



WRITING STYLE GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

The Proofpoint brand embodies a combination of traits that uniquely defines the company in a sea of confusingly similar marketing claims. Proofpoint collateral should reflect and reinforce these attributes:

- **Authentic:** Proofpoint is honest and transparent. We never exaggerate, obscure, or insinuate. We say what we mean. We don't shy away from hard truths. And we communicate in a clear, straightforward style. While our content stands out and engages readers—and deals with subject matter that is often riveting—the writing style is simple, concise, and direct.
- **Problem-solving:** Proofpoint strives to be a reliable partner, working with customers to solve their biggest security and compliance challenges. Accordingly, our tone is helpful and collaborative—never arrogant or dismissive. Proofpoint is forward-thinking. But we are also no-nonsense, logical, and realistic about today's security challenges. Our content, informed by our real-world experience, is smart, innovative, and useful. We use concrete language, cite tangible examples, and address prospects' practical needs.
- **Urgent:** Proofpoint is passionate about helping organizations protect what matters most. We move proactively and forcefully to address customers' needs and combat today's cyber threats. Our content reflects this trait through copy that is crisp, current, and relevant. Like our products, our content helps people make smarter security decisions. We keep readers front and center by delivering the right content in the right format—right when our audience needs it.
- **Confident:** Proofpoint is focused and assured. While our content is approachable and accessible, we speak with authority. Cyber threats are real, but we do not prey on victims' fear, uncertainty, and doubt. Our copy is muscular. Our tone is positive. Our outlook is optimistic.

Our content exists to help prospects and customers wherever they are in the buyer's journey. In the initial stages of that journey, focus on readers and their interests—not Proofpoint and its offerings. For prospects who are ready to hear about how we can help, frame our technology, intelligence, and expertise in terms of their real-world needs.

In other words, our content—like our mission—is not about us. It's about customers and prospects. In that spirit, write with the reader's interests in mind.

The noise and overstated claims in the category compel us to speak with strength and humility. In keeping with our brand archetype, the Proofpoint voice is direct, clear, and simple.

Write to express, not to impress. Use familiar words and precise language. Omit needless words. Vary sentence length, but keep the average short. Choose active verbs over forms of “to be.”

Avoid nominalizations. Use vivid examples. Avoid clichés and jargon. Never exaggerate or distort. While the Proofpoint voice is professional, it is also direct and approachable. Write in first and second person where possible. “We want to connect with you” is far friendlier than “Proofpoint wants to connect with organizations.”

To communicate effectively, our content must be easy to find, scan, digest, and share. To that end, make sure your content has a readability score (as calculated on the Flesch Reading Ease Scale) of 40 or higher. To see the readability score for documents created in Microsoft Word, follow these instructions:

1. In the menu ribbon, go to File – > Options – > Proofing
2. In the section titled “When correcting spelling and grammar in Word,” check the following options:
 - Check grammar with spelling
 - Show readability statistics

TONE

The tone of Proofpoint collateral can vary by medium, audience, and purpose. Blog posts might be breezier and less formal than white papers. But no matter what form it takes, our tone should always reinforce the Proofpoint voice and our role as trusted partner.

“Trusted” means maintaining our singular authority as cybersecurity experts. Collateral that comes across to readers as glib, defensive, or bellicose can undermine that authority. Avoid hype and scare tactics—if readers sense they’re being manipulated or lied to, we lose their trust. Do not make claims we cannot back up with facts. Cite sources when possible. Speak confidently and truthfully. And never resort to FUD (fear, uncertainty, and doubt).

“Partner” means we are on our reader’s side. Our tone should be welcoming and approachable. Our prose should be easily consumed. We are not trying to impress our readers with flowery language or dazzling intellect—we are trying to help them protect their people, data, and brand. Explain new concepts in a way that makes the reader smarter. And celebrate Proofpoint successes in a way that makes our customer the hero.

USAGE

In most cases, Proofpoint adheres to the AP Stylebook and Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary. When the two references conflict, AP takes precedence except where noted in this guide.

The terms outlined in the following section cover these situations:

- Proofpoint style diverges from AP and Merriam-Webster (Proofpoint style always takes priority).
- Usage is not covered in AP or Merriam-Webster.
- Usage guidelines have changed from previous editions of the style and usage guide.
- The term is a commonly misused and bears repeating.

GRAMMAR AND USAGE

ABBREVIATIONS

Spell out the full name of a product, solution, or service the first time it appears in a document, followed immediately by its acronym in parenthesis, if applicable.

ACRONYMS

Spell out most acronyms on first use, followed by the acronym in parentheses. Follow these guidelines:

- Use capital letters with no periods.
- Do not use an apostrophe for plurals.
- Some well-known acronyms are acceptable on first use.
- In most cases, leave spelled-out terms in lowercase unless it is a proper name.

Examples:

Most anti-virus (AV) software is ineffective.

Advanced attacks target vulnerable PCs. (“PC” is used widely enough that it does not need to be spelled out.)

Attackers change their tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) often.

AMPERSAND

Avoid using the ampersand (&) symbol unless it is part of a formal name.

BULLETS

Used judiciously, bulleted lists can highlight key points, break up long blocks of text, and organize parallel items in an easy-to-read format.

When using bulleted lists, follow these guidelines:

- Use parallel construction for all of the bulleted items.
- Capitalize the first letter of the first word of bulleted text (unless the first word is case-sensitive).
- Do not use punctuation at the end of a bulleted item unless it contains a complete sentence. If one item in the list requires punctuation, punctuate all of the items for consistency (though the issue may indicate that the bullets are not actually parallel)
- Do not use multiple levels of bullets.
- Limit each bulleted item to three or fewer lines of text.
- For bulleted items longer than a few words, consider boldfacing the first part of the item. When using boldface, apply to all of the bulleted items in a consistent manner.

If the bulleted items represent a sequence or ranking, used a numbered list instead. (See “Numbered list” entry.)

CAPITALIZATION

Use title case (initial caps) for all titles and primary headings. Use sentence case for secondary headings.

Dates

Use the month-day-year system in all cases. When writing a complete date, place a comma before and after the year. (“During the period July 1, 2009, through June 30, 2010, we traced the sources of malware.”)

When writing only a month and year, or a specific day such as a holiday and a year, do not use a comma:

Examples:

- July 2011
- Christmas 2012

If the date specifies a day of the month, abbreviate month names longer than five letters. Otherwise, spell out the month:

Examples:

- March 14, 2011
- Oct. 31, 1984
- October 1984

If the year does not follow the date, no comma is necessary:

Example: “The meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Dec. 19 in the large conference room.”

Do not use the ordinal form of numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th) unless you use only the day.

Example: The 5th is the date for the meeting.

e.g., i.e.

Avoid these terms. Instead, use their English counterparts, “for example” and “that is,” respectively.

Exclamation points

Avoid. They are rarely necessary in marketing writing—and usually distracting.

HEADINGS

Document and section headlines use title case (“Proofpoint Customer Support”). References to sections within body text should retain title casing (“Read more about this topic in the Proofpoint Customer Support section.”). Subheads use sentence case (“Protect your business from advanced threats”). Per AP style, headings express most numbers numerically, even 1–9. With the exception of question marks, do not use a period or other terminal punctuation at the end of headlines or subheads.

HYPHENS

Hyphenate a compound adjective when it comes before a noun.

Examples:

- long-term security strategy
- real-time analysis

But when a two-word adjective follows a noun, do not use a hyphen.

Example: We detect threats in real time.

Two common exceptions to the hyphenation rules:

- Don’t hyphenate adverbial compounds when the adverb ends in “ly”
Example: We use environmentally friendly materials.
- Don’t hyphenate compound modifiers used with abbreviated units of measurement.
Example: Attackers commandeered the victim’s 4 Gbps network connection.

The writer can sometimes forgo the hyphen when the modifier involves a well-known industry term (such as “intrusion prevention system”) or when doing so does not create ambiguity.

ITALICS

Use italics for names of articles, books, and other publications. (Enclose titles of webinars, podcasts, or other broadcasts in quotation marks with no italics.)

You may also use italics in moderation to emphasize a word or point. Never use boldface for this purpose.

NUMBERED LISTS

Numbered lists can show a relationship between items, such as a sequence or ranking. If items in the list do not need appear in a particular order, use bullets instead. (See “Bullets” entry.)

- Use parallel construction for all numbered items.
- Capitalize the first letter of the first word of each numbered item (unless the first word is case-sensitive).
- Do not use punctuation at the end of a numbered item unless it contains a complete sentence. If one item in the list requires punctuation, punctuate all of the items for consistency.
- Do not use nested levels of numbers. Bullets under a numbered item are acceptable if used sparingly.
- Limit each numbered item to three or fewer lines of text.

For numbered items longer than a few words, consider boldfacing the first part of the item. When using boldface, apply to all of the numbered items in a consistent manner.

NUMERALS

Spell out numbers zero through nine. Likewise, spell out ordinal numbers between one and nine.

Examples:

- One malware variant
- 150 samples
- Third place
- 10th in line

Avoid starting a sentence with a number. If you do, always spell it out.

Always use a comma for numbers of four digits or more (“1,000”), except in a date (see Dates). Use numerals for any number that precedes percent, million, or billion (“25 percent,” “2 million”), unless it begins a sentence.

For headlines, use numerals in most cases (even 1–9).

PERIOD

Put only one space after periods or other sentence-ending punctuation. When a URL is at the end of a sentence, punctuate the sentence with a period.

POSSESSIVES

Avoid using the possessive form of “Proofpoint.” Try to reword the sentence to avoid this. In most cases, you can drop the possessive without creating awkward prepositional phrases by adding a “the” before “Proofpoint.”

Examples:

Avoid: “Proofpoint’s approach is different.

Better: “The Proofpoint approach is different.”

Best: “Proofpoint takes a different approach.”

Punctuation: See entries on Period and Exclamation points and the AP Stylebook.

QUOTATION MARKS

Generally, commas and periods go inside quotation marks; semicolons and colons go outside quotation marks. Question marks, dashes, and exclamation points go inside quotation marks only if they are part of the quoted material.

SPACING

Put only one space after periods and other sentence-ending punctuation, such as the (sparingly used) exclamation mark or question mark. Also, put only one space after colons and semi-colons.

THAT, WHICH

“That” is used in relative clauses and does not get a comma.

Example: “The product features that are being described are highlighted.”

“Which” is used in nonrestrictive clauses and gets a comma.

Example: “The product features, which are being described, are highlighted.”

TRADEMARKS (™) AND REGISTERED TRADEMARKS (®)

Use trademark, service mark, and registration mark symbols when trademarked Proofpoint terms first appear in body copy. For an updated list of Proofpoint trademarks, refer to XXX.

COMMON USAGE EXAMPLES

advanced persistent threat	name)	noncompliance
a.m. and p.m. — (Usage examples: 9 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 10–11 a.m., 10 a.m.–1 p.m., 1 p.m. PDT. Do not use 12 a.m. or p.m.; use noon or midnight instead)	email	offline
anti-spam (adj)	end-user (adj)	off-site (adj)
anti-spyware (adj)	end user (n)	off site (prepositional phrase)
anti-virus (adj) — abbreviate as AV after first reference	FAQs	on-premises (adj; not on-premise or on-prem)
back-end (adj)	Gbps	on premises (prepositional phrase)
back end (n)	HTML	ongoing
callback	in-line (adj)	online (adj and adv)
command-and-control (adj) — abbreviate as C&C (not C2 or CnC)	in line (adv)	on-screen (adj)
cyber attack (n)	Internet	on screen (prepositional phrase)
cyber-attack (adj)	IPS (singular and plural; to avoid confusion when used in the plural form, consider using the term as an adjective. Example: “We found flaws in all five IPS products.”)	on-site (adj)
cyber crime	lifecycle (n) — one word	on site (prepositional phrase)
cyber criminal	malware	out-of-band (adj)
cybersecurity	Mbps	out of band (prepositional phrase)
cyber espionage	multi-gigabit	out-of-date (adj)
cyber threat	network access control (NAC; no hyphens, even when used as a modifier)	out of date (prepositional phrase. Examples: “Your AV signatures are out of date.” “Stop using out-of-date signatures.”)
e-discovery (not eDiscovery, unless part of product	next-generation (adj)	
	noncompliant	

COMMON USAGE EXAMPLES

PDF	setup (n)	URL
phishing	set up (v)	U.S.
p.m. and a.m. (Usage examples: 9 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 10–11 a.m., 10 a.m.–1 p.m., 1 p.m. PDT. Do not use 12 a.m. or p.m.; use noon or midnight instead)	software as a service (SaaS) (n—no hyphens unless used as a compound modifier)	web
predefined	spear-phishing (adj)	web-based (adj)
Q&As	spear phishing (n)	website
real-time (adj)	standalone	worldwide
real time (noun, often used in prepositional phrases)	third-party (adj)	World Wide Web
reinstall	third party (n)	zero-day (adj)—Do not use as a noun. Never use “0-day” or “0day.”
reuse	timeframe	
security risk management (SRM)	timeline	
	up-to-date (when used as a modifier before the noun; no hyphens if it comes after, as in “Your signatures are up to date.”)	