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Writing style guide

Welcome to Avatao's writing style guide

Why the guide and who's it for?

This writing guide is here to help make sure that there's one voice behind Avatao. Sure everybody has their own style and personality (and we want to see that!), but at the end of the day we want to show the world that we are in unison, one voice and most importantly that we are **consistent**.

Our goals

Every content that comes out either challenges, tutorials or social media posts is an extension of us working at Avatao. That's why it's important that we always remember what we aim to do here.

We want people to **learn** when using Avatao. Simple and clear language helps **motivate** them, and gives them a sense of satisfaction - they're able to **understand** what we're saying.

Not everyone's an expert, so it's important to keep that in mind. We don't want to scare them away, we want to **educate** them.

Structure your content

Speak clearly. Be concise, precise with your information. Identify the main ideas you want to talk about before writing. In what order? Is everything I'm saying useful to the reader?

Space it out. Definitely use paragraphs, it's never fun for a reader to see a brick of text with no space in it. We'll lose them before they even begin to read.

- Remember: different idea, different paragraph.

- Sentences shouldn't exceed 20-30 words. Read it out loud. If you can't breathe after reading it, it's too long. Cut, cut, cut!

Format it. Don't be afraid to use titles, and subheadings. The reader needs to be able to scan through the text and know what are the main ideas. Use bullet points too, they're your friend.

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Format it 2.0. I'm sure you've heard of "*Introduction, Body, Conclusion*". Use them! We need to be **consistent**, because we so have different writers. This our best tool, let's unify!

– The intro and conclusion don't need to be long, but always include them. Ease them in and finish with a short wrap-up. We want to be kind to our readers.

– For tutorials and challenges, let's address the reader with a nice 'Hi there' or 'Hi user" before jumping in the instructions. It feels personal and friendly.

Use simple words. The simpler the words, the easier it is to understand. We're not writing scientific papers here.

– We want people to become familiar with our topics not run away from them.

– Don't use words like 'thus', 'therefore'. They are too formal. Instead opt for 'that's why', 'so', 'as a result' etc.

– You're the expert here. Your goal is to make *others* understand a complex subject in an uncomplicated way.

This is especially true, because you cannot expect your audience to understand all underlying concepts. Please refer to our internal knowledge base (TBD) wherever possible.

Active voice

Sentences written in an active voice flow better. It gives emphasis on the subject of the sentence, and overall the sentence is more straightforward and concise. Fun fact, passive sentences have words than active ones and are way more complicated for the reader to understand

Active	*Passive*
Monkeys live in the jungle.	*The jungle is where monkeys live.*

(See how to)
How to Avoid Using the Passive Voice

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The grand-ma test.

The grand-ma test. Ask yourself: Would my grand-ma understand what I've just written? If it's a NO, go back and edit your text. Nobody wants a confused grand-ma!

Style Manual
AP Style

To make sure we're **consistent** throughout all our content we're going to use the [AP style](#) (Associated Press Style). If you have any doubts about acronyms, capitalization, punctualization you can always refer to their style guide.

English

US vs. UK English Ever wondered if you're going insane because you swore color was written with an "u" but then your spell check points out a mistake?

That's because there are two styles of English when it comes to writing, US English and UK English. Yes, they do vary from time to time.

Here is an example:
- analyse and analyze.

Which one to use and when you might ask? Wonder no more! We're sticking to one: [US English.](#) This way we're **consistent**! Don't be shy to have a quick look at the most common differences and get familiar with it. Before you know it, you'll be an expert!

Voice and Tone
Gamification and storytelling to engage users. Let's try and talk to them as if we're talking to our friends. Light, fun and straight to the point.

Grammar Bible

Abbreviations and acronyms
When they are well known use them, for example HTML. Otherwise spell them out.

Capitalization
- Cities/Countries

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- Days/Months
- Names
- Titles - every first letter except articles and prepositions

Commas
When you do an enumeration of things, use commas. Commas are also required sometimes before 'and'. If you feel your sentence is to long, you can always break it down with commas.

- Next, I'll go to Barcelona, Bilbao, and San Sebastian.

Contractions
Big yes. Let's use them whenever possible! It gives and informal, light and personal tone to the text.

We want to connect with our readers. Make them feel like we're approachable.

Here are some examples:

- You are → you're
- We are → we're
- It is/it has → it's
- We have → we've
- Can/could not → can't/couldn't
- Will not → won't

Dates
Spell out the day of the week and month. With this format we don't add '1st, 13th'

- Friday, October 13
- October 13, 2019

Dashes and Hyphens
Use to (-) to unite words into a single one or to indicate a span

- Two-step login
- January-June

Use (—) when you want to give additional information

- He was going to call off the project—or was he?—when the client increased the payment.

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- Do this, do that, go here, go there—there's so much to do that I don't actually get much accomplished during the day.

Ellipses (...)

To show that you've omitted words.

- In the baseball game, our team scored four homeruns, the other team, only two…

Emojis

Preferably use them for social media posts.

Exclamation point|
When expressing excitement, astonishment or strong emotion.

Gender neutral

Unless the gender of a person is known, let's be gender neutral. Instead of using he/she, use they/their/them or person/people.

Here is an example:

- Yes: They use their computer every day (this can be singular and/or plural)
- No: He uses his computer every day.

Also, avoid gender-specifics titles:

- Yes: Police officer
- No: Policeman

Money
Use the currency sign before the amount. If the currency is written in abbreviation put it after the amount.

- €12.00 / $100
- 12.00 EUR / 100 USD

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Names and titles

Capitalize names and titles before names

- Yes: President Abraham Lincoln
- No: The president was on vacation.

Numbers

A number starting a sentence, we spell out the word. If not, we use the numeric version. 1 can be tricky, sometimes it just looks weird visually. Choose what feels best.

Numbers with 3+ digits use a space.

- 2 000

Percentages

Simply use % after the number.

Comma

Commas are useful and help give a clear message to the reader. They can be used for various reasons. Here you have a few situations where you'd need to use commas. The list is more extensive but basically use your common sense.

Quick tip: If you feel like you need to take a breath while reading your sentence, it probably means you should insert in a comma.

- Use a comma before any coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet).
- Use commas to separate items in a series, or for an enumeration.
- Use a comma after introductory adverbs
- Use a comma to separate elements in an address or in a date

Question marks

Use a question mark after a direct question.

- Yes: Will you go with me?
- No: I wonder if he would go with me? (indirect question, use a period)

Quotation marks

Use quotation marks when you use somebody else's word.

- John said " I really liked that book"

    *Note***:**In American English, single quotation marks are used for quotes within quotes.

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Indirect Quotes

You can use indirect quotes when you want to paraphrase what somebody else has said.

- John said he hated when it was hot outside.

Ranges and Spans

Use (-) for ranges and span

  – Use no more than 20-30 words per sentence.

Semicolons

The most common use of the semicolon is to join two independent clauses without using a conjunction like *and.*

Slang and company jargon

Avoid using company jargon. What we say internally doesn't always make sense to the outside world. Use technical terms if you need to but make sure that you quickly define to keep the reader in the loop.

Also, we should agree on a consistent use of important key concepts like exercises vs. challenge vs. tutorial or path vs. set vs. course. What do we use (and use it consistently)?

Space

Use only one space between lines.

Telephone Numbers

Use (-) for telephone numbers, include country code when appropriate.

- + 1-514-112-3232

Time

Use the am and pm format.

- 9:45 am
- 6:00 pm

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Think positive

Think positive. Try and avoid words that imply a negative tone 'can't, 'don't' when possible.

- Yes: This challenge will help you do XYZ
- No: If you don't do this you won't be able to do XYZ

URL and websites

Let's use the shorten URLs so that it looks more neat.
- Yes: avatao.com
- No: https://avatao.com/

Glossary

Further readings

AP Style
US vs. UK