

# Novell Open Source Documentation

www.novell.com

October 15, 2004

## STYLE QUICK START

## Using Novell Documentation Style

Consistency in documentation organization, language, and format helps to convey information clearly and professionally and to enhance understanding of the software it describes. To encourage consistency, Novell maintains a *Novell Documentation Style Guide* as its primary source for information about writing documentation for Novell products. This *Style Quick Start* discusses some best practices from the *Novell Documentation Style Guide*, with special emphasis on areas that might differ from other software documentation.

- ♦ “Using DocBook Tags to Format Your Documentation” on page 1
- ♦ “Style, Grammar, and Usage” on page 2
- ♦ “Terminology” on page 4
- ♦ “Trademarking” on page 8

For style information that is not addressed here, refer to *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition (<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/>). For preferred spellings, refer to *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th edition (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>).

### USING DOCBOOK TAGS TO FORMAT YOUR DOCUMENTATION

Novell product and developer documentation uses structured authoring tools to produce output in several formats, including XML, HTML, PDF, and text. To be compatible with these tools, you should submit documentation in DocBook format when contributing to open source documentation projects sponsored by Novell. For information about standard DocBook elements, see the official [DocBook Web site \(http://www.docbook.org/\)](http://www.docbook.org/).

If you have questions about how to format your document, we recommend that you look for examples in Novell documents at the [Novell product documentation Web site \(http://www.novell.com/documentation\)](http://www.novell.com/documentation) or the [Novell developer documentation Web site \(http://developer.novell.com/ndk/doc.htm\)](http://developer.novell.com/ndk/doc.htm), as appropriate.

**Novell®**

## STYLE, GRAMMAR, AND USAGE

### Commas in a Series

Use a comma to separate all items in a series of three or more items. For example:

Provide the name of the remote host, your username, and your password.

### Headings

- ♦ Use the gerund form of verbs in task headings. For example, use “Setting Up a Server” instead of “To Set Up a Server” or “Server Setup.”
- ♦ Use nouns or short noun phrases in headings for conceptual or reference-oriented sections. For example, use “Overview of iFolder” and “Glossary.”

### Gender-Neutral Language

- ♦ In general, use the second person (“you”) in documentation. Speaking directly to the user avoids the need for a third-person pronoun (which, in English, requires gender).
- ♦ When it is impossible to use the word “you,” try to structure the sentence to avoid using a third-person pronoun. For example, use one of the following proper methods of avoiding sexist language:
  - ♦ Make the subject plural and use plural pronouns such as “they” or “their.”
  - ♦ Use job titles, not pronouns.
  - ♦ Use a definite article (the) or an indefinite article (a, an) instead of a possessive pronoun (his or her).
- ♦ If you must use a third-person pronoun, use the phrase “he or she” when referring to a single individual (and “his or her” as possessive pronouns).
- ♦ Do not use the following improper methods of avoiding sexist language:
  - ♦ Adding a disclaimer regarding sexist language in the introduction to the documentation
  - ♦ Using “they” or “their” with a singular antecedent
  - ♦ Using “he” or “she” in alternating paragraphs or on alternating pages
  - ♦ Using “s/he” or “(s)he”
  - ♦ Using “he/she” or “she/he”

### Interface Items

When referring to interface items (tabs, field names, or labels) in running text, use heading-style capitalization, regardless of the capitalization in the interface. For example:

Click Create or Update a System, then click Yes.

## Pathnames, Filenames, and Directory Names

If your documentation applies only to Linux\*, use the forward slash in pathnames. Because Linux is case-sensitive, present pathnames, filenames, and directory names exactly as Linux recognizes them. For example, `/Provo/Webac65a/page.html`.

If your documentation can apply to other platforms, use a backslash in pathnames, such as `\Provo\Webac65a\page.html`. Honor capitalization only if it is important to do so for any of the supported platforms; otherwise, use lowercase for pathnames, such as `\provo\webac65a\page.html`. Add an explanation to the document about documentation conventions. For example:

When a single pathname can be written with a backslash for some platforms or a forward slash for other platforms, the pathname is presented with a backslash. Users of platforms that require a forward slash, such as UNIX\* or Linux, should use forward slashes as required by your software.

## Quotation Marks

If your authoring tool uses “smart quotes” (curly quotation marks), be sure to use straight quotes in code samples and syntax examples, especially if the sample might be copied for programming.

## Verb Tense

- ♦ In general, use active voice instead of passive.
  - ♦ Active voice is usually more concise and more forceful than passive voice, and it emphasizes the doer of the action. For example:

Weak passive: The network must be updated by the administrator.

Strong active: The administrator must update the network.
  - ♦ Use passive voice to change emphasis to the receiver of the action rather than the doer. For example:

Files are processed immediately.
  - ♦ Use passive voice when the agent is either not known or not important. For example:

Output is sent to the nearest printer.
- ♦ Use the simple present tense almost exclusively. Unless there is a very clear shift in time from past to present or a very clear reference to the future, describe a series of actions in the present tense. For example:

Incorrect: The password contained an invalid character.

Correct: The password contains an invalid character.
- ♦ State perpetual cause-and-effect relationships (every time x happens, y occurs) in the present tense. For example:

Incorrect: When you select this command, GroupWise will open the text files.

Correct: When you select this command, GroupWise opens the text files.

- ♦ Use future tense only when anticipating an event that is yet to happen. For example:

In the next lesson, you will learn how to write a macro.

## TERMINOLOGY

The following table indicates some terminology usage.

Use	Don't Use	Example
and or	and/or Whenever possible, use just “and” or “or.”	Click Apply or OK to save your changes.
appendixes	appendices	
can, might	may	The CD might contain multiple languages.
check box Avoid using where possible and just use the option name.	checkbox	In the dialog box that appears, select Update an Existing System.
click Use “click” when a user performs an action on items that were previously selected. (See also <i>select</i> .)	click on	Click OK to save your changes.
dialog box	dialog	
dimmed, unavailable	grayed, grayed out	
drop-down Hyphenated when used as an adjective, two words when used as a verb. Never used as a noun.	dropdown	
e-mail	email	

Use	Don't Use	Example
<p>end user</p> <p>Just say “user” unless it’s necessary to distinguish between the “end user” and another kind of “user.”</p>	<p>enduser, end-user</p>	
<p>enter</p> <p>Use the verb “enter” only when you want users to type something and press the Enter key. If users are simply adding text to a field, use “type,” “specify,” or “provide.”</p>		<p>At the server console, enter <b>grpwise.ncf</b> to load the agents.</p> <p>Specify the name of the directory tree.</p>
<p>Enter</p> <p>Use when referring to the key on the keyboard.</p>	<p>Return</p>	
<p>etc.</p> <p>This is the only Latin abbreviation you should use.</p>	<p>e.g., i.e.</p>	
<p>field, list, drop-down list, option</p> <p>Using generic terms avoids overloading the user with specialized terminology.</p> <p>(See also <i>interface terminology</i>.)</p>	<p>combo box, spin box, combination box, drop-down combination box, text box, group box.</p>	<p>Fill in the fields.</p> <p>Select your server name from the list of available servers.</p> <p>Select the options you want.</p>
<p>filename</p>	<p>file name</p>	
<p>hard copy, hard-copy.</p> <p>Two words for the noun, hyphenated for the adjective.</p>	<p>hardcopy</p>	
<p>hostname</p>	<p>host name</p>	
<p>interface terminology</p> <p>When possible, use the name of the option without adding “box,” “field,” “option,” “button,” etc.</p> <p>However, do use specific locators when it’s necessary for clarity.</p>		<p>Click Add.</p> <p>Select Line Spacing.</p> <p>If necessary for clarity:</p> <p>Click the Add button.</p> <p>Select the Line Spacing option.</p>

Use	Don't Use	Example
Key names: Alt Backspace Ctrl Del Down-arrow Enter Esc Insert Left-arrow Minus ( - ) PageDown PageUp Plus Right-arrow Spacebar Tab Up-arrow	Don't use special formatting, all caps, or icons.  In general, use the key name only; don't add the word "key" unless it's necessary for clarity.	Press Enter. Press Tab.  Press the Plus key.
man page	manpage	
menu	shortcut menu pop-up menu	Right-click to display a menu of options.  Right-click, then select Paste from the menu that appears.
menu bar Seldom used.	menubar	
might, can	may	You might need to set additional options before proceeding.
open source	open-source Open Source (unless it's a reference to the OSI trademark.)	open source software  The idea behind open source is that the code is available.
option button Avoid using where possible and just use the option name.	radio button	If you want to continue numbering from the previous file, select Continue.

Use	Don't Use	Example
<p>plug-in (noun, adjective) plug in (verb)</p> <p>Use “plug-in” to describe files or tools that alter, enhance, or extend the operation of a parent application that uses a standard Web browser to display the interface.</p> <p>(See also <i>snap-in</i>.)</p>	plugin	Use the iManager plug-ins to manage your application.
<p>pop-up (noun, adjective)</p> <p>Seldom used.</p> <p>(See also <i>menu</i>.)</p>	popup	
<p>press</p> <p>Use “press” to refer to the keys on the keyboard.</p> <p>(See also <i>Key names</i>.)</p>	hit, punch	Press the Spacebar.
scroll bar, scroll box	scrollbar, scrollbar	
<p>select</p> <p>Use “select” to tell a user to identify an item prior to carrying out an action on the item.</p> <p>Use “deselect” as the opposite of “select.”</p>	choose, highlight, block.	<p>Select the options you want, then click Add to add them to the list.</p> <p>Deselect the options for continued numbering.</p>
<p>snap-in (noun, adjective) snap in (verb)</p> <p>Use “snap-in” to describe files or tools that alter, enhance, or extend the operation of a parent application that provides its own GUI to display the interface.</p> <p>(See also <i>plug-in</i>.)</p>	snapin	The installation process adds the ConsoleOne snap-ins.
standalone (noun, adjective)	stand-alone	
status bar	statusbar	

Use	Don't Use	Example
<p>step separator</p> <p>Use &gt; when you're telling a user to click a series of menu items or tabs.</p> <p>Use a comma when you're telling a user to perform a series of actions within a dialog box or property page.</p>	<p>The pipe symbol ( ) or an icon.</p>	<p>Click File &gt; Print</p> <p>Select the text, select the font, then click Apply.</p>
submenu	sub-menu	
time stamp	timestamp	
title bar	titlebar	
<p>type</p> <p>Use "type" when you want users to type something without pressing the Enter key. When possible, use a more generic verb such as "specify" or "provide."</p>	enter	<p>Type the name of the server.</p> <p>Specify the pathname.</p>
username	user name	
<p>Web page, Web site, Web server</p> <p>(two words, init. cap on "Web.")</p>	webpage, website, webserver	
Webmaster	webmaster	

## TRADEMARKING

If your documentation is a standalone book or helpset, it should follow Novell trademarking conventions.

- Use the appropriate ® or ™ symbol to mark Novell trademarks. Mark the trademarked term on its first occurrence in running text in each chapter in PDF documentation, or the first occurrence in running text for each topic in online documentation.
- Use an asterisk to mark trademarks from a companies other than Novell. Mark the trademarked term on its first occurrence in running text in each book in PDF documentation, or the first occurrence in running text in each topic in online documentation.



- ♦ Include an explanation of the marking convention with your other legal information. For example:

A trademark symbol (®, ™, etc.) denotes a Novell trademark. An asterisk (\*) denotes a third-party trademark.

- ♦ Don't place trademark symbols or asterisks in headings, titles, or illustrations, unless the trademarked term occurs on the title page or cover of the document.
- ♦ If you are producing both PDF and online documentation from a single source, use the trademarking conventions for PDF documentation.