, and related costs and revenue, to assist with using energy efficiently, comparing their contract with others available, and considering options for energy supply other than through the distribution system
- how to dispute or raise a query in relation to their bill
- how to access interpreter services and seek financial assistance
- how to report a fault or emergency.

In doing so, the guideline aims to simplify energy bills, promote consumer choice and participation in the energy market, and protect consumers while enabling innovation and competition. To achieve these goals, the guideline requires retailers to:

- **provide certain types of billing information**, including a summary of the customer's current plan and (at least once every 100 days) a message advising whether the retailer can offer the customer a better plan
- **provide billing information using a tiered approach**, to minimise clutter and ensure that the most important information is provided upfront
- **apply design principles to all billing information**, to ensure the bill is designed in a way that prioritises comprehension and draws on practices that have been proven to improve comprehension.

This document explains the requirements of the guideline with reference to:

- illustrative example bills developed by the AER, including a paginated example bill and an unpaginated example bill
- research commissioned by the AER to inform the development of these examples (also available from the Better Bills Guideline page on the AER website).

The process for developing these examples was as follows:

1. We designed initial prototypes with reference to existing examples and research.
2. We tested these initial prototypes in consumer interviews.
3. We refined the prototype designs based on feedback received.
4. We tested the refined prototypes in an online behavioural survey and additional interviews.
5. We further refined the prototypes based on research findings.

Although we hope that these examples will be a useful illustrative resource, retailers are encouraged to use their own insights and testing to continue to improve bill designs in compliance with the guideline.


**This document is not intended to be a comprehensive source of information on the requirements of the guideline.** Anyone interested in understanding how to comply with the Better Bills Guideline should refer to the guideline and accompanying notice.

All documents related to the guideline, including our research, can be found through our website at: [www.aer.gov.au](http://www.aer.gov.au)


# Paginated example

The guideline requirements apply to both paginated and unpaginated bills. A paginated bill provides information on separate pages either digitally (for example, as a PDF document) or physically (for example, as a paper bill). The design of our example paginated bill has been informed by research, including research commissioned specifically for the purpose of developing these example bills. Referring to this research in applying the design principles allowed us to prioritise comprehension. Our research found the examples performed well on key consumer outcomes of comprehension, appeal, trust and confidence to take action.

**TAX INVOICE**



**Retailer Name**  
ABN: 11 222 333 444



**Jane Citizen**  
PO Box 123  
Anytown STATE 0000

Account number: 123456  
Bill issue date: 1 April 2022  
For supply at: 1 Street Road, Anytown STATE 0000  
National Metering Identifier (NMI): 0123456789







**Need help?**  
Enquiries and complaints  
Retailer Name: 131 131  
Faults and emergencies  
Distributor Name: 11 22 33  
Disputes  
Ombudsman: 1800 111 222

**Your bill**  
Your amount due is  
**\$79.87**  
due on  
**27 April 2022**

**Could you save money on another plan?**  
Based on your past usage, our **Super Saver Plus** plan may cost you up to **\$81.45** less per year than your current plan.  
To switch plans, go to [retailer.com.au](http://retailer.com.au) or call us on **131 131**. Conditions may apply.  
The Australian Energy Regulator requires us to include this information.

Compare plans from other retailers at Energy Made Easy  
[www.energymadeeasy.gov.au](http://www.energymadeeasy.gov.au)

**How to pay**

 <b>PAY ON OUR WEBSITE</b> Pay with your credit card or set up a direct debit online at <a href="http://retailer.com.au/pay">retailer.com.au/pay</a> .	 <b>PAY BY BPAY</b> Billir Code: 12345 Reference: 123456 Contact your participating financial institution for information on BPAY.	 <b>PAY BY POST BILLPAY</b> Billir Code: 1234 Reference: 123456 Call 131 816 to pay by credit card or go to <a href="http://postbillpay.com.au">postbillpay.com.au</a> to pay on the internet.
 <b>PAY BY PHONE</b> Call 131 131 to pay by credit card (up to \$1,500 per bill) or set up a direct debit over the phone.	 <b>PAY IN PERSON</b> Pay by cash, EFTOS or cheque at any Australia Post Office.	 <b>PAY BY MAIL</b> Make your cheque payable to Retailer Name and post to PO Box 123, Town STATE 0000

## 1. Uncluttered design helps customers find information quickly

The guideline requires retailers to use white space to reduce clutter. There is no hard-and-fast rule about what constitutes 'enough' white space, but our research findings suggest the layout used as the basis for this design was the easiest to read, as consumers were able to achieve equivalent comprehension after less reading time.

## 2. Accessible colours group, differentiate and highlight information

The guideline requires retailers to use appropriate colour and shading to group, differentiate and highlight information. We tested two colour variations for our example bills, both of which passed industry-standard visual accessibility tests. This option was found to appear more clearly and consistently on consumers' screens in our research.

## 3. The better offer message is prominent

Retailers are now required to let customers know if they might be able to offer them a better plan, based on the information available to the retailer. This is known as a 'better offer message'. The guideline prescribes specific wording for key parts of the message, with some flexibility for other parts of the message. We have used shading, white space, and bold font to make sure the message is prominent and easy to find in our examples.

## 4. The Energy Made Easy link is presented clearly

Retailers are now required to include a link to our plan comparison website Energy Made Easy, although the exact wording used to explain the link is flexible. Our research showed the importance of making it clear that Energy Made Easy allows consumers to compare plans from *other* retailers, whereas the better offer message only relates to plans available from their current retailer. Drawing on our research findings, we've made this message clear by using explicit wording and differentiating its visual presentation from the better offer message (in this case, through a variation in the shading used).

## 5. Information is placed where consumers expect to find it

We tested an alternative bill layout in our research, but the findings indicated that consumers find bills easier to read if information is placed where they expect to find it (for example, the amount due in the top-right and payment information at the bottom).

### Important information

#### Payment assistance

Call 131 131  
If you are having difficulty paying your account, please contact us to discuss payment assistance.

#### National Relay Service

Call 1300 555 727

#### Interpreter service

Call 131 132

Servizio Interpreti  
Dịch Vụ Thông Ngôn  
口譯服務  
خدمة مترجم  
Услуги переводчика

### About your current plan

#### You are currently on our 'Simple Saver' plan

Your plan includes 15% usage discount (expires 31 March 2023)

Your plan includes 20% GreenPower

### Understand your bill

This bill is based on an estimation of your usage. To check your actual usage, you can find instructions for reading your electricity meter at: [retailer.com.au/how-to-read-your-meter](http://retailer.com.au/how-to-read-your-meter)

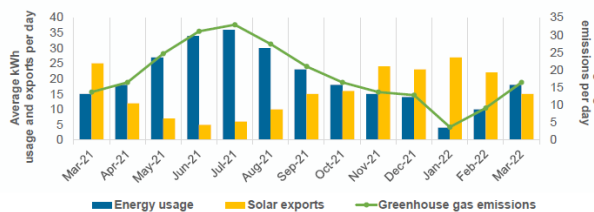
1 March 2022 –  
31 March 2022

	Previous reading	Current reading	Quantity	Rate	Amount
<b>Supply charge</b>			31 days	\$1.02 / day	\$31.62
<b>Peak usage</b> 6 am – 10 pm	20189	20704	515 kWh	\$0.29 / kWh	\$149.35
<b>Off-peak usage</b> 10 pm – 6 am	10093	10145	52 kWh	\$0.13 / kWh	\$6.76
<b>GST (10%)</b>					\$18.77
<b>Solar exports</b> Feed-in tariff	8763	9226	463 kWh	– \$0.09 / kWh	– \$41.67
<b>Usage discount (15%)</b>					– \$25.76
<b>Government energy rebate</b>					– \$24.20
<b>TOTAL BILL</b>					<b>\$114.87</b>
<b>Payment received (15 March 2022)</b>					– \$35.00
<b>TOTAL DUE</b>					<b>\$79.87</b>

### Compare your usage over time

This chart shows your average daily energy usage, solar exports and greenhouse gas emissions for each of the last 12 months.

Average daily kWh for  
this billing period  
Energy usage: 18 kWh  
Solar exports: 15 kWh



Under the tiered approach to billing information, Tier 1 information must appear on the first page of a paginated bill, while Tier 2 information must commence on the second page. Additional information, which is any information not required by the guideline, must not appear before Tier 2 information. This requirement helps ensure that the most important information is provided upfront, followed by other relevant billing information, with the goal of reducing clutter and making key information easier to find.

## 6. Bill elements are designed to be accessible for screen readers

Consumers with visual impairments may use screen readers to read a paginated PDF bill. To make our example bill more accessible to these consumers, the bill elements are designed to assist screen readers to correctly identify the information within.

## 7. Bold headings and subheadings make the table easier to read

Our research indicated that consumers found the understand your bill section easier to read when components were differentiated using shading and bold text.

## 8. Tariff information is provided where it is most salient

Retailers must now provide a summary of all applicable tariffs and charges, including charging windows (for example, 6 am – 10 pm for peak usage). This summary can be provided in either the plan summary section (shown here in the top-right) or the understand your bill section (shown here in the middle of the page). In this case, our research indicated that consumers found the information most helpful when it was provided in the understand your bill section, next to other relevant information.

## 9. Specific details help consumers make sense of billing information

Our research showed that consumers found it helpful to see specific details and explanatory text in the understand your bill section where relevant (for example, the date of a payment received or an explanation for an account in credit).

## 10. Descriptive headings and titles make charts easier to interpret

This chart combines Tier 2 information (energy usage and exports) with additional information (greenhouse gas emissions). According to our research, there is no perfect way to present energy usage information, with different designs scoring similarly on comprehension and consumers expressing different preferences. However, we did find that providing clear and descriptive headings (for example, 'Compare your usage over time'), axis titles (for example, 'Average kWh usage and exports per day'), and legend titles (for example, 'Energy usage') can assist with interpreting charts.

# Unpaginated example



**Retailer Name**

## Your bill

TAX INVOICE

Customer name: **Jane Citizen**  
 Mailing address: **PO Box 123, Anytown STATE 0000**  
 Account number: **123456**  
 Bill issue date: **1 April 2022**  
 For supply at: **1 Street Road, Anytown STATE 0000**  
 National Metering Identifier (NMI): **0123456789**

Your amount due is  
**\$79.87**  
 due on  
**27 April 2022**

### Could you save money on another plan?

Based on your past usage, our **Super Saver Plus** plan may cost you up to **\$81.45** less per year than your current plan.

To switch plans, go to [retailer.com.au](http://retailer.com.au) or call us on **131 131**. Conditions may apply.

The Australian Energy Regulator requires us to include this information.

Compare plans from other retailers at Energy Made Easy: [www.energymadeeasy.gov.au](http://www.energymadeeasy.gov.au)

### Need help?

#### Enquiries and complaints

Retailer Name  
131 131

#### Faults and emergencies

Distributor Name  
11 22 33

#### Disputes

Ombudsman Name  
1800 111 222

### How to pay

#### Pay on our website

Pay with your credit card or set up a direct debit online at [retailer.com.au/pay](http://retailer.com.au/pay).

#### Pay by BPAY

Contact your participating financial institution for information on BPAY.



Biller Code: 12345  
Reference: 123456

#### Pay by Post Billpay

Call **131 816** to pay by credit card or go to [postbillpay.com.au](http://postbillpay.com.au) to pay on the internet.



Biller Code: 1234  
Reference: 123456

The guideline requirements apply to both paginated and unpaginated bills. Unpaginated bills are expected to become more common as billing systems and technologies continue to progress. Our example unpaginated bill has been designed as an HTML-style bill that may be received directly in the body of an email. Although there are no separate pages in this example, for the purposes of this explanatory document we have broken up our unpaginated example into three sections. As you can see, this example applies many of the same research findings as our paginated example, with modifications where relevant. Overall, the research found that although consumers find the unfamiliar layout of the unpaginated bill slightly less appealing, it performs equally well on the key outcomes of comprehension, trust and confidence to take action.

1

## 1. Information is placed where consumers expect to find it

Although the layout of an unpaginated bill is different from that of a paginated bill, our research indicated consumers still expect to find the amount due in the top-right. Feedback from consumers suggests that maintaining continuity in this aspect of bill design will help make bills easier and faster to read, even in an email format.

2

## 2. The design takes advantage of the email bill format to link directly

One of the benefits of a digital bill, including an unpaginated bill delivered in the body of an email, is the ability to provide direct links to websites, including to our plan comparison website Energy Made Easy. This makes things easier for customers.

3

## 3. Related information is grouped in boxes

Although the layout of an unpaginated email bill is different from that of a paginated bill, our research indicated consumers still expect related information (such as customer assistance phone numbers) to be grouped in boxes.

4

## 4. Billing information is clearly separated into sections

In addition to using appropriate shading to group related information, different types of billing information are differentiated through the use of clear section dividers with descriptive headings.

5

## 5. Payment information is formatted for accessibility and convenience

The way payment information is presented has been adapted for the email bill format, with the goal of maximising accessibility and convenience. For example, icons are used only where most useful to simplify access by screen reading technologies, and direct links have been provided to online payment options where applicable.

Under the tiered approach to billing information, Tier 1 information must appear first in an unpaginated bill, followed by Tier 2 information. Additional information, which is any information not required by the guideline, must not appear before Tier 2 information. This requirement helps ensure that the most important information is provided upfront, with the goal of reducing clutter and making key information easier to find, including in an unpaginated bill format. Although there are no separate pages in this example, for the purposes of this explanatory document we have broken up our unpaginated example into three sections. This example applies many of the same research findings as our paginated example, with modifications where relevant.

**Pay by phone**

Call **131 131** to pay by credit card (up to \$1,500 per bill) or set up a direct debit over the phone.

**Pay in person**

Pay by cash, EFTOS or cheque at any Australia Post Office.

**Pay by mail**

Make your cheque payable to **Retailer Name** and post to:

PO Box 123  
Town STATE 0000

**Important information****Payment assistance**

Call **131 131**

If you are having difficulty paying your account, please contact us to discuss payment assistance.

**National Relay Service**

Call **1300 555 727**

**Interpreter service**

Call **131 132**

Servizio Interpreti  
Dịch Vụ Thông Ngôn  
口譯服務  
خدمة مترجم  
Услуги переводчика

**About your current plan****You are currently on our 'Simple Saver' plan**

Your plan includes 15% usage discount (expires 31 March 2023)

Your plan includes 20% GreenPower

**Understand your bill****1 March 2022 – 31 March 2022**

This bill is based on an estimation of your usage. To check your actual usage, you can find instructions for reading your electricity meter at:

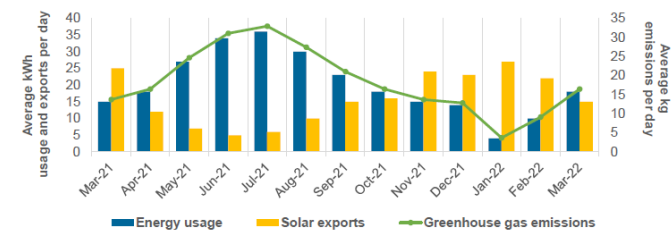
[retailer.com.au/how-to-read-your-meter](http://retailer.com.au/how-to-read-your-meter)

	Previous reading	Current reading	Quantity	Rate	Amount
<b>Supply charge</b>			31 days	\$1.02 / day	\$31.62
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**Compare your usage over time**

**Average daily kWh  
for this billing period**

**Energy usage: 18 kWh  
Solar exports: 15 kWh**



This chart shows your **average daily energy usage, solar exports and greenhouse gas emissions** for each of the last 12 months.