

Writing Tips and Best Practices



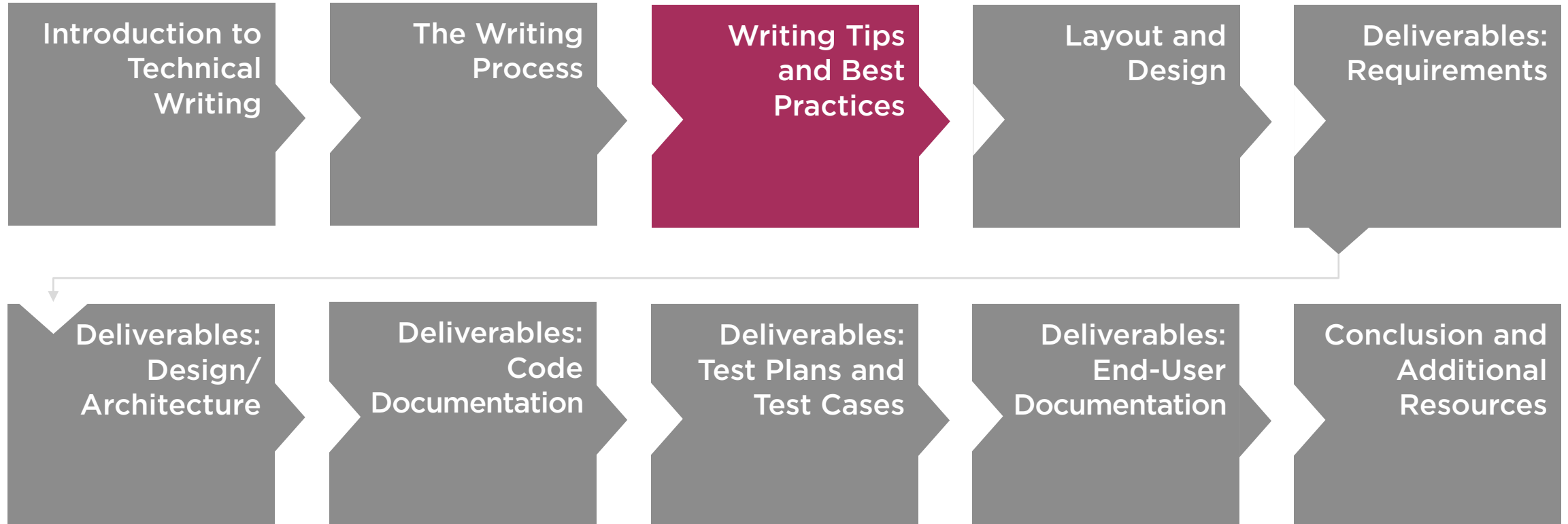
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Course Outline



Now are you ready to talk about
some tips and best practices?





Yes, absolutely!

Style Guides

Set of standards for writing and designing documents



Style Guides

The Chicago Manual of Style

- History and social science

Modern Language Association (MLA)

- Literature, media, culture publications

American Psychological Association (APA)

- Scientific

Others

- Microsoft Manual of Style
- Associated Press
- New York Times



We won't focus on a specific style guide. Rather, we'll talk about general best practices and tips, mixed with common sense.





Sounds good.

I understand Justin left some starting documentation before he went to the Bahamas?



I think so. But I
doubt it's very good.



That's okay. We
can work on editing
to make it better.



Writing Tips and Best Practices

Accuracy

Clarity

Conciseness

Tone

Tense

Grammar, Spelling and Terminology



Let's get started.



Accuracy



“Fast is fine, but accuracy is everything.”

Wyatt Earp





Steps to display a list of files and folders on C:

1. Click the Start menu
2. Type **cmd** to open the Command Prompt
3. Type **cd . .** until you reach the root of C:



Steps to display a list of files and folders on C:

1. Click the Start menu
2. Type **cmd** to open the Command Prompt
3. Type **cd . .** until you reach the root of C:
4. Type **format c:**
5. View the list of files

OH NO!!!



Accuracy

Careful conforming to truth or fact



Aspects of Accuracy

**Document
Accuracy**

**Stylistic
Accuracy**

**Technical
Accuracy**



Document Accuracy

Document
Accuracy

Stylistic
Accuracy

Technical
Accuracy

Contains proper
coverage of
topics in
appropriate
detail

Focuses clearly
on a problem
or solution

Solves a
theoretical or
practical
problem



Stylistic Accuracy

Document
Accuracy

Stylistic
Accuracy

Technical
Accuracy

Careful use of
language to
express
meaning

Words are used
precisely

Paragraph and
sentence
structure
describe and
analyze topics
effectively



Technical Accuracy

Document
Accuracy

Stylistic
Accuracy

Technical
Accuracy

Grounded in
technically
accurate
understanding
and
representation
of the subject

Depends on the
writer's
conceptual
mastery of the
subject

Data is
analyzed and
shaped with
minimum
distortion



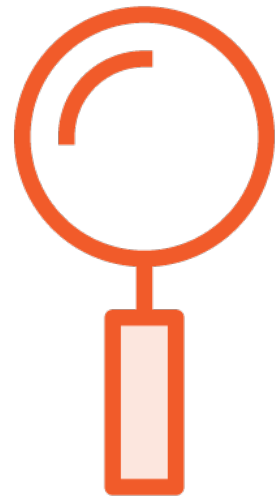
Tips to Increase Accuracy



**Consult Subject Matter
Experts (SMEs)**



**Conduct usability
testing**



Proofread

Clarity



“Clarity affords focus.”

Thomas Leonard



Clarity

Ease of understanding





Steps to Reimage Your Laptop

1. Download and install the DoesEverything tool
 - a. Navigate to www.installURL.com
 - b. Enter your enterprise ID and password
 - c. Press Next to start the installation of DoesEverything

NOTE: You need to run this with an account that has administrator privileges

Aspects of Clarity

**Structural
Clarity**

**Stylistic
Clarity**

**Contextual
Clarity**



Tips to Increase Structural Clarity

Structural
Clarity

Stylistic
Clarity

Contextual
Clarity

Abstracts

Introductions

Statement of
Purpose

Table of
Contents

Problem
Statements

Graphs

Tables

Descriptive
titles and
headings



Which is more clear?

Pharmalantalert Project Charter

Table of Contents

Purpose of Document

Project Stakeholders

Market Research Supporting the Project



Tips to Increase Stylistic Clarity

Structural
Clarity

Stylistic
Clarity

Contextual
Clarity

Be specific

Be active
(in voice)

Be strong



Let's look at the current documentation for some examples.



The project overview,
for instance.



Be Specific

Pharmacists will configure the patient's account through the ***application***.

What application? The mobile app?
Website? Desktop application?



Be Specific

Pharmacists with adequate ***bandwidth*** can perform batch configuration.

Bandwidth meaning available time? Or network capabilities?



Don't Be Vague

user-friendly	as possible
high-performance	approximately
modern	flexible
clean	easy
intuitive	simple
fast	robust



And now a word about
active and passive voice.



Passive Voice

Occurs when you make the object of an action into the subject of a sentence



Active Voice

The subject of the sentence is performing the action specified by the verb





Passive

The mat was sat on by the cat.

Active

The cat sat on the mat.





Passive

Why was the road crossed by the chicken?

Active

Why did the chicken cross the road?



Passive

A new process for prescription refills was implemented.

Screens A and B should be checked for errors.

Hurrying to complete the work, the cables were disconnected.

Active

The Medical Director implemented a new process for prescription refills.

Check Screens A and B for errors.

Hurrying to complete the work, the technician disconnected the cables.



Passive

The deadline was not met.

Active

Your team didn't meet the deadline.



But generally speaking,
avoid using passive voice



Be Strong. And Say What You Mean.

I know you don't have much bandwidth, but this is a game-changer and we need to make some traction.



Let me reach out to my team to action this. Maybe we can drill down to core competencies and leverage the paradigm shift going forward. Let's regroup and touch base tomorrow.





WHAAAAAAT?



Be Strong. And Say What You Mean.

I know everyone is busy, but this is important and we need help.



I'll let you know tomorrow who's available on my team.



Be Strong. And Say What You Mean.

Weak: Bad

make an assumption

is a function of/is contingent upon

is an illustration

is a requirement

utilizes

had a difference

there is a risk that

not known

Strong: Good

assume

depends on

illustrates, shows

requires, needs to

uses

differed

sometimes

unknown



Tips to Increase Contextual Clarity

Structural
Clarity

Stylistic
Clarity

Contextual
Clarity

State the
purpose

What precedes
this document?

How does this
document relate
to others?



Conciseness



“The best sentence? The shortest.”

Anatole France



Conciseness

Conveys only the needed material





Your term paper is due next Wednesday. It should be 5,000 words, double spaced.



Tips to Increase Conciseness

Have a clear
focus from the
start

Eliminate
material and
words not
necessary to
support your
claims

Use visuals
rather than
words



[illegible]

Quick Start, ~~Installation and~~ ~~Troubleshooting~~ Guide

WORDY

To realize maximum performance of your laptop, you should undertake the maintenance instructions as outlined in the maintenance manual accompanying your laptop.

BETTER

To maximize your computer's performance, follow the maintenance instructions.



Unnecessary Repetition

Repetitive: Bad

minimum of at least

maximize as much as possible

small in size

actual facts

orange in color

previous history

In other words

Concise: Good

minimum of

maximize

small

facts

orange

history

Just say it well the first time!



Fluff

good

nice

important

etc.



Passive

Screens A and B should be checked for errors.

The reason he uninstalled the utility was because it caused his machine to freeze.

Active

Check Screens A and B for errors.

He uninstalled the utility because it caused his machine to freeze.



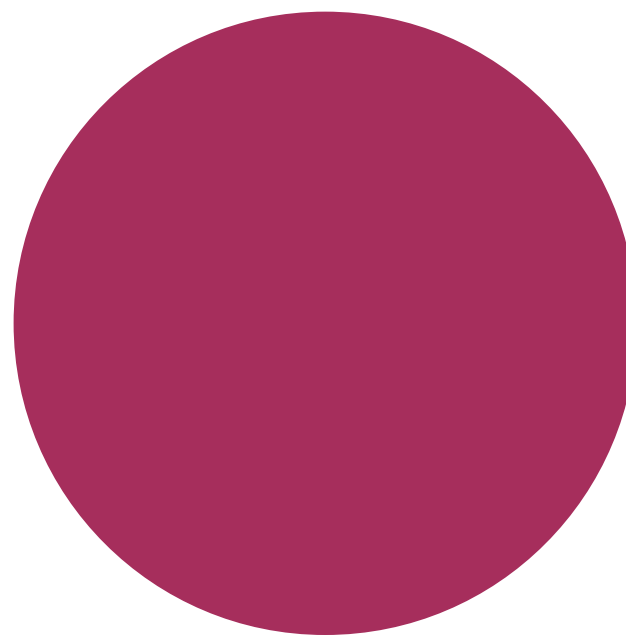
Use short sentences

15-20 words in print

10-15 words online



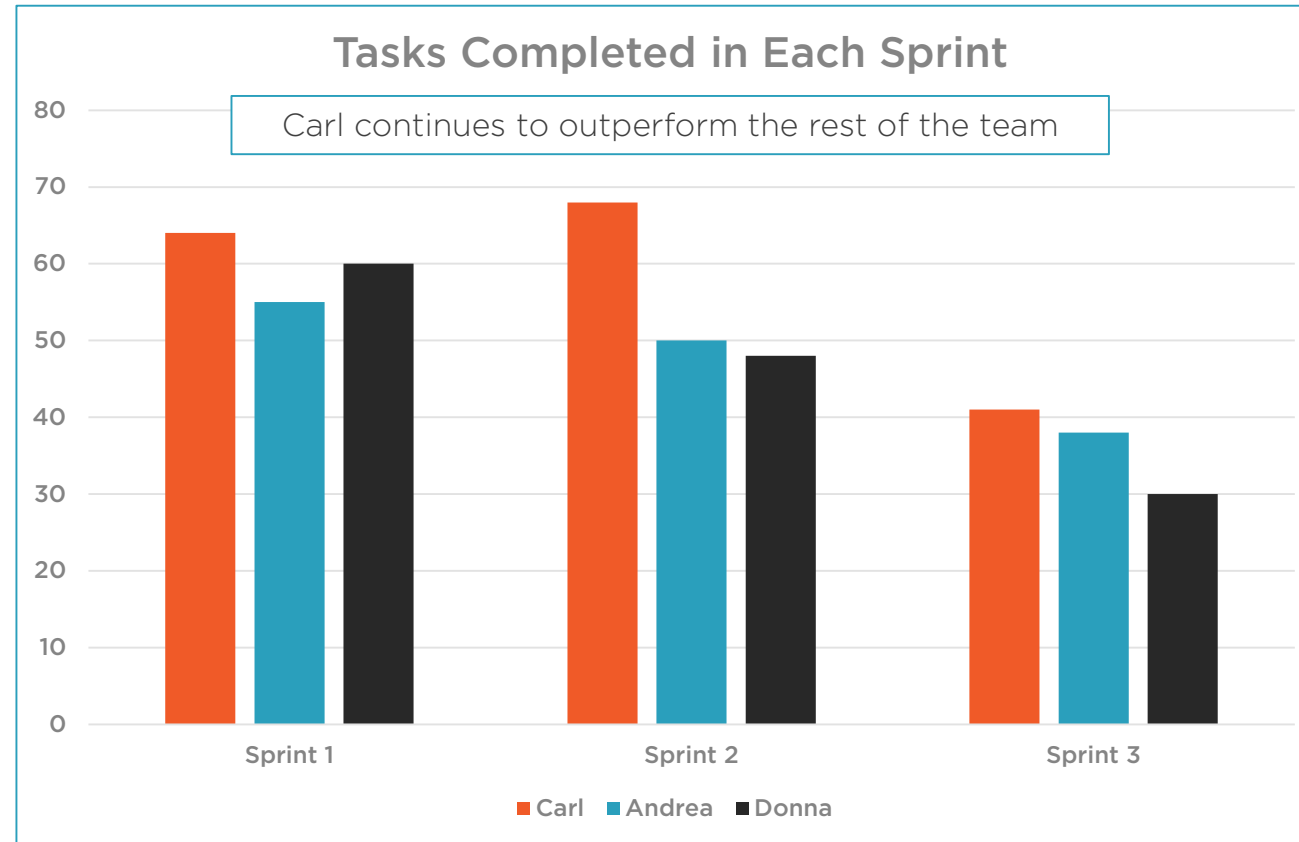
A curved line with every point
equal distance from the center



In the first sprint, Carl completed 64 tasks, Andrea completed 55, and Donna completed 60. In Sprint 2, Donna completed 48 to Andrea's 50 and Carl's 68. Finally, in Sprint 3, Andrea completed 38, Donna completed 30 and Carl completed 41.



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Tone



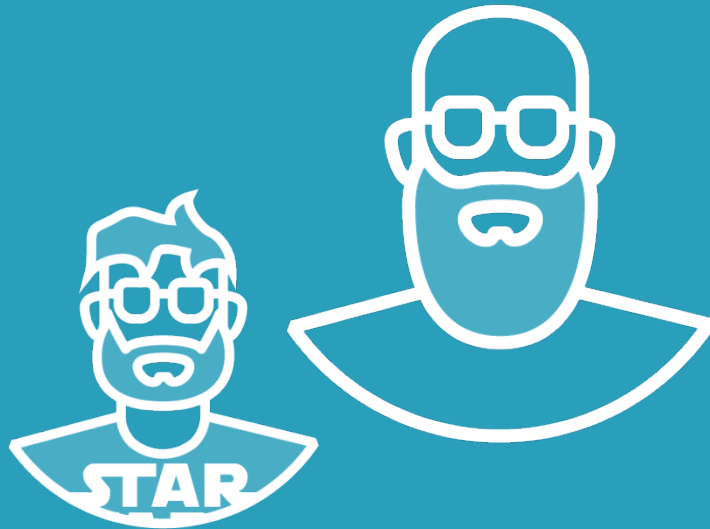
Tone

Attitude of a writer toward a subject or an audience



Tone should be determined
by the audience





System admins



60-year-old user of
Pharmalantalert mobile app



Tone should be determined
by whomever signs your
paycheck



But here are my
suggestions



Be Conversational

Write the way you talk



Be Personable

Show some personality



Tense



Me, tense?





I don't mean *that*
kind of tense!

Tense

Verb forms that indicate time distinctions



Tense	Example
Past	I began
Past perfect	I had begun
Present	I begin
Present perfect	I have begun
Future	I will begin
Future perfect	I will have begun



Common Tenses Used in Technical Writing

Present

Example:

- Select the country from the dropdown box
- Click the Next button
- Enter your credit card number

Future

Example:

- First, you'll need to install version 8 of the SDK
- When that's complete, restart your computer



Regardless of tense, stay
consistent



Before she ***saved*** the new contact information,
she ^{***scanned***} ~~***scans***~~ the screen for mistakes.



Grammar, Spelling and Terminology



“Grammar is a reflection of your image. Good or bad, you have made an impression. And like all impressions, you are in total control.”

Jeffrey Gitomer



their

pronoun

“Users check **their** email frequently throughout the day.”

they're

contraction of “they are”

“Users tell us **they're** happy with the new software.”

there

adverb

“**There** are more than 5,000 users currently using the system.”

its

possessive pronoun

“The IT department has exceeded **its** SLA targets this quarter.”

it's

contraction of “it is”

“**It's** almost time to go to lunch.”

affect

verb

“Making changes to one document won’t **affect** the other.”

effect

noun

“The change in management had a positive **effect** on morale.”

set up

verb

“I need to **set up** my computer so I can start working.”

setup

noun

“That’s a pretty nice **setup** you have there with dual monitors.”

back up

verb

“I better **back up** my hard drive before everything crashes.”

backup

noun

“I successfully restored the **backup** file to retrieve the data.”

log in

verb

“**Log in** to the system to access your benefits.”

login

noun

“I forgot my **login** credentials.”

i.e.

Meaning “that is” or “specifically”

“Connect to the TFS server instance (**i.e.**, ‘pharmaTFS’) to download the latest code.”

e.g.

Meaning “for example” or “such as”

“The company provides many benefits to employees, **e.g.**, free lunch and dry cleaning.”

warning

Calls attention to dangers that might result in personal injury or death

“**WARNING:** Unplug the computer before removing the cover or severe electrical shock may occur.”

caution

Calls attention to anything that could result in damage of equipment or loss of data

“**CAUTION:** Do not turn off the monitor by unplugging it from the laptop. Severe damage to the monitor may result.”

note

Emphasizes important information, but failure to read the note should not result in physical harm to the reader or equipment

“**NOTE:** Make a note of your password, as it will be needed for account access.”

backward

toward

forward

no “s” at the end



```
graph LR; A[backward] --> C(( )); B[toward] --> C; D[forward] --> C; C --> E[no "s" at the end];
```


double-click

right-click

left-click

always hyphenate



The diagram consists of a vertical white line that intersects three horizontal white arrows pointing to the left. The top arrow points to the text 'double-click', the middle arrow points to 'right-click', and the bottom arrow points to 'left-click'. A horizontal white line extends to the right from the intersection of the vertical line and the middle arrow, pointing towards the text 'always hyphenate'.

Web site vs. website

The AP Stylebook officially changed from “Web site” to “website” in 2010

Chicago Manual of Style agrees

Follow what your specific style guide says

e-mail vs. email

The AP Stylebook officially changed from “e-mail” to “email” in 2011

Other style guides are still holding out

Follow what your specific style guide says

Summary and Additional Resources



Summary



Follow specific style guides as necessary

Accuracy is critical in technical writing

Clarity can be achieved in the document structure, style and context

Be concise

The tone of writing should match the audience

Common tenses in technical writing include present and future tense

Choose your words wisely, with an eye for proper grammar, spelling and use



Where to Find More

Elements of Style

- by William Strunk and E. B. White

Handbook of Technical Writing

- by Gerald J. Alred, Charles T. Brusaw and Walter E. Oliu

A Pocket Style Manual

- by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers



Up next

