

# Education.com Style Guide (2010)

This guide provides direction on Education.com’s brand voice and tone, grammar and style conventions, and how to write titles, introductions, and abstracts. It was developed for our editorial team and freelancers and is most relevant to activity and worksheet content.

These guidelines serve more as recommendations than a prescriptive formula (aside from a few exceptions, which are noted in the text). We encourage you to cultivate your own voice and style within the Education.com brand. Every member of the editorial team has their own way of doing and writing, and we support you in finding yours.

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## Voice and Tone

Key to finding success as a writer here is nailing our voice and tone. Education.com is a fun, welcoming, supportive place and we aim to reflect that personality in everything we say.

Voice and tone are related but you can think of voice as what we say and tone as how we say it. Our **voice** communicates the personality of our brand. It’s our overall writing style. **Tone** moderates our voice and changes according to the type of content and the user’s context.

### Voice Guiding Principles

- **Be conversational.** We want our site to feel like having a conversation with a favorite aunt or older sister at the kitchen table. Informal, friendly, and inviting.
- **Be playful.** As creators of content for kids and families, we gravitate naturally toward playfulness.
- **Be natural.** This is where finding your own style within our voice is especially important. If you feel like you’re forcing a style that’s unnatural or affected for you, this will probably come across to the reader as well. Don’t strong-arm the fun; we want you to interpret our voice in a way that feels right to you. Rely on your own instincts and judgment when it comes to making a style call (and remember that your editor is here to assist during the process).

**Tip:** Read your writing aloud to catch clunky phrasing.

- **Be clear.** We love to have fun with language and are big fans of playful phrasing, but style should never get in the way of meaning. Above all our writing should be straightforward and easy to understand.

## Notes on Tone

There are just a couple points to keep in mind regarding tone.

- **Consider the age range of the content.** The younger the content, the more light and playful the tone can be. For content targeting older kids, use a more frank tone that feels appropriate for the age.
- **Consider the subject matter.** For lightweight craft activities, a breezy tone feels fun and appropriate. For dryer subject matter, such as advanced math concepts, a more sober (but still conversational) tone is appropriate; too silly or light a tone feels out of place and could communicate a lack of depth and seriousness in the content.

## Grammar and Style

This section covers mechanical style conventions that aid in capturing our brand voice.

- Use contractions. Contractions make writing feel less stiff and formal and should be used in most instances unless doing so feels awkward.

**DON'T** What is more frightening than a great white shark?

**DO** What's more frightening than a great white shark?

- Use colloquialisms, e.g. "let's face it" or "in a jiffy." Like contractions, colloquialisms keep your writing casual and fun.

Let's face it, coloring is always better when cats are involved.

These puppets come together in a jiffy, and are simple enough for very young kids to make.

- Use alliteration, but in moderate doses. Alliteration is catchy and fun to read and can help expand your writing vocabulary by encouraging you to think of creative ways of expressing an idea. Best applied in moderation, though, as it's very easy to cross over into the overly silly or cutesy if used too much.

Make your child's day with a coloring page featuring a gaggle of ghosts.

- Use exclamation points, but again, in moderation. Avoid tacking on an exclamation point to the end of a sentence to try to make it sound fun and exciting. Aim to write engaging text independent of punctuation, and reserve exclamation points for the sentences that really call for them. As a rule, limit exclamation points to one per introduction.
- Avoid using jargon or overly technical or academic terms, what we fondly call "teacher talk." If you're unsure whether the average reader would be familiar with a term, try to find a more common alternative. If it's necessary to use an uncommon term, provide a clear and simple explanation.

**DON'T** Tracing is a great way to boost manual dexterity.

**DO** Tracing is a great way to boost fine motor skills.

**DON'T** Increase your child's digraph fluency with this phonics worksheet.

- DO** Help your child practice sounding out digraphs. Digraphs are consonant pairs such as “ch” or “ck” that make a single sound.

## Writing a Title

The perfect title is clear and descriptive yet interesting and entices the reader to click through. Readers skim titles to find content that interests them, and if a title doesn’t attract or is unclear, they’ll move on.

### Guidelines for Activity and Worksheet Titles

- Titles tell the reader what the activity or worksheet is about in as fun and snappy a way as possible.
- For activities, titles take the form of an imperative beginning with a verb.
  - DON’T** Season Art
  - DO** Sculpt the Seasons
- Where possible and appropriate, use alliteration and rhyme to inject fun into a mundane subject.
  - Fraction Action: Practice  $\frac{1}{2}$
  - Get into Grammar: Plural Nouns
- When choosing words, try to be specific; avoid using a general term when a specific one is available.
  - DON’T** Make a Toy Box
  - DO** Build a Cardboard Play Chest
- For worksheets that form a series, choose an introductory phrase that describes the series as a whole, and begin each title with that phrase. In the second half of the title, specify what the worksheet is about.
  - Get into Grammar: Plural Nouns
  - Get into Grammar: Spot the Verb
  - Get into Grammar: Pronouns
- SEO: Always keep SEO (search engine optimization) top of mind. Make sure your title contains the top keyword related to the activity or worksheet. Use specific terms, but avoid obscure or erudite words that no one would likely type into a search field. Ask yourself: what terms would I search if I wanted to find this?

## Writing an Introduction

When writing an introduction, think short and sweet. Keep these questions in mind as you write:

1. What is this activity/worksheet all about?
2. What are the learning benefits?
3. Why should users care?

## Guidelines

- Length:
  - Activities: 3-5 sentences
  - Worksheet intros: 3-4 sentences
- Open with a snappy hook to grab the attention of the reader and set a fun tone.
- Spend 1-2 sentences introducing the activity or worksheet and explaining the learning benefits. Avoid giving instructions in the intro; any instructional information should be in the steps.
- Pick 1-2 major learning areas to highlight and only if they really make sense. For a paper bag puppet craft that has a step asking kids to cut various shapes out of construction paper, shape practice is involved but not a major learning benefit. Pretend play is a better fit.
- To list fine motor skills or not: Only list fine motor skills if it's truly one of the primary benefits of the craft, such as stitching. Nearly every craft improves fine motor skills in some way.
- Avoid overusing the phrase "your child" and particularly the infamous "your child will." In addition to sounding a bit stiff, we find that writers tend to fall back on this phrasing if they're not looking out for it. It quickly becomes repetitive when users are looking at multiple activities or worksheets in a session.
  - DON'T** Your child will practice sounding out the letter A.
  - DO** Kids practice sounding out the letter A.
  - DO** Help your kindergartner practice sounding out the letter A.
  - DO** Get your beginning reader to practice sounding out the letter A.
- Conclude with a brief, engaging wrap-up sentence that transitions smoothly to the activity body (instructional steps).

## Writing an Abstract

The abstract is the snippet of introductory text that appears under a title when browsing or searching activities or worksheets. Like titles, abstracts play a part in enticing users to read further. A good abstract gives a snapshot of what the activity or worksheet is all about in a clear, concise, and fun way.

## Guidelines

- You don't have to write the abstract from scratch. Choose a sentence from the activity or worksheet introduction that gives a good overview of the content, then tweak it a bit to make it more direct and compelling. It's good practice to alter the abstract, even only slightly, so the intro doesn't feel too redundant.
- Abstract length should be 1-2 sentences and no longer than two lines. You want to strike a balance between providing enough information to be clear but not overwhelming with a large block of text. A brief snapshot of the content is all that's needed. Always remember: a good abstract is a short abstract.