

Accessibility in the internet age means accessibility for non-native speakers, for human translators, and for machine translators. Online content is — by default — global content.

In my career as a content creator, I hold myself to a high standard. I challenge myself to design experiences that are intuitive, engaging, and frustration-free.

Nothing exists in a vacuum — I have taken this fact to heart while writing for global audiences. If I write with only myself, I have an audience of exactly one. This is why research was essential for me while creating my Guidelines for Global Communication. I read books on language accessibility and researched cultural emoji differences and compiled the following information to help my writing team reach international audiences with increased clarity:

## What to Use:

- ✓ Correct punctuation
- ✓ Simple language
- ✓ Simple sentence structure
- ✓ Light, informative tone
- ✓ Present tense
- ✓ Lists (numbered **only** when list order matters)
- ✓ Correct phrase coordination, subordination, parallelism
- ✓ Appropriate credit for all external sources (images, links, other content)

## Avoid (if possible):

- ✗ Complex sentence structure
- ✗ Contractions
- ✗ Abbreviations
- ✗ Metaphors
- ✗ Idioms (drop of a hat, in a pinch)

- ✗ Cultural references (sports, TV)
- ✗ Negative constructions
- ✗ Parenthetical dashes
- ✗ Pluralizing words by adding (s)
- ✗ Using “&” to mean “and”
- ✗ Using slashes to mean and/or
- ✗ Latin (i.e., e.g., ad hoc, etc.)
- ✗ Slang
- ✗ Jargon, overly technical words
- ✗ Compound words and phrases
- ✗ Colloquial terms for special symbols (“pound sign” “star”)
- ✗ Generic link text (“Learn more”)

## Tips and Tools to Try:

- Reworking a sentence to get rid of extra prepositional phrases
- Reading your article out loud
- Thinking outside the box
- Copying/pasting your text into the [Hemingway app](#)
- IBM [Writing for an International Audience](#)
- [Plain Language Guidelines](#)
- Modified English Lists/Guides:
  - [Simplified English](#)
  - [Basic English](#)



Photo by [Kaitlyn Baker](#) on [Unsplash](#)

## Limit the length of sentences

✗ If only admins have permission to add videos, indicating that managers cannot add videos, then only admins will be able to see the video management page.

✓ *If only admins have permission to add videos, then managers cannot add videos. **Therefore**, only admins will be able to see the video management page.*

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# Write positively and actively

## Avoid negations, write about what you can do

✗ You **cannot** access team assignments that belong to teams of which you are **not** a member.

✓ You **must** be a member of a team to access that team's assignments.

## Use active verbs to indicate who does the action

✗ The dialog box **is opened by clicking** the "Create request" button.

✓ You can **click** the "Create request" button to **open** the dialog box.

Note: Use passive voice when the subject is being acted upon or if the actor is unclear. Example: "My car was stolen"

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# Use complete phrases to introduce data

✗ You can add videos to your team from:

☐ YouTube

☐ Vimeo

☐ Brightcove

☐ Kaltura

✓ You can add videos to your team from the following video hosting sites:

☐ YouTube

☐ Vimeo

☐ Brightcove

☐ Kaltura

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## Syntactically and semantically complete sentences

✗ The file you selected is not available.

✓ The file **that** you selected is not available.

**For specific order and selections, use “which”**

✗ Complete these steps in the order **that** they are written.

✓ Complete these steps in the order **in which** they are written.

**For general reference, use “that”**

✗ The Enterprise package is a solution **which** gives your team privacy.

✓ The Enterprise package is a solution **that** gives your team privacy.

**Use to with indirect objects**

✗ A label gives **a variable** a more informative name.

✓ A label gives a more informative name **to a variable**.

**Revise adjectives that follow nouns**

✗ Subtitles **longer** than 42 characters are too wide for the video player.

✓ Subtitles **that are longer** than 42 characters are too wide for the video player.

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# Use a verb-centered writing style

Avoid using “nounified” verbs, use verbs instead!

- ✗ A check mark next to the video indicates the **selection** of a video.
- ✓ A check mark next to the video indicates **that the video is selected**.

Focus on the action, use simple verbs instead!

- ✗ Managers can **enable the permission** for contributors to do review.
  - ✓ Managers can **permit** contributors to do review.
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# Use standard verb complements

- ✗ We **recommend to use** the Web version of the application.
  - ✓ We **recommend that you use** the Web version of the application.
  - ✗ You can **select to** display team resources in multiple languages.
  - ✓ You can **choose to** display team resources in multiple languages.
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# Transitive and intransitive verbs

Intransitive verbs cannot take direct or indirect objects:

- ✗ Employees can **rise** the management ladder quickly.
- ✓ Employees can **climb** the management ladder quickly.

Establish the relationship between transitive verb, subject, and object:

- ✗ He **rose** the occasion.

✓ *He **rose to** the occasion.*

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## Keep phrasal verbs together

✗ **Turn** your computer **off** at the end of the day.

✓ ***Turn off** your computer at the end of the day.*

✗ **Spell** the phrase **out** instead of using an abbreviation.

✓ ***Spell out** the phrase instead of using an abbreviation.*

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## Use short, simple verb phrases

Avoid unnecessary future tenses:

✗ The workflow settings **will affect** which pages you can see.

✓ *The workflow settings **affect** which pages you can see.*

Simplify complex verb phrases:

✗ The request **could not be being created** by users without permission.

✓ *Users without permission **cannot create** the request.*

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## How many?

Use the only with definite nouns:

✗ You can see **the** relationship between these two functions.

✓ *You can see **a** relationship between these two functions.*

Use singular and plural nouns correctly:

- ✗ All the **data items** have a numeric **value**.
  - ✓ *Each **data item** has a unique numeric **value**.*
  - ✗ New **files** can be changed only by **their** owner.
  - ✓ *Each new **file** can be changed only by **its** owner.*
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## Define or revise ambiguous noun phrases

Establish important relationships between ideas:

- ✗ The default **subtitle request sort order** starts with the earliest due date.
- ✓ *The default **sort order for subtitle requests** starts with the earliest due date.*

Some noun phrases need hyphens to avoid confusion:

- ✗ Include **plot important on screen text** in your translation.
  - ✓ *Include **on-screen text** in your translation **that is important to the plot**.*
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## Which one?

Avoid ambiguous pronouns:

- ✗ After you define the **structure** of the **table**, enhancing **it** is easy.
- ✓ *Once you define the structure of the table, **enhancing the table** is easy.*

Don't use **this**, **that**, **these**, and **those** as pronouns

- ✗ Save your changes. **These** are important to team workflow.



✓ Save your changes. **These changes** are important to team workflow.

### Don't use which to refer to an entire clause

✗ The titlecard is too large, which is a problem for the user.

✓ *The large size of titlecard is a problem for the user.*

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## Modifiers

### Place “only” and “not” immediately before whatever they are modifying:

✗ Artificial Neural Network forecasting **only** works in Version 7.0.

✓ *Artificial Neural Network forecasting works **only** in Version 7.0*

### Clarify what each prepositional phrase is modifying

✗ Servers enable clients **to share data** across platforms **with other users**.

✓ *Servers enable clients **to share data with other users** across platforms.*

### Clarify what each relative clause is modifying

✗ The audience consisted of employees, quality partners, and **customers who are participating in beta testing**.

✓ *The audience consisted of three groups of people **who are participating in beta testing**: employees, quality partners, and customers.*

### Clarify which parts of a sentence are being joined by and or or

✗ Do not dip your bread **or roll in your soup**.

✓ *Do not dip **your bread or your roll** in your soup.*

### Consider moving verb modifiers to the beginning

✗ Avoid creating features that require workarounds **whenever possible**.

✓ ***Whenever possible**, avoid creating features that require workarounds.*

### Clarify ambiguous modification in conjoined noun phrases

✗ Sort by **video or subtitle language** on this page.

✓ Sort by **video language or subtitle language** on this page.

### Both and either can clarify inclusive and exclusive conjunctions

✗ Enter your username and password to log in.

✓ Enter **both** your username **and** your password to log in.

✗ Choose a video language or select “Don’t set” in the menu.

✓ **Either** choose a video language **or** select “Don’t set” in the menu.

### Use if . . . then to reinforce causal relationships

✗ If you forget to add a video title, the video will be hard to find.

✓ If you forget to add a video title, **then** the video will be hard to find.

## Punctuation

- Use and (not ampersand) unless referring to the symbol &
- Use commas to separate main and dependent clauses and reduce confusion
- Don’t use double Hyphens ( — )
- Don’t use em dashes ( — ) for parenthetical, dependent, exemplary phrases
- Use parentheses to list synonyms or examples of a term
- Don’t use quotation marks for measurements, metaphors, or technical terms
- Use semicolons to separate items in a series in which one item has a comma

## Capitalization

- Capitalize proper nouns
- Capitalize user-interface labels **as they are capitalized in the interface**
- Don't capitalize common nouns

## Keep a List of Deprecated Terms

- trademark violations
- obsolete terms
- terms for internal use only
- incorrect technical terms
- spelling variants
- idioms, colloquialisms, metaphors
- unnecessary abbreviations (e.g., latin, etc.)