Technical Writing Style Guide- Product Education

June 2022

Preface

This style guide is designed to be used by the Product Education department to create product documentation for HP Inc. PCoIP® products. This style guide is an extract of the *IBM Style Guide* which is considered an industry standard for technical documentation in the computer software and IT industry. If a writing or style question is not answered within this guide, consult the appropriate fallback guide.

1. Language and grammar

Abbreviations

Abbreviations include initialisms, acronyms, and shortened words. An initialism is an abbreviation that is pronounced as individual letters, for example, IBM. An acronym is an abbreviation that forms a pronounceable word, for example, NATO.

General guidelines

Use abbreviations when the following conditions are true:

- Their meanings are clear.
- They make the information easier to understand.
- They are recognized more easily than their spelled-out forms, for example, HTML.
- Space is limited, for example, in a table or detailed diagram.

Not Commonly known

Avoid abbreviating any words that the audience won't understand immediately.
For the first reference, completely spell out the full name or function that we use the acronym or initialism for, followed by the acronym or initialism in parentheses. You can then use the abbreviated form in all subsequent references.

Ex. Anyware Manager(AWM) is an HP management plane enabling users to configure, manage and monitor brokering of remote workstations….
To make an abbreviation plural, just add s (no apostrophe).

Ex. There were 16 CEOs in the boardroom. They all stated that they use network video recorders (NVRs) for their security systems at present.

Do not use Latin abbreviations, such as e.g., et al, etc., and so on. Instead, use appropriate English phrases such as for example, and so on.

Do not spell out an abbreviation that is commonly known to the target audience.

Ex. DOS, HTML, HTTP, and so on.

Periods and Units of measurement

Omit periods in abbreviations for units of measurement unless they can be confused with words (bps, rpm, in., and so on).

In uppercase abbreviations, omit periods (EST, IS, US, and so on).
Include periods in lowercase abbreviations that relate to time or that can be confused with words (yr., hr., no., and so on). However, do not use periods for am and pm.
Use a single period when an abbreviation appears as the last word in a sentence.

Anthropomorphism

Do not attribute human characteristics to inanimate objects, which are incapable of human behaviour and emotions. As much as possible, focus technical information on users and the actions that they perform, not on a product and the actions that it performs. Avoid words like '*allows*', '*enables*', '*expects*', and so on. (Exception for marketing content).

Articles

Include definite and indefinite articles and apply them correctly. Do not omit articles a, an, and the. Articles increase clarity.

Ex.
- Create **a** Connector token
- The following section outlines how to install the Anyware Manager with the default database….

Capitalization

Headline-style capitalization

This style uses initial uppercase letters for all significant words in the text. In headline-style capitalization, capitalize the initial letter of the following words:
- The first and last words of the text
- All nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and subordinating conjunctions, such as after, although, because, before, how, if, then, that, though, until, when, where, whether, and while
- Any word in a hyphenated compound that is not an article, preposition, or coordinating conjunction
- The last word in a hyphenated compound, regardless of its part of speech

In headline-style capitalization, do not capitalize the initial letter of the following words:
- Articles, except as the first word
- Coordinating conjunctions
- Prepositions, except as the first or last word
- The *to* in an infinitive

Ex.
- Install Anyware Connector RPM
- Configure the Anyware Manager to use Proxy
- Preparing a Secret Storage Application

After a colon

Do not capitalize the word after a colon.

Ex. I am about to list several things: one, two, and three.

Exceptions that require a capital following a colon:
- Items in a vertical list (such as this one)
- Note that follows a label

Ex. CAUTION: Do not disconnect the yellow wire.

- Proper noun
- Quotation
- Subheading on the same line as the heading

Contractions

Do not use contractions when documenting technical information.

2. Punctuation

Apostrophes

In general, only use an apostrophe when you need to form the possessive of the word; not the plural. The exception to this is the possessive of "it", which is "its", and does not take an apostrophe.

Ex. The new CFO's office had its own entrance.
Ex. A hard day's work.

If the word ends in s, just add an apostrophe to form the possessive.

Ex. Everyone stared at Charles' new car, a Tesla Model S.

Colons

Do not use a colon at the end of a heading or title.

Use a colon between a heading and subheading or between a title and subtitle. Do not insert a space before the colon, and insert one space after the colon. Capitalize the first letter of the subheading or subtitle.

Ex. Installing Anyware Manager: Darksite Installation

Introductory text

Use a colon after the introduction to a vertical list, including a procedure or substeps in a procedure.

Ex.

To ensure the communications between Anyware Connector and external entities are trusted and secured, the following certificates are required:
- Certificate for establishing LDAPs connection from Connector to AD, typically it is the DC certificate
- Certificate for the Connector to establish HTTPS connection from PCoIP client to Connector for Login
- Certificate for Anyware Manager to establish HTTPS connection from Connector to Anyware Manager installed locally

> **Note: Technical Writing**
>
> Do not use em dashes in technical writing. You can rewrite the sentence or use other punctuation marks such as commas, parentheses, colons, and so on, to achieve the same result.

Commas

Use the serial (Oxford) comma before conjunctions (such as "and" or "or") in lists.

Ex. It checks dev, beta, and stable in that order.

Read the following to learn how to avoid comma splices:

1. Use a comma between independent clauses that are separated by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, & yet).

Ex. The user installed the wrong plugin, so he was unable to run the program.

NOTE: You do not need a comma if the clauses are short.

Ex. Stop the process and call support.

2. Remember that then is not a coordinating conjunction.

Ex. (a) Click Apply, then click OK. (incorrect)
Ex. (b) Click Apply, and then click OK. (correct)
Ex. (c) Click Apply; then click OK. (acceptable alternative)

Example (a) is incorrect. You cannot use '*then*' as a coordinating conjunction. You must write it as it appears in either example (b) or example (c).

Ellipses

Use non-spaced ellipses.

INCORRECT: . . .
CORRECT: …

Periods

Use periods correctly at the end of a sentence. After a period, use the spacing that your authoring tool provides. If you insert spacing manually, insert only one space after a period. Do not use periods in uppercase abbreviations.

Ex. E.S.T, I.D, U.S (incorrect)
Ex. EST, ID, US (correct)

3. Formatting and organization

Headings

Use headings to organize information into a logical structure. Make headings brief and descriptive. Use the appropriate type of heading for each information type.

1. Use gerunds for the headings of tasks. If the subject is a functional overview, use a heading such as Introduction or Overview rather than a pseudo-task-oriented heading that begins with Understanding, Introducing, or Learning.

Ex. (incorrect)
Install the client program
Understanding client/server communications

Ex. (correct)
Installing the client program
Introduction to client/server communications

2. Use question-style headings, such as "How do I uninstall the old version?" only in troubleshooting topics and frequently asked questions (FAQs). Do not use question-style headings in concept, task, and reference topics.

3. Do not end a heading with a period or colon.

Lists

Use a vertical list to visually organize a long series at the end of a sentence or a series of parallel sentences or paragraphs. Lists can make information easier to read and translate if they are not too long. Avoid in-sentence enumerations in technical information. Do not overuse lists; text that consists of a series of vertical lists that are loosely tied together with short introductory sentences can look more like an outline than a finished work.

1. Unordered list
Use an unordered (bulleted) list when the sequence of list items is not significant. In an unordered list, arrange list items in a logical way. If there is no better method for arranging them, put them in alphabetical order.

Ex. When you configure the computer, you can use the program to set the following items:
- Date and time
- Passwords
- Drive startup sequence

2. Ordered list
Use an ordered (numbered) list when the sequence is significant, for example, when writing procedures or ranking items.

Ex. To disable Anyware Monitor:
1. Open the Admin Console.
2. Navigate to the Remote Workstation tab.
3. Click on the Kebab menu.

If all list items are complete sentences, use a period after each. If all list items are fragments, do not include a period after any. If a list contains items that start with fragments, and one or more of the fragments are followed by a complete sentence, including a period after all fragments.

Tables

Often, text that is difficult to understand in paragraph form becomes clear in a table format. Tables help highlight relationships among similar pieces of information and are easily scanned for quick reference. Use grammatically parallel text for all cells in a column.

Follow the normal rules of punctuation.

Ex. Use sentence-style capitalization for these table elements:
- Cell contents
- Column headings
- Row labels
- Table captions

Notes and Notices

Use notes and notices with discretion. If you overuse notes, they lose their significance. Use the correct type of notice to indicate the possibility of damage or injury. To call attention to important hints, tips, guidance, restrictions, or advice that might be overlooked, use a meaningful label that describes the nature of the material.

Consider labels such as:
- Note
- Tip
- Warning
- Caution
- Attention

If two or more notes are together, use a plural label on a separate line and arrange the notes in the appropriate type of list. Do not interrupt a paragraph with a note. A note must not be inline; it must stand alone. Do not indent note text, and do not use notes where they distort the appearance of the surrounding text.

Short descriptions

A short description is a very key component in technical documentation. It provides the user with an overview of the topic and if they really need the information. When writing a short description make sure you do the following:

- Write short descriptions for all topics.
- A short description should succinctly provide information about what the topic entails and it should not exceed more than **50 words**.
- State the purpose (without being self-referential) and why users would care about or need the information you are presenting in the topic.
- Always use complete sentences.

Writing short descriptions for task/procedure topics

The short description should answer one or more of the following questions:

- Why do users need to perform this task?
- When would users perform this task?
- Who performs this task?
- What does this task help users accomplish?
- What are the benefits of doing this task?
- How does this task fit with other tasks?

INCORRECT: You can monitor the overall health of your system, using the Health statistics report.

CORRECT: To identify instabilities and prevent critical system failures, you can monitor the overall health of your system by generating a report from the Health statistics task.

In the correct version, the short description describes why you would view the health status and also states how you would do it.

Writing short descriptions for concept topics

The short description should answer one or more of the following questions:

- What is the concept, feature, or main idea?
- Why should users care?

INCORRECT: Intel® AMT is used to remotely operate the power of physical workstations..

CORRECT: Anyware Manager can use Intel® AMT to remotely power operate physical workstations. To be controlled remotely, a physical workstation within a deployment must have Intel AMT provisioned.

In the correct version, the product name appears, the short description contains the definition, and the sentence states why the feature is useful.

Writing short descriptions for reference topics

The short description should answer one or more of the following questions:
- What is the reference information and what does it do?
- What is the reference information used for?
- Why is this reference information useful?
-

INCORRECT: The system requirements for Anyware Monitor are the following:

CORRECT: System requirements are the recommended hardware and software components that are required for your product and system to run optimally.

In the correct version, the short description describes what system requirements are and why they are required.

4. Numbers and measurements

In general, spell out cardinal and ordinal numbers zero through ten and use numerals for numbers 11 and greater. If a number appears at the beginning of a sentence, spell out the number. Remember to hyphenate compound numbers.

Ex. The first thing you must do is purchase seven new monitors.

Ex. The company hired 31 new employees last year.

Ex. Forty-seven new bugs were found in the build.

Adjectival phrases

Compound adjectival phrases and express them with a numeral unless the adjectival phrase occurs at the beginning of the sentence.

Ex. Enter your 3-character code.
Ex. Eight-digit pins are more secure than 4-digit pins.

Units of measurement

Use numerals for numbers that are combined with a unit of measurement, including characters.

Ex. Place the pieces 5 mm apart.
Ex. Your password must be 7 characters long.

Bits, bytes, and words

Use numerals. Do not use, for example, 0-bit and 1-bit to mean bit 0 and bit 1.

Ex. In byte 4

Time references

Use numerals for times.

Ex. A full server backup is performed at 6:15 pm every day.
Ex. Replace the fan within 5 minutes.

Dates

Monday, September 1st, 2014 (North America)
Monday, 1. September 2014 (Europe)
Date format should always use the ISO8601 standard: YYYY/MM/DD

Labels

Use numerals.
Ex. Use Input 3 when connecting your external drive.

5. UI Elements

Styling

Use (**AAA**) style (rendered as bold in the output) for the following:
- Buttons
- Checkboxes
- Drop-down lists
- Fields
- Menu items
- Sliders
- Tabs
- Windows
- Dialog boxes
- Pages
- Areas
- Panes
- Wizards
- Portals
- Admin Console tab names

Use (`AAA`) style (rendered as `monospace` in the output) for the following:
- File paths
- Web addresses
- User inputs
- Flags options

Use (```bash```) style (rendered as `monospace` in the output) for the following:
- Lines of codes
- Commands
- Code blocks

Ex.

4. Run the following commands to configure the firewall:

```bash
sudo firewall-cmd --permanent --add-port=6443/tcp # virtual network flannel

sudo firewall-cmd --permanent --zone=trusted --add-source=10.42.0.0/16 # This subn

sudo firewall-cmd --permanent --zone=trusted --add-source=10.43.0.0/16 # This subn
```

Images

Use (![Alt Text](../../)) to insert an image. Make sure to use relevant meaningful text instead of 'Alt Text'. Images should be present in the appropriate source folder.

Images should be named and saved in a format that gives more information about the image, the location of the UI element present in the image, or additional content about the image. The image name should always start with a relevant HP Inc. product name in the abbreviation form. Accepted abbreviations are (AWM for Anyware Manager, AWC for Anyware Connector, AMM for Anyware Monitor, and so on.)

Ex.

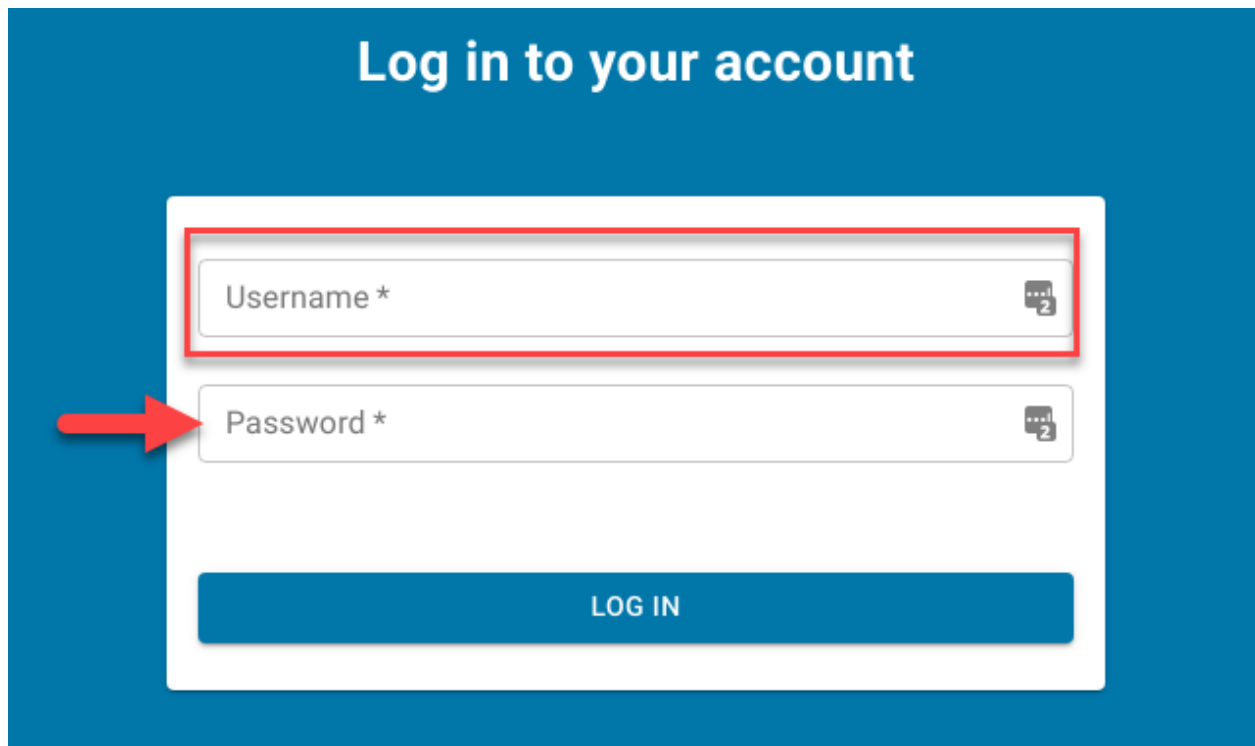AWM_Workstation_tab
AWC_OS_Specific_Screenshot
AMM_Enable_log_off

Underscore (_) is the only accepted separator in an image name.

All images that are inline or in between chronological procedure steps should not be more than 630px. Otherwise, the standard accepted dimensions are 750px. Ensure the images are clear, high-quality and in sync with the most latest UI of the software. Outdated images should be replaced immediately.

If specific information or a UI element is required to be highlighted in the image or screenshot you should **ONLY** mark it with a '**red box highlighter**' or a '**red arrow**' pointing toward the correct element.

Ex.

Overuse of images is not recommended as they lose their significance and it brings a challenge to upkeep the documentation. Images should be used only wherever necessary.

6. Writing

Ambiguous Writing

Noun strings

Avoid noun strings as much as possible, particularly in headings and titles. A noun string is a group of nouns strung together without a verb, preposition, or articles to separate them. Noun strings make it difficult to assess where the adjective lies (what is being modified), and can cause difficulties with translation.

As a general rule, do not use more than three nouns in a row.

Ex.

INCORRECT: Honeywell Galaxy Dimension control panel integration
CORRECT: Control panel integration for Honeywell Galaxy Dimension
INCORRECT: To view the intrusion detection area configuration pages...
CORRECT: To view the configuration pages for the intrusion detection area…

Parentheses

Use parentheses to identify abbreviations, symbols, measurements, and so on.

Ex. When you are finished, press the pound key (#).

Avoid using in running text, because parentheses can diminish the importance of the text within.

Ex. The installation is complete (but some files might be missing).

Parentheses can also lead to ambiguity, so use with caution. The following is an example of how parentheses can lead to ambiguity when used in running text.

INCORRECT: The Mobile Kit must be secured. Suggested securing methods include anchors, straps, or hook-and-loop strips (not included).

In the above example, it is unclear whether it is all items, or just hook-and-loops strips, that are not included. The example below provides a clearer alternative.

CORRECT: Suggested securing methods include either anchors, straps, or hook-and-loop strips, all of which are not included.

Personal and possessive pronouns

Using pronouns instead of "HP Inc."

You can replace "HP Inc." with the pronouns "us", "we" or "our", but never "I" or "me", because a reader could easily interpret "I" or "me" as representing "the writer", not the company. Because the pronouns "us, "we", and "our" are used to referring to the company name, there is no risk to the strength of our trademarks.

Examples of replacing HP Inc. with pronouns:

"If you have issues with your upgrade, you can contact us."

Result: Good because HP Inc. is replaced by "us".

"If you have issues with your upgrade, you can contact me."

Result: Bad because HP Inc. is replaced by "me".

"If you do not want us to monitor your premises, you can restrict access."

Result: Good because HP Inc. is replaced by "us".

"If you are having trouble selecting the right plan, we can help you choose one that meets your needs."

Result: Good because HP Inc. is replaced by "we".

Possessive form of HP

Never use "HP's" when modifying or showing possession about the company's software, hardware, affiliations, events or holdings, etc. Because HP Inc. is the brand holder that represents the full catalogue of software, systems and hardware, the brand can always be modified to avoid the possessive case.

INCORRECT: The tradeshow lineup will include HP's hardware products, the company's flagship software, and PCoIP systems.

CORRECT: The tradeshow lineup will include HP™ hardware products, the company's flagship software, and PCoIP systems.

Voice, tone and tense

HP Inc. strives to produce fresh, relevant, instructive content. Here are a few notes on the voice and tone to use in your writing for HP Inc.

HP Inc. is a B2B business, in a very technical field, so we must be sure to speak in a tone that is acceptable and professionally presented to our audience, which consists of:
- Integrators who sell HP Inc. solutions
- Consultants and Industry Specialists
- End-Users; customers (existing and prospects)
- Channel partners / Resellers / Distributors

The following 'TONE' of our professional writing can follow:
- Professional, technical and directed
- Friendly and accessible, but not overly casual
- Helpful and knowledgeable, but not salesy or pushy
- Expert, but not know-it-all (watch the jargon!)

First-person - "I"

Ex. "I would suggest that HP offers one of the best PCoIP software worth trying out, and my experience would support that suggestion."

Second person - "You" and "Your"

Ex. "You should try HP Inc. when looking for Remote desktop software. You will not be disappointed by HP ('s) scalability, support, quality and market leadership."

Ex. "When you install Anyware Manager, you'll get a PCoIP software that is very extensible, and will be good for your bottom line."

Third person - "It" and "They"
Corporate preference is to use the removed, non-personal third-person voice in all B2B communications.

Ex. "When looking for remote desktop software, HP Inc. offers all the features necessary. Both enterprise and small-medium-size businesses (SMBs) will find an excellent PCoIP solution, no matter what their needs or size."

Also used more for describing technical information. You can use nouns and third-person pronouns such as it and they. Do not use gender-specific pronouns.

Preferred voice categories
Technical writing
- Second person: Use when describing steps in a task, when explaining cause and effect.
- Third person: Used more for describing technical information (for example, how something works).

Active and Passive Voice

Use the active voice as much as possible. It is more direct than using the passive voice and is usually clearer.

INCORRECT: An existing icon must be selected, and then the project can be saved.
CORRECT: Select an existing icon, and then click Save.

There are times when using the passive voice is acceptable. You can use it if any of the following conditions are true:
- The system, not the user, performs the action.
- It makes more sense to focus on the receiver of the action.
- You want to avoid blaming the user for an error.
- The information would be clearer.
- You are writing a glossary definition (or another specific information type that requires passive voice).

Tenses

Unless it is absolutely necessary to use the past or the future tense, always write using the present tense in technical writing.

INCORRECT: The program was installed during the upgrade.
CORRECT: The program is installed during the upgrade.
INCORRECT: After you click OK, a dialogue box will appear.
CORRECT: After you click OK, a dialogue box appears.

Error messages

Effective error messages inform users that a problem occurred, explain why it happened, and provide a solution so users can fix the problem. Users should either perform an action or change their behaviour as a result of an error message.

You can also consult The IBM Style Guide Chapter 7, "Computer Interfaces" for information on writing different types of messages.

Words

Choosing words

Choosing correct wording makes technical documents more persuasive, effective, and easier to read. Common word problems include wordy phrases, incorrect words, and words with more than one meaning.

Use the shortest word or phrase possible without changing the meaning. Overuse often turns a wordy phrase into a cliché:

- Confirming our conversation…
- Please do not hesitate to call.
- We are pleased to present our proposal for…
- Thank you for the opportunity to present our proposal for….

Jargon

Consult the following guidelines for the use of jargon.
- Minimize jargon – Define necessary jargon for non-expert readers. In proposals, treat jargon like abbreviations. Define it the first time the word is used in each major section that is likely to have different readers or evaluators.
- Replace jargon with plain English when feasible. When deciding to use the customer's exact words or plain English, plain English is always better. Use or reflect the customer's language, but replace it with plain language when feasible.
- Use the customer's jargon before your own. The acceptability of jargon is in direct correlation to the number of individuals using that jargon in the customer's organization and the power of those individuals.

In order of acceptability:
- Customer's jargon
- Industry or business jargon
- Professional jargon
- Seller's jargon

Sentences and paragraphs

Do not begin sentences with "According to" or "X has found".
Avoid heavy, overwhelming paragraphs. Paragraphs should be broken down into short, easy-to-understand chunks. Some of the most complex and technical subjects are best presented simply and in logical, brief succession.

It is acceptable to begin a sentence with a conjunction such as "And", "Or", or "But".