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## Language and grammar

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## 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.

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## General guidelines

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Use an abbreviation in the following situations:

- Its meaning is clear: the spelled-out form is well known or is stated at the first instance in text.
- It makes the information easier to understand.
- It is recognized more easily than its spelled-out form, for example, HTML.
- It reduces text when space is limited, such as in a table or detailed diagram.

Do not use an abbreviation in the following situations:

- It is unnecessary: the spelled-out form is short, clear, and does not benefit from abbreviation.
- It is invented: the abbreviation is created for specific content and does not have widespread use.
- Its meaning is unclear: the spelled-out form is not well known or is not stated at the first instance in text.
- It makes the information more difficult to understand.
- It occurs infrequently in the information, such as only two or three times in a large amount of content.
- It has several possible spelled-out forms, and the variations create confusion.
- It creates an inappropriate or undesirable letter combination or word.
- It is derived from Latin.
- It abbreviates an IBM product name. Legal and branding representatives must officially approve abbreviations for product names, such as RUP or TADDM.
- It abbreviates a name or entity that is owned by another company, and the owning company does not use that abbreviation.
- It might be a registered trademark for a different product or entity.

Follow these general guidelines for abbreviations:

- Do not abbreviate or otherwise abridge text if doing so sacrifices clarity. In the following example, writing both parameter options in full is clearer than saving a little space by referring to both options by using a single term with the prefix in parentheses.
  - ✗ Set the (UN)ABRIDGED option of the INFO parameter.
  - ✓ Set the ABRIDGED or UNABRIDGED option of the INFO parameter.
- Choose the indefinite article *a* or *an* according to how an abbreviation is spoken. Use *a* before an abbreviation that begins with a consonant sound. Use *an* before an abbreviation with a vowel sound. For more information about which indefinite article to use, see [Articles](#).
  - ✓ a PDF document, an SAP project, an XML activity
- If an abbreviation can be plural, form the plural by adding a lowercase *s*. The abbreviation for a unit of measurement is both singular and plural.
  - ✓ user IDs, RFPs, 1 mm, 10 mm
- Do not use an abbreviation as a noun unless the sentence makes sense when you substitute the spelled-out form of the term.
  - ✗ The tutorials are available as PDFs. [portable document formats]
  - ✓ The tutorials are available as PDF files.
  - ✗ Enhancements in this release include a redesigned GUI.
  - ✓ The procurement process begins with an RFP.
- Do not use abbreviations as verbs.
  - ✗ You can FTP the files to the server.
  - ✓ You can use the FTP command to send the files to the server.

- Do not use an apostrophe and the letter s ('s) to show the possessive form of an abbreviation. Make the abbreviation an adjective, or use the abbreviation in a prepositional phrase.
  - ✗ HTML's properties are editable.
  - ✓ HTML properties are editable.
  - ✓ The properties of HTML are editable.
- Do not abbreviate a unit of measurement in general text if no numeric value is associated with it.
  - ✗ Record the size of the package in mm.
  - ✓ Record the size of the package in millimeters.
  - ✗ Download times are reduced from 10 ms to less than a ms.
  - ✓ Download times are reduced from 10 ms to less than a millisecond.
- Do not abbreviate a multiplier to a letter, such as “thousand” to K or “million” to M. Use letters only as prefixes to units of measurement, such as “km” for “kilometers” or “MB” for “megabytes”. For correct usage of multiplier prefixes, including k (for x1,000) and K (for x1,024), see [Units of measurement](#).
  - ✗ The company has 10K employees.
  - ✓ The company has 10 thousand employees.
  - ✓ The company has 10,000 employees.
  - ✗ The contract is worth USD 4M.
  - ✓ The contract is worth USD 4 million.
  - ✓ The contract is worth USD 4,000,000.
  - ✓ Each turbine can generate 30 MW of power.
  - ✓ The power line is 50 km long.
  - ✓ The client system has only 100 KB of memory.

**Exception:** Using an uppercase letter as an abbreviation for a multiplier is allowed when space is limited (as on some user interfaces or websites, and as in some mobile apps), and when readers can be expected to know or easily determine the meaning of the abbreviation. In such instances, do not insert a blank between the number and the multiplier.

  - ✗ 100 K visitors/yr.
  - ✓ 100K visitors/yr.
  - ✓ Sales: \$4M

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## Spelled-out forms

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Follow these guidelines for spelling out abbreviations:

- Do not spell out an abbreviation that is commonly known to the target audience. Commonly known terms vary by audience; each writing and editing team must determine which abbreviations are familiar to the audience.
  - ✓ *When known to the audience:* DOS, HTML, HTTP, PDF, TCP/IP
- If an abbreviation is not commonly known, or if you are unsure whether it is commonly known, spell out the term at its first occurrence in text, followed by the abbreviation in parentheses. If information has a defined, linear reading path, consider spelling out an abbreviation at its first occurrence in a major section, such as at the beginning of each chapter in a book, or in an overview topic instead of in each subtopic. See specific guidance for [Videos](#).
  - ✓ massively parallel processing (MPP)
  - ✓ minimum recovery time (MRT)
  - ✓ customer service representative (CSR)

- Confirm the capitalization for the spelled-out form of an abbreviation; many spelled-out abbreviations do not require initial uppercase letters.

IBM only To confirm the capitalization, first search for the term in the [IBM Terminology database](#). The database is not exhaustive, so you might also have to search the internet. If you find instances of the spelled-out form with initial lowercase letters in reliable sources, use that capitalization because IBM Style prefers a lowercase style.

✓ graphical user interface (GUI)

✓ local area network (LAN)

✓ service-oriented architecture (SOA)

- Most spelled-out forms of language and protocol names have initial uppercase letters.

✓ Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP)

✓ Unified Modeling Language (UML)

✓ Web Services Description Language (WSDL)

✓ Wireless Application Protocol (WAP)

- When you spell out an abbreviation, do not capitalize letters in the middle of a word to show the origin of an initialism.

✗ eXtensible markup language (XML)

✓ Extensible Markup Language (XML)

- In most cases, when you spell out an abbreviation, do not include wording that repeats part of the spelled-out version of the abbreviation. For example, do not use *DASD device*, because the second *D* stands for *device*, or *JCL language*, because the *L* stands for *language*. However, there are rare exceptions. For example, it is standard to refer to a *CICS system*, although *CICS* stands for *Customer Information Control System*.

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## Periods with abbreviations

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Follow these guidelines for using periods with abbreviations:

- Omit periods in uppercase abbreviations.

✓ EST, ID, US

- Omit periods in abbreviations for academic degrees.

✓ BA, MA, PhD

- Include periods in abbreviations for social titles.

✓ Dr., Ms., Jr.

- If an abbreviation that requires a period occurs at the end of a sentence, do not include another period.

✓ In American system units, the dimensions are 4 in. x 6 in. x 12 in.

For guidance about using periods with abbreviated units of measurement, see [Units of measurement](#).

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## Glossaries

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For the abbreviation, provide a *See* reference that points to the spelled-out term; do not provide a definition.

✓ **DBCS**

See double-byte character set.

For the spelled-out term, provide a definition; do not provide a *See* reference to the abbreviation. Put the abbreviated term in parentheses after the spelled-out term.

✓ **double-byte character set (DBCS)**

A set of characters in which each character is represented by 2 bytes.

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## Headings and titles

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Avoid using abbreviations in headings and titles unless an abbreviation is well known or the spelled-out form is too long. If you use an abbreviation for the first time in a heading or title, ensure that you include the spelled-out form either in the heading or title or in the text that immediately follows the heading or title. See also [Headings](#).

✓ **Creating Unified Modeling Language diagrams**

You can use Unified Modeling Language (UML) diagrams to model complex systems.

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You can use UML diagrams to model complex systems.

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## Indexes

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For abbreviations that are unambiguous and that are recognized more easily than their spelled-out forms, index only the abbreviations. Examples are *AIX*, *CORBA*, *HTML*, *SQL*, *PDF*, *XML*, *TCP/IP*, and *UNIX*.

✓ **<i1>AIX**

For other abbreviations, create main entries for both the abbreviation and the spelled-out form. Place the secondary and tertiary entries under the abbreviation. Under the spelled-out form, place a *See* reference to the abbreviation.



```
<i1>ECI
<i2>requests
<i2>security
<i2>transaction IDs
<i2>transaction IDs
<i1>External Call Interface
<i2>See ECI
```

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## Latin abbreviations

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Do not use Latin abbreviations; use their English equivalents instead. Latin abbreviations are sometimes misunderstood.

Latin	English equivalent
e.g.	Use <i>for example</i> .
etc.	Use <i>and so on</i> when you list a clear sequence of elements, such as “1, 2, 3, and so on” or “Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and so on”. Otherwise, rewrite the sentence to replace <i>etc.</i> with something more descriptive, such as “and other output”.
i.e.	Use <i>that is</i> .

Table 1. Latin abbreviations

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## Legal considerations

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If you create an abbreviation, check with your Intellectual Property Law (IPL) department before you use it. Your IPL department must verify that abbreviations are not trademarks of other companies. Do not use abbreviations for terms if the abbreviations are trademarks of other companies.

Do not create an abbreviation that is the same as an IBM trademark but that has a different meaning. For example, do not use *AFS* as an abbreviation for *advanced file system*. *AFS* is a trademark of IBM.

For legal reasons, do not use abbreviations on front covers unless they are IBM trademarks.

See also [Legal information](#).

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## Product names

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For information about abbreviating product names, see [Product and service names](#).

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## Dates and times

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For information about abbreviating dates and units of time, see the following information:

- [Date abbreviations](#)
- [Unit of time abbreviations](#)

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## Adverbs - only

The word *only* can be used as an adverb, an adjective, or a conjunction. When *only* is used as an adverb, the meaning of the sentence can change, depending on the location of the word *only*.

Place the word *only* immediately before the word or phrase that it modifies.

- ✗ Deleting a host group only removes it from the server and not from the business application.
- ✓ Deleting a host group removes it only from the server and not from the business application.
- ✗ If a user only belongs to a Guest group that is not a primary group, that user cannot access the client.
- ✓ If a user belongs only to a Guest group that is not a primary group, that user cannot access the client.
- ✗ You can only charge a file plan component to one user at a time.
- ✓ You can charge a file plan component to only one user at a time.

In the following table, each sentence has a different meaning, depending on where you place the word *only*.

Sentence	Meaning
Only an administrator can open the XML files in the latest browser.	Administrators, but not other users, can open the XML files in the latest browser.
An administrator can only open the XML files in the latest browser.	The administrator can open, but cannot edit, close, or delete, the XML files in the latest browser.
An administrator can open only the XML files in the latest browser.	The administrator can open the XML files, but not other files, in the latest browser.
An administrator can open the XML files in only the latest browser.	The administrator can open the XML files in the latest browser, but not in older browsers.

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## Anthropomorphism

Do not assign human characteristics to inanimate objects, which are incapable of human behaviors and emotions. As much as possible, focus technical information on users and their actions, not on a product and its actions. See specific guidance for [Marketing](#).

✗ *Product focus:* The Delivery Information window *allows* you to specify the name of the sender.

✓ *User focus:* In the Delivery Information window, specify the name of the sender.

✗ *Product focus:* This menu *enables* you to create diagrams.

✓ *User focus:* Use this menu to create diagrams.

✗ *Product focus:* The configuration *expects* the disk to have parity protection.

✓ *User focus:* Before you configure the disk, ensure that it has parity protection.

✗ *Product focus:* The Replicator page *lets* you synchronize your local database with replica databases.

✓ *User focus:* On the Replicator page, you can synchronize your local database with replica databases. Double-click a file to download it to your local directory.

✗ *Product focus:* The website *permits* you to save your credit card information.

✓ *User focus:* You can save your credit card information on the website.

In cases where you must focus on a product, do not use verbs that humanize objects, such as *ask*, *decide*, *expect*, *say*, *see*, *think*, or *want*. However, inanimate objects such as hardware and software can perform actions, and some verbs are appropriate for both people and things. For example, a program can *search* for a text string, or an application can *read* data from a file.

Use appropriate verbs to avoid anthropomorphism.

✗ The application *asks* you for a value.

✓ The application *prompts* you for a value.

✗ The control partition *decides* to switch roles.

✓ The control partition *switches* roles.

✗ If the system *sees* a new device, it changes the settings automatically.

✓ If the system *detects* a new device, it changes the settings automatically.

✗ The Merge Certificate window *tells* you about the new certificate information.

✓ The Merge Certificate window *displays* the new certificate information.

✗ If a connector is disabled, the system *thinks* that the entire channel is disabled.

✓ If a connector is disabled, the system *operates* as if the entire channel is disabled.

✗ When the controller *wants* to create a resource, it constructs a list of storage locations.

✓ Before the controller *creates* a resource, it constructs a list of valid storage locations.

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## Articles

Articles increase clarity and ease translation.

The articles “a” and “an” are indefinite articles. Use them to refer to things in the abstract or not in the particular. “An offering” or “a product” means any offering or any product, as opposed to a specific offering or product.

“The” is a definite article. Use it to refer to a particular thing or things, meaning that “the offering” or “the product” is about that particular offering or product.

Do not omit an article that belongs in a sentence to save space because the omission creates a sentence that sounds stilted and unnatural.

✗ Create project.

✓ Create a project.

✗ File cannot be found.

✓ The file cannot be found.

✗ Delete object from editor.

✓ *Refers to any object:* Delete an object from the editor.

✓ *Refers to a specific object that was discussed previously:* Delete the object from the editor.

In some cases, articles can be omitted. For example, you can omit the article from a sentence that expresses a general sentiment.

✗ The servers talk to the clients.

✓ Servers talk to clients.

✗ Only the administrators can create the projects.

✓ Only administrators can create projects.

For more information about when to keep or omit articles, refer to a grammar tutorial, such as [When to Use 'A,' 'An,' or 'The'.](#)

## When to use *a* or *an*

Choose the indefinite article *a* or *an* according to how an abbreviation, word, or number is spoken.

If an abbreviation is pronounced as a series of letters, choose the article according to the pronunciation of the first letter. If an abbreviation is pronounced as a word, choose the article according to the pronunciation of the word. Assume that the period in a file name extension, such as .exe, is pronounced as *dot*, and use the indefinite article *a*.

Use *a* before an abbreviation, word, or number that begins with a consonant sound.

Takes the article <i>a</i>	Consonant sound
.mbtest file	D, as in <i>dot</i>
historical	H, as in <i>hit</i>
LAN	L, as in <i>land</i>
one	W, as in <i>won</i>
ROM	R, as in <i>romp</i>
SYSGEN	S, as in <i>system</i>
unit	Y, as in <i>you</i>
x4	B, as in <i>by four</i>

Use *an* before an abbreviation, word, or number that begins with a vowel sound.

Takes the article <i>an</i>	Vowel sound
HTTP	A, as in <i>ache</i>
IoT	I, as in <i>iced</i>
LU	E, as in <i>elf</i>
MVS	E, as in <i>empty</i>
RPQ	A, as in <i>are</i>
SOA	E, as in <i>estimate</i>
SQL	E, as in <i>estimate</i>

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### Related resource

For more information about articles, see the external guidance [When to Use 'A,' 'An,' or 'The'.](#)



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# Capitalization

Use sentence-style capitalization for headings, titles, labels, banners, and similar elements, unless noted otherwise in this topic.

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## Capitalization styles

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Items such as headings, captions, labels, or interface elements generally follow one of two capitalization styles, depending on the item: sentence-style capitalization or headline-style capitalization.

### Sentence-style capitalization

This style is predominantly lowercase; capitalize only the initial letter of the first word in the text and other words that require capitalization, such as proper nouns. Examples of proper nouns include the names of specific people, places, companies, languages, protocols, and products.

- ✓ Business models
- ✓ Creating Boolean expressions
- ✓ Planning network architectures
- ✓ Properties and settings for printing
- ✓ Requirements for Linux and UNIX operating systems

### 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*, *than*, *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 word *to* in an infinitive, except as the first word

- ✓ Punctuating Lists and Glossaries
- ✓ Variables to Be Determined by the Program
- ✓ IBM 3684 Point-of-Sale Terminal

The following list shows the headline-style capitalization of common words:

A-D	D-M	M-T	T-Z
a	during	Much	This
an	for	nor	to
and	Hers	or	versus
Another	Him	Our	We
Any	His	Ours	What
Anyone	How	Output	When
Anything	I	over	Where
Are	If	regarding	Whereas
as	in	Several	Which
at	Input	She	While
Away	into	Some	Who
Be	Is	Such	Whom
Because	It	Than	Why
beside	Its	That	with
between	Itself	the	without
Both	Many	Their	yet
but	Me	Theirs	You
by	Mine	Them	Your
concerning	More	These	Yours
Do	Most	They	N/A

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## Abbreviations

Confirm the capitalization for the spelled-out form of an abbreviation; many spelled-out abbreviations do not require initial uppercase letters.

- ✗ Graphical User Interface (GUI)
- ✓ graphical user interface (GUI)

- ✗ Local Area Network (LAN)
- ✓ local area network (LAN)

- ✗ Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA)
- ✓ service-oriented architecture (SOA)

Most spelled-out forms of language and protocol names have initial uppercase letters.

- ✓ Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP)
- ✓ Unified Modeling Language (UML)
- ✓ Web Services Description Language (WSDL)
- ✓ Wireless Application Protocol (WAP)

When you spell out an abbreviation, do not capitalize letters in the middle of a word to show the origin of an initialism.

- ✗ eXtensible markup language (XML)
- ✓ Extensible Markup Language (XML)

For more information about abbreviations beyond capitalization, see [Abbreviations](#).

## Colons

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Use a lowercase letter after a colon when the colon occurs within a sentence and introduces an inline list or independent clause (unless the word that follows the colon is a proper noun or otherwise requires capitalization).

- ✓ Three security measures are evaluated: a firewall, an encryption key, and a password.
- ✓ The deletion is final: you cannot restore an element after you delete it.
- ✓ You can use the editor with the following programming languages: Java, C, and C++.

Use an uppercase letter after a colon when the colon introduces these items:

- Vertical list
  - ✓ You can use the following background colors:
    - Blue
    - Green
    - Red
- Note or text that follows a label
  - ✓ **Attention:** Do not remove or install this unit without using the provided lift tool.
  - ✓ In a database: This distributed storage option is known as database persistent sessions.
  - ✓ Input and output operations: Move mode and locate mode
- Quotation
  - ✓ The manager's instructions were clear: "Submit the report by Monday."
- Subheading or subtitle
  - ✓ Lesson 1: Installing the server
  - ✓ Scenario: Generating sample data

For more information about colons beyond capitalization, see [Colons](#).

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## Figures

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Use sentence-style capitalization for figure captions and for callouts in figures and illustrations.

For more information about figures beyond capitalization, see [Figures](#).

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## General text

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As much as possible, use a lowercase style in general text. Do not use all uppercase letters except when necessary for accuracy, such as when writing acronyms, initialisms, command names, trademarked names, or caution and danger labels for notices. Apply the following capitalization guidelines:

- Use lowercase for names and terms unless the name or term is a proper noun. Translators are wary of translating terms that have initial uppercase letters. In general, if a term should be translated, use lowercase.
  - ✗ To illustrate the concept, create a Class diagram.
  - ✓ To illustrate the concept, create a class diagram.
  - ✗ Run the Transformation.
  - ✓ Run the transformation.

- ✗ The company is hiring Software Developers.
- ✓ The company is hiring software developers.
- Do not use uppercase letters for emphasis. To emphasize a word, use italic font. To call attention to important hints, tips, guidance, restrictions, or advice that might be overlooked, consider using a note that has a meaningful label.
- ✗ Do NOT disconnect from the server.
- ✓ Do not disconnect from the server.
- ✗ YOU CANNOT CREATE A SUBSCRIPTION UNTIL YOU FINISH THIS TASK.
- ✓ Restriction: You cannot create a subscription until you finish this task.
- Do not create terms with internal uppercase letters.
- ✗ CopyPool
- ✓ copy pool
- Do not start a sentence with a lowercase term; rewrite the sentence.
- ✗ **onmouseover** events can add visual interest.
- ✓ You can add visual interest by using **onmouseover** events.
- ✗ **if** expressions, unlike **if** statements, return a value.
- ✓ Unlike **if** statements, **if** expressions return a value.
- Do not capitalize the names of features and components unless they are sold separately or are trademarked.
- ✗ Use the Command-Line Interface to ...
- ✓ Use the command-line interface to ...
- ✗ Open the Table Partitioning feature.
- ✓ Open the table partitioning feature.
- Do not capitalize collective or generic terms, such as agent names.
- ✗ The Dispatcher
- ✓ The dispatcher
- ✗ The Image Display Monitor
- ✓ The image display monitor
- ✗ The Paging Supervisor
- ✓ The paging supervisor

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## Glossaries

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Use the following capitalization in glossaries:

- Use lowercase for glossary terms unless a term is a proper noun or requires capitalization for other reasons.
- Use sentence-style capitalization for glossary definitions.

For more information about glossaries beyond capitalization, see [Glossaries](#).

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## Headings, titles, and banners

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In general, use sentence-style capitalization for headings.

Use sentence-style capitalization for these items:

- Titles and headings in online information, such as websites, presentations, tutorials, samples, IBM Developer articles, and technotes
- Titles of white papers and marketing content
- Titles of parts, tracks, or sessions in events
- Titles of screens within videos
- Titles and headings in topic-based information
- Headings in books (except the book title)

Use headline-style capitalization for these items:

- Titles of books
- Titles of CDs
- Titles of stand-alone information units, such as quick start guides or discrete sets of product documentation
- Titles of events, such as training courses or programs
- Titles of videos

If a headline-style title has a subtitle, apply these capitalization guidelines:

- Use headline-style capitalization for a subtitle that is displayed on the same line as the title, is short, or is essential to the title.
- Use sentence-style capitalization for a subtitle that is displayed separately from the title, is lengthy, or is supplementary to the title.

When you cite a heading in text, use the capitalization that is used in the source unless the original heading is in all uppercase letters. In that case, use headline-style capitalization in the citation.

Use sentence-style capitalization for banners. Capitalize names of IBM products in banners according to trademark conventions. Limit capitalization in banners; avoid words in all uppercase except to conform to trademark conventions, as in terms such as *UNIX*.

For more information about headings beyond capitalization, see [Headings](#).

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## Hyphens

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Apply the following capitalization guidelines to hyphenated words:

- When a hyphenated word occurs at the beginning of a sentence, capitalize only the first element in the word unless a subsequent element is a proper noun or proper adjective.
  - ✗ Power-Saving techniques are important for notebook users.
  - ✓ Power-saving techniques are important for notebook users.
- When a hyphenated word occurs at the beginning of a heading with sentence-style capitalization, capitalize only the first element in the word unless a subsequent element is a proper noun or proper adjective.
  - ✗ All-american manufacturing is less common than it used to be.
  - ✓ All-American manufacturing is less common than it used to be.
- When a hyphenated word occurs at the beginning of a heading with headline-style capitalization, capitalize only the first element in the word unless a subsequent element is a proper noun or proper adjective.
  - ✗ Case-Sensitive languages
  - ✓ Case-sensitive languages
  - ✗ Non-European-Based companies
  - ✓ Non-European-based companies
- When a hyphenated word occurs in a heading with headline-style capitalization, capitalize the first element in the word; the last element in the word, regardless of its part of speech; and any element that is not an article, preposition, or coordinating conjunction.
  - ✗ Designing Interfaces for Non-English-speaking Users
  - ✓ Designing Interfaces for Non-English-Speaking Users

- ✗ Self-contained Sensors
- ✓ Self-Contained Sensors
- ✗ Once-a-day Notifications
- ✓ Once-a-Day Notifications

For more information about hyphens beyond capitalization, see [Hyphens](#).

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## Indexes

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Use lowercase for index terms unless a term is a proper noun or requires capitalization for other reasons.

For more information about indexes beyond capitalization, see [Indexes](#).

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## Letters as letters

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If you refer to a letter, use the capitalization that is appropriate for the context unless it causes confusion. For example, if you refer to a letter in the middle of a word, use the capitalization that occurs in the middle of the word.

- ✓ The *M* in *HTML* stands for *Markup*.
- ✓ Double the letter *m* in the word *programming*.
- ✓ Before the repair, the printer did not print uppercase *A*'s or lowercase *t*'s.
- ✓ To form the plural of a single letter, add an apostrophe and the letter *s*.

If you refer to a letter and the capitalization is irrelevant, use an uppercase letter.

- ✓ With some fonts, readers can mistake *N*'s for *M*'s.
- ✓ Beginner typists often mistype *P*'s and *Z*'s.

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## Lists

---

Capitalize the first word of each item in a vertical list.

- ✓ *Correct example:*

The routine makes the following conversions:

- An EBCDIC value to a real number
- A real number to an EBCDIC value
- An EBCDIC value to an integer
- An integer to an EBCDIC value

In definition lists, capitalize the first word of each term or descriptive name, unless it must be lowercase, and capitalize the first word of each definition.

- ✓ *Correct example:*

### **All**

You can perform all operations on resources.

### **Create**

You can view, edit, and add resources.

### **Modify**

You can view and edit resources.

For more information about lists beyond capitalization, see [Lists](#).

## Nouns

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Common nouns, also known as generic nouns, refer generally to people, places, things, or ideas. Do not capitalize common nouns in the middle of a sentence.

- ✗ Ensure that each User specifies a unique password.
- ✓ Ensure that each user specifies a unique password.
- ✗ Ask an Administrator to grant you permission to access the database.
- ✓ Ask an administrator to grant you permission to access the database.
- ✗ In Java, an Object refers to an actual instance of a Class.
- ✓ In Java, an object refers to an actual instance of a class.
- ✗ Marie is a Software Engineer.
- ✓ Marie is a software engineer.
- ✗ John is a Subject Matter Expert.
- ✓ John is a subject matter expert.

Proper nouns refer to names of specific people, places, things, or ideas. Always capitalize proper nouns. For details about how to capitalize place names, see [Geographic locations](#).

- ✓ John is a subject matter expert in IBM Enterprise Design Thinking.
- ✓ Marie works from the Bangalore office as a software engineer.
- ✓ Maria Martinez, director of international sales, opened the meeting of employees from Europe and Africa.
- ✓ A technical writer, a journalist, and an editor applied for the position of senior information developer.
- ✓ The president of IBM was the first speaker at the conference.

Civil titles, professional titles, military ranks, and similar official designations are usually lowercase. However, titles are capitalized in these cases:

- When the title immediately precedes a personal name and is used as part of the name; for example, President Lincoln
  - In other contexts, for reasons of courtesy or diplomacy
  - When referring to an individual in combination with their job title
- ✓ Arvind Krishna, President and Chief Executive Officer of IBM, was the first speaker at the conference.

To distinguish whether a noun is a common noun or a proper noun, consider whether the noun refers to any one of many items (common noun) or whether it refers to the specific name of one item (proper noun).

For more information about names and titles, see [Names and titles](#).

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## Tables

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Use sentence-style capitalization for these table elements:

- Cell contents
- Column headings
- Row labels
- Table captions

For more information about tables beyond capitalization, see [Tables](#).

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## User interfaces

The primary reference for capitalization in a product interface is the design guidelines for that product. When you write about an item that is displayed in an interface or on a device, match the capitalization and spelling of the item in your writing. If an item uses all uppercase letters, use the same capitalization to refer to the item, even though use of all uppercase letters in general is discouraged. If a product does not have interface design guidelines, use sentence-style capitalization for all interface elements.

For more information about UI elements beyond capitalization, see [UI elements](#).

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## Computer-related terms

Use lowercase for terms unless other capitalization is specified in the following table or by industry or product guidelines.

Item and advice	Examples
<p><b>Conditions, status, bytes, and bits</b> Use lowercase for the name of a bit, byte, condition, indicator, or for status. Do not enclose the name in quotation marks. When you use more than one adjective for a bit, byte, condition, indicator, or status, hyphenate only for clarity and readability.</p> <p><b>Symbolic names of bits</b> Use uppercase for the symbolic name of a bit unless different capitalization is required by a case-sensitive system or programming language.</p>	<p>✓ ... turns on the terminal-error indicator.</p> <p>✓ ... sets the adapter lock bit.</p> <p>✓ The processing unit must be loaded again to recover from a no-operation status that results from a data-unsafe condition.</p> <p>✓ ... sets the <b>TJBOWAIT</b> bit.</p> <p>✓ ... tests the <b>NIPPTLST</b> bit.</p>
<p><b>Control words, status words, and special codes</b> Use lowercase for the name of a control word, status word, or special code.</p>	<p>✓ The program status word ...</p> <p>✓ The program-check new PSW ...</p> <p>✓ The channel-address word ...</p> <p>✓ The instruction-length code ...</p>
<p><b>Data areas</b> Use lowercase for the spelled-out name of a data area.</p> <p><b>Symbolic names of data areas</b> If the programming language is not case-sensitive, use uppercase for the symbolic name of a data area in a program.</p>	<p>✓ A data control block ...</p> <p>✓ The page table entry ...</p> <p>✓ The image construction area ...</p> <p>✓ Use the <b>OUTBUF</b> data area to ...</p> <p>✓ The <b>INAREA</b> data area ...</p>
<p><b>Data sets and libraries</b> Use lowercase for the descriptive name of an operating-system data set or system library. Use uppercase for the symbolic name of a system data set or library unless different capitalization is required by a case-sensitive system or programming language. Do not use a shortened form of the symbolic name as a descriptive name.</p>	<p>✓ The link parameter ...</p> <p>✓ The parameter library ...</p> <p>✓ The system abend data set ...</p> <p>✗ The LINK library ...</p> <p>✓ <b>SYS1 . LINKLIB</b></p> <p>✗ The PARM library ...</p> <p>✓ <b>SYS1 . PARMLIB</b></p> <p>✗ The DUMP data set ...</p> <p>✓ <b>SYS1 . DUMP</b> data set</p>
<p><b>Dumps</b> Use lowercase for dump names unless they are abbreviations; in that case, use uppercase.</p>	<p>✓ The indicative dump ...</p> <p>✓ The console dump ...</p> <p>✓ The <b>SVC</b> dump ...</p>
<p><b>File and directory names</b> Use lowercase for file names and directory names for operating systems and application programs that are not case-sensitive. For a case-sensitive operating system or application program, use the capitalization that is used in the operating system or application program.</p>	<p>✓ Copy the files from the <b>olddir</b> directory to the <b>newdir</b> directory.</p>
<p><b>Hardware components</b> Use lowercase for the names of hardware components unless they are labeled; in that case, use</p>	<p>✓ The paper-level sensor ...</p>



the same capitalization as the label.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The accumulator ...</li> <li>✓ The address register ...</li> <li>✓ In drive A ...</li> <li>✓ <i>The label is on or near the button:</i> Press <b>Power</b>.</li> <li>✓ <i>The button is not labeled:</i> Press the power button.</li> </ul>
<b>Logs</b> Use lowercase for the descriptive name of a log.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The system log ...</li> <li>✓ The history log ...</li> </ul>
<b>Machine instructions, channel commands, and device orders</b> Use initial uppercase letters for the spelled-out name of a machine instruction, channel command, or device order, except for words that are articles, prepositions, or coordinating conjunctions. Use uppercase letters for the abbreviation of an instruction, a command, or an order.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The Zero-and-Add instruction ...</li> <li>✓ The Transfer-in-Channel command ...</li> <li>✓ The Erase-Unprotected-to-Address order ...</li> <li>✓ The <b>ZAP</b> instruction</li> <li>✓ The <b>TIC</b> command</li> <li>✓ The <b>EUA</b> order</li> </ul>
<b>Macros</b> Use uppercase for the name of a macro.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The <b>ATTACH</b> macro ...</li> <li>✓ The <b>DTF</b> macro ...</li> <li>✓ The <b>ENQ</b> macro ...</li> <li>✓ The <b>FREEMAIN</b> macro ...</li> </ul>
<b>Programming concepts and general classes of programs</b> Use lowercase for words that denote programming concepts or general classes of programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ In exchange buffering ...</li> <li>✓ An emulation ...</li> <li>✓ The simulators ...</li> <li>✓ In recovery management ...</li> </ul>
<b>Programming keywords</b> Use uppercase for a keyword unless otherwise required by a case-sensitive programming language. When the keyword is represented by a descriptive word or phrase, use lowercase.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The <b>JOB</b> statement ...</li> <li>✓ The <b>DD</b> statement ...</li> <li>✓ The <b>COPY</b> routine ...</li> <li>✓ The routing code ...</li> <li>✓ The entry-point address ...</li> <li>✓ The trace module ...</li> <li>✓ The damage-assessment routine ...</li> </ul>
<b>Programming languages</b> When you refer to a programming language rather than a compiler, use initial uppercase letters for the official name of the language and lowercase for its short name unless the name of the language is always spelled in uppercase, such as <i>COBOL</i> .	<p><b>Official names</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The Assembler Language for OS</li> <li>✓ The RPG II Language (not Report Program Generator II Language)</li> </ul> <p><b>Short names</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ In assembler language ...</li> <li>✓ In RPG II language ...</li> </ul>
<b>Programs or functions</b> A program or function that is an integral part of a system is usually equivalent to a component, and its name is shown in lowercase. However, in some cases, such a program or function is important enough to be treated as though it is a separate product. To decide how to treat the name of such a program or function, refer to the naming conventions for your product, or consider how the names of other programs and functions that are addressed in the same context are treated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Use the disaster recovery function to ...</li> <li>✓ The Performance Optimizer program included in this product ...</li> </ul>
<b>Software components</b> The term <i>software component</i> applies to various entities in an operating system. The term is sometimes applied to a set of routines, sometimes to a program, and sometimes to a set of programs. Some components are products that can be ordered separately, and some are integral parts of a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The job scheduler ...</li> <li>✓ The initiator ...</li> <li>✓ Application Dictionary Services</li> </ul>

program or system. A group of related routines often has a collective name such as <i>facility</i> , <i>feature</i> , <i>option</i> , <i>support</i> , or <i>utility</i> . Use lowercase for these terms when they refer to integral parts of the system. Use initial uppercase letters for these terms when they can be ordered as separate products. Maintain the original capitalization when a feature that was previously sold separately becomes an integral part of another product.	
<b>Stages during system or program execution</b> Use lowercase for the names of operating system or program stages. To describe these stages, use the word <i>at</i> or <i>during</i> , and do not add the word <i>time</i> except when you refer to the run stage: for example, <i>at run time</i> .	<p>✗ At nucleus initialization time ...</p> <p>✓ After nucleus initialization ...</p> <p>✗ During system generation time ...</p> <p>✓ During system generation ...</p> <p>✗ At assembly time ...</p> <p>✓ Before assembly ...</p>
<b>Storage areas and their divisions</b> Use lowercase for the names of areas and divisions of main storage, real storage, and virtual storage.	<p>✓ The pageable link-pack area ...</p> <p>✓ The nonpageable dynamic area ...</p> <p>✓ The fixed build-list (<b>BLDL</b>) table ...</p>

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## Conjunctions

Conjunctions are terms that connect words, clauses, or sentences. Coordinating conjunctions, such as *and*, *but*, and *or* are used to join together words in the same clause. Subordinating conjunctions, such as *because*, *since*, and *after*, are used to introduce a dependant clause.

### Coordinating conjunctions

Beginning sentences with *and*, *but*, or *so* is permitted when it allows for shorter, scannable, conversational sentences. Do not overuse these devices, especially in instructional content.

✓ Try Acrolinx and see for yourself how it can help you. And if you have questions about the flags, contact Support.

Do not add a comma after a coordinating conjunction unless there is a nonessential clause just after the conjunction.

✗ But, you can view other log files.

✓ But you can view other log files.

### Subordinating conjunctions

To ensure that your information is clear for all types of audiences, use subordinating conjunctions with caution because they often have multiple meanings. For example, *since* should only be used to refer to time. Do not use it as a synonym for *because*.

Similarly, use *while* only to refer to a period of time. To avoid potential ambiguity, do not use the term as a synonym for *although* or *though* in documentation.

✗ While you do not have access, you can still...

✓ Although you do not have access, you can still...

Use *once* to mean one time. Do not use it as a conjunction to mean *after* or *when*.

Do not use *as* to mean *because*.

Use *if* to express a condition and *whether* to express an alternative. Use *if...then* only to express that a conditional relationship exists between two actions or events. Avoid using *then* to introduce an independent clause that follows an *if* clause.

✗ If you set a password, then access is restricted

✓ If you set a password, access is restricted

Use *that*, without a comma, to introduce a restrictive clause. Use *which*, preceded by a comma, to introduce a nonrestrictive clause.

Consider the following examples:

1. The system units, which have two drives, are floor-standing models. (Nonrestrictive)
2. The system units that have two drives are floor-standing models. (Restrictive)

In the first example, all of the system units are floor-standing models and each has two drives. The second example implies that some of the system units have two drives and some do not; the sentence refers only to system units with two drives. See the IBM Style topics [Commas](#) and [Pronouns](#) for more information.

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## Contractions

Contractions are permitted in all types of content. Decide whether they fit the context. Follow these guidelines when you use contractions:

- Use simple, commonly understood contractions.

✗ ain't, shan't, 'twas

✓ can't, don't, isn't, what's

- Do not use contractions when it is not clear from the context which letters are omitted. For example, *they'd* might mean either *they had* or *they would*.
- Do not use complex contractions that combine more than two words.

✗ it'll've, 'tishn't, wouldn't've

- Do not confuse contractions and possessives. See [Possessives](#).

✓ it's (it is or it has)

✓ its (belonging to it)

✓ they're (they are)

✓ their (belonging to them)

✓ who's (who is)

✓ whose (belonging to whom)

✓ you're (you are)

✓ your (belonging to you)


- Do not form contractions with trademarks, brand names, or product names.

✗ For decades, IBM's been synonymous with mainframe computing.

✗ DB2's a product that can ...

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## Inclusive language

IBM CEO, Arvind Krishna, asked all at IBM to take the [Emb\(race\) Pledge](#)  to fight racial discrimination and implicit bias. Other companies in the tech industry and beyond are examining their practices with regard to discrimination and are reviewing their use of terminology.

The Words Matter Terminology Review Board formed to review terms submitted by IBMers to determine if the terms promote racial or cultural bias. The team wrote guiding principles for determining bias in “master” and “slave” terms, and also for terms with “black”

and “white”. These guiding principles have been valuable in determining if submitted terms promote bias, and in helping IBMers to understand the reasoning behind the Board’s decisions.

The Board has reviewed over 40 terms submitted by IBMers. The result of this work is that a small set of offensive terms are now prohibited for use in all IBM content, internally and externally. This both brings IBM into line with IBM’s support of racial justice, and with industry trends for equitable, inclusive language.

IBM has joined the Linux Foundation’s Inclusive Naming (LF) initiative. This LF initiative plans to use content from IBM, including the guiding principles developed by the Words Matter Terminology Review Board. The Linux Foundation will use the list of prohibited terms, replacement terms, and rationales, as well as the list of terms the Board reviewed and recommended not be changed. This content, representing the work of the Words Matter Board, will become foundational to this group, which represents multiple companies, including Microsoft and Dell, and will influence the language across the industry in individual companies and standards bodies such as the IEEE.

You can learn more by visiting the [Emb\(race\)](#) website and by viewing the playback of [Why Words Matter](#) in Your Learning.

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## Eliminating cultural or racial bias

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The IBM Academy of Technology, sponsored by the Black Executive Council and senior VPs, launched the Inclusive IT terminology [Words matter](#) initiative to identify and address discriminatory language or terminology that reinforces cultural or racial bias, to be replaced in IBM IT content. As part of this initiative, the IBM Style Council is directly supporting the “Words matter” terminology review board to review potentially problematic terms, identify suitable replacement terms, and provide guidance on the [Word usage](#) and [Terminology](#) sites.

Examples of guidance that the terminology review board has established:

- Do not use the terms “white” or “black” in a context where white is represented as good or black is represented as bad, such as “whitelist” and “blacklist”. Such usage reinforces a model that promotes racial bias.
- Do not pair the terms “master” and “slave” in an IT context. It diminishes the horror of the dehumanizing practice of slavery.

You can see a complete list of [terms to replace](#). You also can see the [IBM Inclusive IT Language](#) page for a list of terms that IBM is replacing.

Anyone at IBM can [submit a term for review](#).

For more information, see the [Inclusive IT Terminology site](#) and the [Be Equal allyship portal](#).

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## Eliminating gender bias

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Other considerations apply for inclusive writing, including to avoid gender bias. As an example, do not assume that the subject of a sentence is male if the context might refer to any gender. Thus, instead of using “man hours”, use “labor hours” or “person hours”. Sometimes, you can rewrite a sentence to use the second person (“you”). For example, instead of writing “The user can now move his cursor in four directions”, write “You can now move your cursor in four directions”. It is also acceptable to use “they” to refer to a singular subject.

An exception where use of a gender-specific pronoun is acceptable is where the subject refers to a specific named person. For example, “Sabrina is a senior administrator. She meets daily with her staff to assign tasks”.

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## Accessibility

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All IBM products and solutions, and the information that supports them, must meet Accessibility standards, for use by people of all abilities. For more information, see the [Accessibility](#) topic, the [IBM Accessibility](#) site, and the [IBM Accessibility Checklist](#).

## Third-party content

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When you must refer to prohibited terms because they occur in a product that is not owned by IBM, make it clear that these terms are not from IBM. For guidance about standard language to use when referring to prohibited terms in technologies that are not owned by IBM, see the [Industry and 3rd party usage](#) section in the [Inclusive IT Terminology - FAQ](#) page.

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## Plurals

Form the plural of most words, abbreviations, and numbers by adding the letter *s* alone.

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### (s)

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Do not use the letter *s* in parentheses (*s*) to indicate that a noun can be singular or plural. Some languages form plural nouns differently than English, and the construction (*s*) can cause translation problems. Instead, use the plural form or, if it is important to indicate both singular and plural options, use *one or more*.

- ✗ Select the item(*s*) from the list.
- ✓ Select the items from the list.
- ✓ Select one or more items from the list.

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## Abbreviations

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To form the plural of an acronym or any initialism, add a lowercase *s*.

- ✓ The resident routine enables a module to perform the same I/O operation on different DCBs or ACBs at the same time.

For more information, see [Abbreviations](#).

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## Letters

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Use an apostrophe and the letter *s* (*'s*) to form the plural of single letters.

- ✗ Before the repair, the printer did not print uppercase *As* or lowercase *ms*.
- ✓ Before the repair, the printer did not print uppercase *A's* or lowercase *m's*.
- ✗ Beginner typists often mistype 9*s*, P*s*, and Z*s*.
- ✓ Beginner typists often mistype 9*s*, P'*s*, and Z'*s*.

- ✗ The basic learning requirements for any industry are often known as the ABC's.
- ✓ The basic learning requirements for any industry are often known as the ABCs.

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## Numbers

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For both numerals and numbers that are expressed as words, form the plural by adding the letter s alone.

- ✓ By default, the field is filled with zeros.
- ✓ The award recipients walked into the auditorium in twos.
- ✓ Binary code contains only 0s and 1s.
- ✓ The most frequently returned values were 5s, 7s, and 12s.
- ✓ Several financial analysts classify the 1980s and 1990s as a bull market.
- ✓ Of the eight remaining units, six were 517s and two were 918s.

When you refer to zero objects, use the plural form.

- ✓ Your account has zero active services.

For more information, see [Numbers](#).

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## Units of measurement

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The abbreviation for a unit of measurement is both singular and plural.

- ✓ 1 mm
- ✓ 10 mm

For more information, see [Numbers and measurement](#).

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## Plural versus singular

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To reduce the risk of ambiguity, do not refer to more than one object when what is being described applies to each object in a particular class.

- ✗ Servers must contain sending units.
- ✓ Each server must contain exactly one sending unit. *(When there is a one-to-one relationship between the subject and object)*
- ✓ Each server must contain at least one sending unit. *(When there is a one-to-many relationship between the subject and object)*
- ✗ Baskets can have owners.
- ✓ A basket can have at most one owner. *(When there is a zero-to-one or one-to-one relationship between the subject and object)*
- ✓ A basket can have zero or more owners. *(When there is a zero-to-many or one-to-many relationship between the subject and object)*

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## Possessives

Follow these guidelines for using possessives:

- For most singular nouns, and for plural nouns that do not end in s, form the possessive by adding an apostrophe and the letter s ('s).
  - ✓ The editor's desk is at the end of the hall.
  - ✓ Men's and women's locker rooms are located beside the office gym.
- For plural nouns that end in s, form the possessive by adding an apostrophe alone.
  - ✓ Click **ID Change** to edit the users' short names.
  - ✓ The mediator concluded that the employees' rights were not violated.
- Do not use possessive 's with inanimate objects.
  - ✗ Use the Label Change feature to quickly edit the server's labels.
  - ✓ Use the Label Change feature to quickly edit the server labels.
  - ✗ The computer keyboard's Alt key stopped working.
  - ✓ The Alt key on the computer keyboard stopped working.
- Do not use 's to show the possessive form of abbreviations or product names.
  - ✗ The GUI's layout is intuitive.
  - ✗ AI's impact on business will be enormous.
  - ✗ IBM Instana's capabilities yield real-time monitoring, proactive issue diagnosis, and performance optimization.
  - ✓ The layout of the GUI is intuitive.
  - ✓ The impact of AI on business will be enormous.
  - ✓ The capabilities of IBM Instana yield real-time monitoring, proactive issue diagnosis, and performance optimization.
  - ✗ Download IBM's Installation Manager software ...
  - ✓ Download the IBM Installation Manager software ...
- Do not use 's to show the possessive form of IBM unless you refer to only the company and do not identify goods or services.
  - ✗ For an overview of IBM's Cloud infrastructure ...
  - ✓ For an overview of the IBM Cloud infrastructure ...
  - ✓ IBM's focus on work-life balance is respected in the technology industry.
- You can use *your* in reference to an asset after the asset is customized by the user in some way.
  - ✓ Download the dataset that you want to use from the *Data catalog* page. After you curate the data to fit your use case, save your dataset.
  - ✓ Fine tune the foundation model to customize the model for your use case, and then deploy your tuned foundation model as a new model asset.

## Typographical considerations

You can generate an apostrophe directly through the keyboard, by using tagging in an authoring tool, or by using HTML or unicode characters in the source to produce the right characters in the output.

To follow IBM Design Language best practices, use a curly apostrophe instead of a straight apostrophe where appropriate.

The following table describes the key combinations to use depending on the operating system you're using.

Character	Unicode representation	Windows	Mac	HTML
Apostrophe (')	U+2019	Alt+0146	option+shift+] ]	&rsquo;

## Related resources

- [IBM copyright and trademark guidelines: Use of IBM as a company name](#)

- IBM only [IBM Design Language>Punctuation](#) 



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## Prefixes

A prefix is a word segment that is added to the beginning of a root word to create a derivative word.

## Hyphens

In most cases, do not use a hyphen to connect a prefix to a word.

To determine whether to hyphenate, consult the [Word usage list](#) in IBM Style, the [IBM Terminology database](#) , and the [Merriam-Webster dictionary](#) . For some words, Merriam-Webster shows a preference in the main definition entry, but allows an alternative. Example: reevaluate or re-evaluate. In such cases, you can choose either option.

Otherwise, hyphenate a prefix in the following situations:

- When you must distinguish the word from a homonym (for example, *co-op*, *re-cover*, *re-create*, *re-sign*)
- When the root word is capitalized or a numeral (for example, *pre-2000*)
- When the root word consists of more than one word (for example, *non-English-speaking citizens*, *pre-latency-period transaction*)
- In some words in which identical letters would be next to each other (for example, *anti-intellectual*, *co-opt*, *de-emphasize*)
- When the prefix is *self-*, *all-*, or *ex-* (meaning *formerly*)

The following table lists common prefixes and examples of when to omit or use a hyphen:

Prefix	Examples
ante	antedate, anteroom
anti	antilogical, antispeculation, <i>but</i> anti-inflammatory, anti-intellectual
auto	autoconfigure, autogenerated, autoinstall, autonumber
bi	biannual, bidirectional, biweekly, <i>but</i> bi-level
bio	biochemical, bioengineering
co	coauthor, coexistence, colocate, cooperate, coordinate, corequisite, coworker, <i>but</i> co-chair, co-create, co-edition, co-execute, co-opt
counter	counterclockwise, countermeasures
cyber	cyberattack, cybercrime, cybersecurity, cyberspace, <i>but</i> cyber resilience
extra	extralinguistic, extrapartition
hyper	hyperactive, hypersensitive
infra	infrared, infrastructure
inter	interactive, intercept, interrelated
intra	intranode, intrapartition, intrarecord, intrasystem
macro	macroinstruction, macrostructure
meta	metaclass, metadata, metafile, metatable
micro	microchip, microcircuit, microcode, microfiche
mid	midterm, midyear, midday
mini	minicomputer, minicourse, minidisk
multi	multichannel, multicloud, multifactor, multimedia, multipath, multiplexer, multipoint, multiprocessor, multischema, multitenant, multitiered, multitable, multivendor, <i>but</i> multi-core, multi-instance
non	noncompliant, noncontiguous, nonheap, noninteractive, nonlinear, nonnegotiable, nonpaired, nonsystem, nonzero, <i>but</i> non-native
over	overlay, override, overstrike
post	postediting, postinstallation, postmortem, postoperation, postrequisite
pre	preapply, preassembled, precompile, predefined, preenrollment, preestablish, preformatted, preinstallation, preoperational, preprocessor, preruntime, preunite
pro	progovernment, proinsulin, pronuclear
pseudo	pseudocode, pseudorandom, pseudotext



Prefix	Examples
re	redirect, reedit, reentrant, reexamine, resynchronize, <i>but</i> re-cover (cover again), re-create (create again), re-enable
semi	semicolon, semiconductor, <i>but</i> semi-indirect
sub	subaddress, subarea, subcapacity, subclass, subfile, subnet, subnetwork, subtab
super	superclass, superobject, superscript
supra	supranational, supravital
trans	transinformation, transvalue
ultra	ultrafiche, ultraviolet
un	unavailable, uncommitted, unformatted, unordered
under	underlying, underrun, underused

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## Prepositions

Use prepositions to clarify the relationship between elements in a sentence. Follow these guidelines for using prepositions:

- Include prepositions that increase clarity.

✗ *Ambiguous:* Unload the file using the ULOAD utility.

✓ *Clear:* Unload the file by using the ULOAD utility.

- Omit unnecessary prepositions. For example, omit the prepositions in phrasal verbs when the verb alone provides the same meaning.

✗ click on

✓ click

✗ print out

✓ print

✗ start up

✓ start

- Avoid using too many prepositions in a sentence. Too many prepositions can clutter the text.

✗ *Awkward:* The report is a list of the status of all of the event monitors for this process.

✓ *Improved:* The report lists the status of all event monitors for this process.

- Use a preposition at the end of a sentence to avoid an awkward or stilted construction.

✗ *Awkward:* Click the item for which you want to search.

✓ *Improved:* Click the item that you want to search for.

- Use a prepositional phrase instead of an apostrophe and the letter s ('s) to show the possessive form of abbreviations, brand names, or product names. See [Possessives](#).

✗ The GUI's layout is intuitive.

✓ The layout of the GUI is intuitive.

✗ IBM Cloud's catalog includes services that developers can use to build ....

✓ The catalog in IBM Cloud includes services that developers can use to build ....

- To determine which prepositions to use with interface elements, see [UI elements](#).

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# Pronouns

Make clear pronoun references, avoid pronouns that are gender specific, and use the appropriate relative pronoun for the context.

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## Contents

- [Ambiguous pronoun references](#)
- [Company pronouns](#)
- [Gender-neutral pronouns](#)
- [Personal pronouns](#)
- [Relative pronouns](#)

---

## Ambiguous pronoun references

LLM helper Ensure that the noun to which a pronoun refers is clear. Avoid sentences in which a pronoun can refer to more than one noun or in which a pronoun refers to an unstated noun.

- ✗ Maria told Susan that her report was late.
- ✓ Maria told Susan that Susan's report was late.
- ✗ If the field is populated with default text, it does not change.
- ✓ If the field is populated with default text, the text does not change.
- ✗ Ensure that you apply the fix packs to the servers. These provide critical security.
- ✓ Ensure that you apply the fix packs to the servers. These fix packs provide critical security.
- ✗ Back up the files weekly. This is important for several reasons.
- ✓ Back up the files weekly. This practice is important for several reasons.

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## Company pronouns

Use the personal pronouns *they*, *them*, and *their* when referring to a non-IBM organization by name. This approach promotes a more personal and familiar tone, and supports the brand direction in which *we*, *us*, and *our* is used when referring to IBM.

- ✓ To respond better and faster to customer needs, American [Airlines] needed to transform the way they worked to take advantage of new technology features.
- ✓ The broadest benefit of Campari's new operating model is that it provides a far shorter and more cost-effective pathway for all of the company's brands to present a truly premium digital experience to their customer base.

Use the pronoun *it* when referring to an unnamed company, or *they* when referring to more than one unnamed company.

- ✓ This course follows a fictitious health and wellness company based in Buffalo, New York. It invested in IBM Cloud Pak for Data as its data and AI technology solution.
- ✓ The fact-checking program includes more than 90 organizations that fact-check posts in more than 60 languages. In the United States, they include groups such as PolitiFact and Factcheck.org.

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## Gender-neutral pronouns

Many terms and titles, such as *customer engineer*, *programmer*, *teacher*, or *administrative assistant*, do not apply exclusively to one gender. To make your writing inclusive, do not use gender-specific pronouns such as *he*, *him*, *himself*, *his* or *she*, *her*, *herself*, *hers* when the subject could be either gender. Also, do not use the pronoun *it* to refer to a person.

Use these techniques to avoid gender-specific pronouns:

- Use the imperative mood.

✗ The operator should turn the blue switch on her right to Remote.  
 ✓ Turn the blue switch on the right to Remote.

- Use the second person: *you, your, yours, or yourself*.

✗ The user can now move his cursor in four directions.  
 ✓ You can now move your cursor in four directions.

- Use plural nouns and plural pronouns: *they, their, theirs, them, or themselves*.

✗ A customer engineer must be trained on the hardware and software that he services.  
 ✓ Customer engineers must be trained on the hardware and software that they service.

**Exception:** Do not use a plural noun when doing so makes the relationship between subject and object unclear. Use one of the other techniques instead.

✗ Users can modify their profiles. *(It is unclear whether there is a one-to-one or a one-to-many relationship between the subject and object)*  
 ✓ You can modify your profile. *(If each user can have one profile)*  
 ✓ You can modify your profiles. *(If each user can have more than one profile)*

Do not use these techniques to avoid gender-specific pronouns:

- Do not use constructions that combine pronouns.

✗ he or she, he/she  
 ✗ him or her, him/her  
 ✗ his or her, his/her  
 ✗ his or hers, his/hers  
 ✗ s/he, (s)he

- Generally, do not use a singular noun and a plural pronoun: *they, their, theirs, them, or themselves*.

✗ An employee is expected to clean their work area before they go home.  
 ✓ All employees are expected to clean their work areas before they go home.

**Exception:** If you refer to a person of unspecified gender, and none of the previous techniques apply, you can consider using singular *they, their, or themselves* with a plural verb.

✓ The award took the form of a bursary to support a marketing student in the completion of their degree studies.

- Do not use the pronoun *it* to refer to a person.

✗ Everyone must bring its own computer to the training class.  
 ✓ All attendees must bring their own computers to the training class.

In examples or scenarios, you can use a person's name and then use a gender-specific pronoun to refer to that name. Vary the use of proper names in documentation. Use names that represent various ethnic backgrounds, genders, and locations. For information about referring to names, see [Personal information](#).

✓ If Marco keeps an accurate record of his programming time, he can easily create a report.  
 ✓ Sabrina is a senior administrator. She meets daily with her staff to assign tasks.

To refer to a chatbot, use the pronoun *it*. If possible, rewrite the text to avoid use of a pronoun.

✓ (Best option) Alexa can respond to user questions and manage shopping and to-do lists.  
 ✓ (Alternative) Alexa can respond to user questions. It can manage shopping and to-do lists.  
 ✗ Alexa can respond to user questions. She can manage shopping and to-do lists.

## Personal pronouns

---

Use the pronouns that are appropriate for the person of the verb. Follow these general guidelines for personal pronouns:

- Use the second-person pronoun *you* as often as possible. The subject of an imperative sentence is understood to be “you”.
- Use first-person pronouns *I*, *me*, *my*, *we*, *us*, and *our* with caution, because their use can lead to uncertainty about the entity referred to.
- Use first-person pronouns, if appropriate, in the following circumstances:
  - In articles, white papers, blogs, videos, marketing proposals, or documents with one or more authors and in which the author or authors describe their own actions or opinions
  - In pre-sales content when fostering a conversational tone
  - In the question portion of frequently asked questions (FAQs)
  - In videos, if it adds value to the content or if the presenters are visible
  - In user interfaces where the tone is informal and supportive of the users' task need. Example: “Can’t find what you need? Look in the 'My projects' list.”
  - In requests for personal information, such as name and email address, where the user will benefit from knowing why IBM is asking for this information. Example: “Why do we need your email address?”
  - In calls to action, emails, event invitations and other areas where an informal tone is appropriate to the context. Example: “We’re looking forward to seeing you at Think”
  - In sales tools that address a named person or organization, such as very important technical officer (VITO) letters, proposals, sales tools, and sales plays
- Avoid third-person pronouns that are gender specific.

## Relative pronouns

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Do not use the words *that*, *which*, and *who* interchangeably.

- Use *that*, without a comma, to introduce a restrictive clause. A restrictive clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence. If the restrictive clause is removed, the meaning of the sentence changes.

✓ *Restrictive clause (uses “that”):* The lawnmower *that* is in the shed needs to be sharpened.

*Explanation:* We have more than one lawnmower. The one in the shed needs to be sharpened.

- Use *which*, preceded by a comma, to introduce a nonrestrictive clause. A nonrestrictive clause provides extra information that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence. If the nonrestrictive clause is removed, the basic meaning of the sentence does not change.

✓ *Nonrestrictive clause (uses “which” and commas):* The lawnmower, *which* is in the shed, needs to be sharpened.

*Explanation:* We have only one lawnmower and it needs to be sharpened. You’ll find it in the shed.

- Use *who*, not *that* or *which*, to refer to a person. However, you can use the possessive form *whose* with both animate and inanimate objects.

✗ Database administrators *that* require more information ...

✓ Database administrators *who* require more information ...

## Related resources

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For information about using contracted forms of pronouns, see the [Contractions](#) topic.

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## Spelling

In general, use US English spelling in all publications. If certain publications, such as marketing materials, are distributed only in regions that use a different spelling, such as UK English, decide which spelling is appropriate.



To confirm the spelling of words, use these resources in the following order:

- [Word usage](#)
- [IBM Terminology](#) 
- [Merriam-Webster](#) : When the dictionary lists multiple spellings for a word, the first spelling is usually preferred.

To confirm the definition of words, use these resources:

- For nontechnical words, see [Merriam-Webster](#) .
- For technical words, see [IBM Terminology](#) .

The following table lists differences between US spelling and other variants:

 <b>Not US spelling</b>	 <b>US spelling</b>
adaptor	adapter
analogue	analog
analyse	analyze
artefact	artifact
authorise	authorize
axe	ax
behaviour	behavior
cancelled	canceled
catalogue	catalog
centre	center
colour	color
cypher	cipher
fulfil	fulfill
grey	gray
labelled	labeled
learnt	learned
licence	license
metre	meter
mould	mold
organise	organize
orientated	oriented
paycheque	paycheck
practise (verb)	practice
programme	program
rateable	ratable
recognise	recognize
sizeable	sizable
supercede	supersede

See how spelling is important to the topic of [Abbreviations](#)




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## Terminology

Terminology management promotes the consistent use of standardized terms across IBM. When we monitor and enforce the use of consistent terminology, our customers get clear, consistent information that makes sense across products, solutions, and technologies. Terminology management is also a key component of IBM's globalization strategy. Translators can translate terminology accurately and efficiently using tools and established translations.

Use the following resources to verify correct terminology and usage:

Resource	Description
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Resource	Description
<a href="#">Word usage</a>	See the word usage list in IBM Style for which words and spellings to use or avoid in IBM content for external audiences.
<a href="#">IBM Terminology database</a> 	Search the Terminology database for definitions of terms, usage information, abbreviations, synonyms, and more. To provide feedback about terms and their definitions, contact the <a href="#">IBM Terminology</a> team. You can also search the Terminology database in Slack by sending a direct message to <a href="#">Termbot</a>  .
<a href="#">IBM Terminology home page</a> 	Find information and links to everything about terminology in IBM, including glossaries, TermExt, terminology guides, and education.

## Verbs

Use clear and succinct verbs with the appropriate mood, person, tense, and voice.

## Contents

- [General guidelines](#)
- [Mood](#)
- [Person](#)
- [First person](#)
- [Second person](#)
- [Third person](#)
- [Subject-verb agreement](#)
- [Tense](#)
- [Voice](#)

## General guidelines

Keep verbs clear and concise:

- Avoid using words that primarily function as verbs as nouns or adjectives. Verbs that are commonly misused as nouns or adjectives include *configure*, *compile*, *debug*, *fix*, and *install*.

✗ after the compile

✓ after the compilation

✗ the debug function

✓ the debugging function

✗ during the install

✓ during the installation

- Avoid using a phrasal verb (a verb and a preposition) if the verb alone provides the same meaning.

✗ call up

✓ call

✗ click on

✓ click

✗ print out

✓ print

✗ start up

✓ start

- When you write a sentence that includes two coordinate clauses, do not omit the verb from the second clause.
  - ✗ The file names are displayed in uppercase characters and the other file attributes in lowercase characters.
  - ✓ The file names are displayed in uppercase characters, and the other file attributes are displayed in lowercase characters.
- When you use a verb phrase at the beginning of a sentence with a present participle, such as *creating*, or a past participle, such as *created*, make sure that the verb phrase modifies the correct word. Failure to do so results in a dangling modifier.
  - ✗ Having configured your environment, the program is ready to be used.
  - ✓ After you configure your environment, you can use the program.
  - ✗ Cleared of the corrupted data, you can now repopulate the repository.
  - ✓ After you clear the corrupted data, you can repopulate the repository.

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## Mood

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Use the appropriate mood for the information type:

- Use the imperative mood for requests or instructions, such as in procedures.
  - ✓ Before you install the product, back up your files.
  - ✓ Select one or more checkboxes.
- Use the indicative mood to specify information, such as facts and explanations.
  - ✓ The product provides a powerful way to store information.
  - ✓ The computer cancels the action and stops all processing.
- Do not use the subjunctive mood in technical documentation.
  - ✗ If you were to save the file ...
  - ✓ If you save the file ...
  - ✗ It is important that the file be saved ...
  - ✓ Important: Save the file ...

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## Person

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Use the appropriate person for the information type.

### First person

Avoid using first person, which is indicated by the personal pronouns *I*, *me*, *my*, *we*, *us*, and *our*. The first person focuses on the writer, not on the audience or the information being presented. See specific guidance for [Videos](#). The first person can also contribute to an overly informal tone and cause confusion over whether the writing represents an individual, group, or IBM as a company. See [Personal pronouns](#).

- ✗ I find some servers more difficult to configure.
- ✓ Some servers can be more difficult to configure.
- ✗ Let's start by planning the home page for the website.
- ✓ Start by planning the home page for the website.
- ✗ We can add a model to the project that we created in the previous step.
- ✓ You can add a model to the project that you created in the previous step.

✗ We are offering you a 15 percent discount for this IBM event.

✓ You are eligible for a 15 percent discount for this IBM event.

The use of first person is acceptable in these situations:

- In the question portion of frequently asked questions (FAQs).
  - ✓ Q: How do I change the properties of a class?
- In articles, white papers, marketing proposals, or documents with one or more authors and in which the author or authors describe their own actions or opinions.
  - ✓ I look forward to meeting you at this year's technical symposium.
- In videos, if it adds value to the content or if the presenters are visible. In these cases, the presenters may introduce themselves but should not use the first person elsewhere in the video.

## Second person

As much as possible, use the second person, which is indicated by the personal pronoun *you*. The second person focuses on the reader.

✓ When you create a database, you must provide a unique name.

To instruct the user to perform an action, use the imperative mood. The subject of an imperative sentence is understood to be *you*.

✓ To begin processing, press Enter.

## Third person

Use the third person to describe concepts, facts, and results. The third person focuses on the information being presented. Most often, technical information is about things, not people. Therefore, the third person is indicated by nouns and third-person pronouns such as *it* and *they*. When you use the third person, do not use gender-specific pronouns, such as *he* and *she*, unless the context requires them. For details, see [Gender-neutral pronouns](#).

- ✓ The first three exercises show how to build complex models.
- ✓ Specify whether users can add themselves to a project.
- ✓ Peter recorded his test results in a spreadsheet program.

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# Subject-verb agreement

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Follow the basic grammar rules for subject-verb agreement: a subject and its verb must agree in number and person. Use these guidelines to make subjects and verbs agree in more complex situations:

- Subjects joined by *and* usually take plural verbs.
  - ✓ Government and healthcare are key target markets for smarter software.  
*Exception:* When the parts of the subject form a single idea or refer to a single person or thing, they take a singular verb.
  - ✓ Sales and marketing is the biggest expense for the product.  
*Exception:* When the adjective *each* or *every* precedes a compound subject, the verb is usually singular.
  - ✓ Each manager and employee receives an annual performance review.
  - ✓ Every sample and tutorial is edited according to the guidelines.
- When subjects are joined by *or* or *nor*, the verb agrees with the subject that is closer.
  - ✓ Neither service nor support is included with the basic contract.
  - ✓ Either the editor or the writers run the grammar-checking tool.



- ✓ The user name, password, or both are not valid.
- Collective nouns usually are treated as singular entities, and take a matching verb. Some collective nouns can be used commonly as plural, so it is acceptable to write, “The staff are arriving”. However, where the collective noun seems more natural as a plural, as in when group members act separately, be as clear as possible and use a modifier to make the noun and verb agree elegantly.
- ✓ This afternoon, the team presents its findings.
- ⚠ The staff are arriving.
- ✓ The staff members are arriving.
- ✗ Each morning, the team discuss their preferences.
- ✓ The team players discuss their preferences.
- ✓ IBM announces its quarterly results promptly.

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## Tense

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Write in the simple present tense as much as possible.

- ✗ When you open the latch, the panel will slide forward.
- ✓ When you open the latch, the panel slides forward.

Use past or future tense only when you cannot use present tense or it does not make sense to use present tense.

- ✗ If you selected **New** in the previous window, the current window will display the default values.
- ✓ If you selected **New** in the previous window, the current window displays the default values.

Do not use future tense in a cause and effect sentence, but you can use it for valid future situations.

- ✓ Certification testing will be available at the next Think conference.

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## Voice

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LLM helper Use active voice as much as possible. Active voice focuses on the performer of the action and is often clearer, shorter, and more direct than passive voice.

- ✗ *Passive:* The Limits window is used to specify the minimum and maximum values.
- ✓ *Active:* In the Limits window, specify the minimum and maximum values.
- ✗ *Passive:* Up to 500 files can be stored in the database.
- ✓ *Active:* You can store up to 500 files in the database.

Passive voice is acceptable when any of these conditions are true:

- The system performs the action.
- It is more appropriate to focus on the receiver of the action.
- You want to avoid blaming the user for an error, such as in an error message.
- The information is clearer in passive voice.
- Specific information types, such as glossary definitions, require passive voice.
- ✓ The file is saved when you press Enter.
- ✓ When you use the recover command, any lost data is recovered.
- ✓ Error: An incorrect value was entered.

## Related resources

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For information about using contracted forms of verbs, see the [Contractions](#) topic.

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## Punctuation

- [Punctuation and symbols](#)
  - [Colons](#)
  - [Commas](#)
  - [Dashes](#)
  - [Ellipses](#)
  - [Exclamation points](#)
  - [Hyphens](#)
  - [Parentheses](#)
  - [Periods](#)
  - [Quotation marks](#)
  - [Semicolons](#)
  - [Slashes](#)
- 

## Punctuation and symbols

Ensure that references in text to punctuation marks and special characters are clear. Special characters include symbols such as the ampersand (&) and the at sign (@).

Some punctuation marks and special characters are known by different English names in different geographic areas. For example, the exclamation point (!) is commonly referred to as an exclamation mark in the UK. Use the names that are listed in the table in this topic.

## Contents

---

- [Individual punctuation marks or special characters](#)
- [Series of punctuation marks or special characters](#)
- [Common punctuation marks and special characters \(table\)](#)

## Individual punctuation marks or special characters

---

Follow these guidelines for individual punctuation marks or special characters:

- Do not refer to an individual punctuation mark or special character by its symbol alone. Use the name alone, or use the name followed by the symbol in parentheses. Use the name alone if the punctuation mark or special character is standard, such as a comma or period, and including the symbol would clutter the text. Include the symbol in parentheses when a punctuation mark or special character is not well known or when including the symbol improves clarity. See specific guidance for [Videos](#).

✗ Usually, ... in the user interface indicates that further user input is required or that an action is in progress.

✓ Usually, an ellipsis (...) in the user interface indicates that further user input is required or that an action is in progress.

✗ Insert . after each sentence.

✓ Insert a period after each sentence.

✗ Use \* as a wildcard.

✓ Use an asterisk (\*) as a wildcard.

- ✗ If the first character of the file name is >, the file name is rejected.
  - ✓ If the first character of the file name is a greater than symbol (>), the file name is rejected.
  - To avoid visual ambiguity when you refer to braces, brackets, and parentheses, use commas instead of parentheses to separate such characters from the surrounding text.
    - ✗ If you do not include the required parentheses (( )), an error occurs.
    - ✓ If you do not include the required parentheses, ( ), an error occurs.
    - ✗ The closing bracket (]) is missing.
    - ✓ The closing bracket, ], is missing.
    - ✗ The path contains the library qualifier in braces ({ }).
    - ✓ The path contains the library qualifier in braces, { }.
  - If you refer to the punctuation mark or special character again close to the first occurrence, you can either repeat the name without the symbol in parentheses or refer to the punctuation mark or special character generically.
    - ✓ Use the forward slash (/) in a path name. Do not use the forward slash for any other purpose.
    - ✓ Use the forward slash (/) in a path name. Do not use this character for any other purpose.
  - Do not use symbols instead of words in general text.
    - ✗ Specify a user name & password.
    - ✓ Specify a user name and password.
    - ✗ Type a telephone #.
    - ✓ Type a telephone number.
    - ✗ The available space is the size of the disk - the amount of space that is required for the installation.
    - ✓ The available space is the size of the disk minus the amount of space that is required for the installation.
    - ✗ Click **Save** & then **Close** to save your changes and exit the page.
    - ✓ Click **Save** and then **Close** to save your changes and exit the page.
    - ✗ The server is 4x faster than other servers that store the same amount of data.
    - ✓ The server is four times faster than other servers that store the same amount of data.
- The following exceptions are allowed:
- An ampersand symbol (&) that is used in a proper noun such as the company name *H&R Block* or in common abbreviations, such as *R&D for research and development*. The symbol can also be used in situations where the allowed number of characters is limited, such as a user interface or mobile app.
  - A number sign (#) that is used in marketing material to indicate a ranking, as in “Gartner ranks IBM #1 in cloud innovation report”.
  - A percent sign (%) that is used as part of a percentage value as in, “Almost 50% of the world population has internet access”.
  - When you write about a user interface, do not include a punctuation mark, such as a colon or ellipsis, that is part of an interface element label unless one of the following conditions applies:
    - The omission of the punctuation mark causes confusion.
    - You use a tool that extracts the wording from the label, including any punctuation, for use in the documentation.
  - ✗ *Incorrect in most cases:* Click **Save As...** and then type a file name.
  - ✓ *Correct in most cases:* Click **Save As** and then type a file name.

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## Series of punctuation marks or special characters

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Follow these guidelines for a series of punctuation marks or special characters:

- Introduce the series with a complete sentence that ends with a colon.
- Place the series of symbols on the following line.
- Separate each item in the series with a space.
- To ensure that readers clearly interpret the items in the series, follow these guidelines:
  - Do not enclose the series in parentheses.
  - Do not separate the items with punctuation marks, such as commas.
  - Do not include coordinating conjunctions, such as *and*, between the items.
  - Do not punctuate the series with a final period. If the series includes a period, avoid placing it at the end of the series.
  - Do not include the names of the punctuation marks or special characters.
  - If the series includes a range of numbers or letters, use an en dash (–) without spaces to indicate the range.

✓ The password can contain any of the following characters:

0–9 A–Z a–z # & . ^ ~

- Unless the context determines the order of the characters, list numeric characters first, followed by alphabetic characters (uppercase and then lowercase), followed by other characters in ASCII order. To sort punctuation marks and special characters, use the following ASCII sort sequence unless you use a tool that imposes a different sort sequence.

(space) ! " # \$ % & ' ( ) \* + , - . / : ; < = > ? @ [ \ ] ^ \_ ` { | } ~ ¢ ≥ ≤ ÷ °

- Avoid using characters that are not supported in most standard code pages, especially in online information that is translated. In addition to standard punctuation marks, most code pages support the following special characters:

! # \$ % & \* + / < > @ \ ^ ~

[Start of page](#)

## Common punctuation marks and special characters

Use the names in the following table to refer to punctuation marks and special characters. For a list of common keyboard keys, see [Keyboard keys](#).

[Accute accent](#) | [Ampersand](#) | [Angle brackets](#) | [Apostrophe](#) | [Asterisk](#) | [At sign](#) | [Backslash](#) | [Braces](#) | [Brackets](#) | [Caret or circumflex](#) | [Cent sign](#) | [Check mark](#) | [Colon](#) | [Comma](#) | [Copyright symbol](#) | [Dagger](#) | [Degree symbol](#) | [Dollar sign](#) | [Double brackets](#) | [Double quotation marks](#) | [Division sign](#) | [Double quotation marks](#) | [Ellipses](#) | [Em dash](#) | [En dash](#) | [Equal sign](#) | [Euro sign](#) | [Exclamation point](#) | [Forward slash](#) | [Grave accent](#) | [Greater than symbol](#) | [Greater than or equal to symbol](#) | [Hyphen or minus sign](#) | [Less than symbol](#) | [Less than or equal to symbol](#) | [Less than symbol](#) | [Multiplication sign](#) | [Not equal to symbol](#) | [Number sign](#) | [Paragraph mark](#) | [Parentheses](#) | [Percent sign](#) | [Period](#) | [Pi symbol](#) | [Plus or minus sign](#) | [Plus sign](#) | [Pound sign](#) | [Question mark](#) | [Registered trademark symbol](#) | [Section indicator](#) | [Semicolon](#) | [Single quotation marks](#) | [Space](#) | [Tilde](#) | [Trademark symbol](#) | [Underscore](#) | [Vertical bar](#)

Symbol	Name
'	Acute accent
&	Ampersand
< >	Angle brackets (pl.), opening angle bracket, or closing angle bracket
' or '	Apostrophe
*	Asterisk (not <i>star</i> )
@	At sign
\	Backslash
{ }	Braces (pl.), opening brace, or closing brace (not <i>curly brackets</i> )
[ ]	Brackets (pl.), opening bracket, or closing bracket (not <i>square brackets</i> )
^	Caret or circumflex
¢	Cent sign
✓	Checkmark
:	Colon
,	Comma
©	Copyright symbol
†	Dagger

Symbol	Name
°	Degree symbol
\$	Dollar sign
[[ ]]	Double brackets (pl.), opening double brackets, or closing double brackets
" " or " "	Double quotation marks (pl.), opening quotation marks, or closing quotation marks (not <i>quotes</i> or <i>quote marks</i> )
÷	Division sign
...	Ellipsis (s.) or ellipses (pl.)
—	Em dash
–	En dash
=	Equal sign (not <i>equals</i> )
€	Euro sign
!	Exclamation point (not <i>exclamation mark</i> or <i>bang</i> )
/	Forward slash (not <i>slash</i> , <i>virgule</i> , or <i>solidus</i> )
`	Grave accent
>	Greater than symbol
≥	Greater than or equal to symbol
-	Hyphen or minus sign
<	Less than symbol
≤	Less than or equal to symbol
×	Multiplication sign
≠	Not equal to symbol
#	Number sign (Use <i>hash sign</i> when you refer to the symbols as part of a hashtag in social media.)
¶	Paragraph mark or carriage return
()	Parentheses (pl.), opening parenthesis, or closing parenthesis (not <i>brackets</i> )
%	Percent sign
.	Period (not <i>full stop</i> ) Use <i>dot</i> for the character in a web address or file name extension.
π	Pi symbol
+	Plus sign
±	Plus or minus sign
£	Pound sign
?	Question mark
®	Registered trademark symbol
§	Section indicator
;	Semicolon
' or ‘ and ’	Single quotation marks, opening quotation mark, or closing quotation mark (not <i>quotes</i> or <i>quote marks</i> )
	Space To explicitly indicate a space, use the word <i>space</i> enclosed in parentheses: (space).
~	Tilde
™	Trademark symbol
—	Underscore When it is under a character use <i>underline</i> .
	Vertical bar

## Related resource

- [Special characters](#) in the **Word usage** topic of IBM Style

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## Colons

Use a colon to indicate that closely related information follows.

## Contents

---

- [General text](#)
- [Headings and titles](#)
- [Introductory text](#)
- [Capitalization](#)
- [Numbers](#)

## General text

---

Follow these guidelines for using colons in general text:

- Use a colon after an independent clause to introduce an inline list.
  - ✗ The product improved in: accessibility, ease of use, and functions.
  - ✓ The product improved in three categories: accessibility, ease of use, and functions.
  - ✗ Remember to: encrypt the hard disk drive and set a password.
  - ✓ Remember to take these security measures: encrypt the hard disk drive and set a password.
- Use a colon after the label of a note.
  - ✓ **Important:** Back up all data before you begin the migration.
  - ✓ **Tip:** You can also edit the object properties by right-clicking an object.
- Use a colon between two independent clauses to amplify, elaborate on, or show a close relationship to the first clause.
  - ✓ Plan the configuration carefully: the initial settings are difficult to change after you add user accounts.
- Do not insert a space before a colon, and insert one space after a colon.

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## Headings and titles

---

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

- ✗ Creating test cases:
- ✓ Creating test cases

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.

- ✓ Getting started: Model-driven development in the Java domain
- ✓ When You Think Midmarket, Think IBM: Strategic Offerings for Midsize Businesses

For more information about headings, see [Headings](#).

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## Introductory text

---

Use a colon after the introduction to a vertical list, including a procedure or substeps in a procedure. To avoid translation problems, make the introduction a complete sentence. See specific guidance for [Marketing](#).

If a sentence intervenes between the introduction and the first item, use a period after both the introduction and the intervening sentence. For more information about introducing lists or procedures, see [Lists](#) or [Procedures](#).

- ✓ *Vertical list:*

When you configure the computer, set the following items:

- Date and time
- Drive startup sequence
- Passwords

✓ *Procedure:*

To install the product, complete the following steps:

1. Click Install program.
2. In the wizard, follow the instructions on each page.
3. Click Finish.

✓ *Substeps:*

1. Connect the cables:
  - a. Connect the keyboard cable.
  - b. Connect the mouse cable.

Use a colon or a period after the introduction to a figure or table. Either punctuation mark is correct if it follows a complete sentence. Choose the punctuation mark that best suits the context. For example, you might use a colon if the introduction immediately leads in to the item that follows. If the introduction is more descriptive or is interrupted by an intervening sentence, use a period. In your information set, be consistent with the punctuation marks that you apply for the context. For more information about introducing figures or tables, see [Figures](#) or [Tables](#).

✓ The diagram ends with a stop node, as shown in the following figure:

✓ Table 10 shows results from the first test and table 11 shows results from the second test. The results in both tables are accurate to two decimal points.

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## Capitalization

---

Use a lowercase letter after a colon when the colon occurs within a sentence and introduces an inline list or independent clause (unless the word that follows the colon is a proper noun or otherwise requires capitalization).

- ✓ Three security measures are evaluated: a firewall, an encryption key, and a password.
- ✓ The deletion is final: you cannot restore an element after you delete it.
- ✓ You can use the editor with the following programming languages: Java, C, and C++.

Use an uppercase letter after a colon when the colon introduces these items:

- Vertical list
  - ✓ You can use the following background colors:
    - Blue
    - Green
    - Red
- Note or text that follows a label
  - ✓ In a database: This distributed storage option is known as database persistent sessions.
  - ✓ Input/output operations: Move mode and locate mode
- Quotation
  - ✓ The manager's instructions were clear: "Submit the report by Monday."
- Subheading or subtitle
  - ✓ Lesson 1: Installing the server
  - ✓ Scenario: Generating sample data

For more information about capitalization, see [Capitalization](#).

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## Numbers

---

Use colons to separate units of time. Do not insert a space before or after the colon.

- ✓ The status meeting starts at 9:30 AM.
- ✓ The last build finished running at 18:54:30.

Use colons to express ratios. Do not insert a space before or after the colon.

- ✓ Consumer sales increased 5:1 last quarter.
- ✓ Reclaim space in your data center with 20:1 server consolidation.

For more information about numbers, see [Numbers](#).

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## Commas

Use a comma to separate elements in a sentence, such as items in a series, clauses, or introductory phrases. If a sentence is complex or longer than 32 words, consider rewriting it, separating it into multiple sentences, or presenting its contents in a vertical list. See specific guidance for [Marketing](#).

## Contents

---

- [Commas between clauses](#)
- [Commas after introductory words and phrases](#)
- [Commas between items in a series](#)
- [Commas with nonrestrictive clauses and phrases](#)
- [Commas as separators in numbers](#)
- [Commas with quotation marks](#)

## Commas between clauses

---

Use a comma between independent clauses that are separated by a coordinating conjunction unless the clauses are short or closely related. Coordinating conjunctions are *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, and *yet*.

- ✓ Some companies are outsourcing development while others are outsourcing research.
- ✓ Not only are some companies outsourcing development, but many of them are outsourcing critical projects.
- ✓ Click **Save**, and type a file name.

*Then* is not a coordinating conjunction. You cannot join independent clauses with *then* unless you add a semicolon or a coordinating conjunction.

- ✗ Click **Start** then select a program.
- ✓ Click **Start**; then select a program.
- ✗ Click **Start**, then select a program.
- ✓ Click **Start**, and then select a program.

Do not use a comma between an independent clause and a dependent clause that are separated by a coordinating conjunction unless the sentence might be misread without a comma.

- ✗ The message includes an error code, and is displayed in three languages.
- ✓ The message includes an error code and is displayed in three languages.



- ✗ The host greeted the last participant who joined the conference call and started the meeting.
- ✓ The host greeted the last participant who joined the conference call, and started the meeting.

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## Commas after introductory words and phrases

---

Use a comma after introductory words, clauses, and phrases.

- ✓ However, most hardware components conform to this standard.
- ✓ First, you create a project.
- ✓ After you remove the lid, proceed to step 4.
- ✓ In the diagram editor, right-click a diagram.
- ✓ To move the model element, click **Refactor > Move**.

Do not add a comma after a coordinating conjunction unless the conjunction is followed by a clause that requires a comma, such as a conditional clause.

- ✗ But, you can view other log files.
- ✓ But you can view other log files.
- ✓ But, if you are using Windows 10, you can view other log files.

[Start of page](#)

## Commas between items in a series

---

Use commas to separate items in a series of three or more. Use a comma before the conjunction that precedes the final item. See specific guidance for [Marketing](#).

- ✓ A message window describes an error, explains how to correct it, and provides the controls to correct it.
- ✓ Present the items in a meaningful order, such as alphabetically, numerically, or chronologically.

Do not add commas or conjunctions between the items in a series of special characters.

- ✗ The name can contain any of the following characters: #, &, ., ^, and ~.
- ✓ The name can contain any of the following characters: # & . ^ ~

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## Commas with nonrestrictive clauses and phrases

---

Use commas to set off nonrestrictive clauses. A nonrestrictive clause provides extra information that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence. If the nonrestrictive clause is removed, the basic meaning of the sentence does not change.

- ✓ *Nonrestrictive clause:* The Recovery log, which is generated automatically, shows the cause of the problem.
- ✓ *Nonrestrictive clause:* The updates, which are free to subscribers, are also available on the website.
- ✓ *Nonrestrictive clause:* Specify a font, such as Helvetica or Garamond, before you save the document.

Do not use commas to set off restrictive clauses. A restrictive clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence. If the restrictive clause is removed, the meaning of the sentence changes.

- ✓ *Restrictive clause:* The Recovery log that contains the most recent information is in the current\_logs folder.
- ✓ *Restrictive clause:* Customers who subscribe to the service receive monthly updates.
- ✓ *Restrictive clause:* Specify an operating system such as z/OS to support 64-bit applications.

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## Commas as separators in numbers

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Specific rules apply to using commas as separators in numbers based on the length of the numbers and how they are used in a sentence. For more information about using commas as separators in numbers, see [Numbers: Comma separators](#).

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## Commas with quotation marks

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For details about using commas with quotation marks, see [Quotation marks: Quotation marks with other punctuation](#).

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## Dashes

There are two types of dashes—en dashes and em dashes. They each have specific purposes and should not be used interchangeably.

### En dashes

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En dashes (–) are longer than hyphens (-) and shorter than em dashes (—). The en dash (–) derives its name from typesetting: the length of an en dash is the width of an uppercase *N* in the same font.

The keyboard shortcuts for an en dash are:

- On Windows, press Alt+0150.
- On a Mac, press Option+minus sign key (-).

#### Showing ranges with en dashes

Use an en dash to show a range, or inclusive numbers, letters, pages, dates, or codes. Do not use spaces before or after the en dash.

Follow these guidelines for using en dashes with ranges:

- ✓ numbers 12–15
- ✓ pages 100–107
- ✓ X'41'–X'FE'
- ✓ September–December

*Exceptions:* Use the word *to* instead of an en dash in the following situations:

- In a range of numbers where either or both of the numbers are negative, to avoid confusion between a hyphen and the minus sign in front of a negative number.
  - ✓ -40°C to -60°C
- In a range of page numbers that are in folio-by-chapter format.
  - ✓ pages 3-2 to 3-7
- Do not use words such as *from* or *between* to show a range; it is not clear whether the items are the boundaries of the range or are included in the range.
  - ✗ letters from A - J
  - ✓ letters A–J
  - ✗ numbers between 1 - 5
  - ✓ numbers 1–5

✗ messages between IGY3009 and IGY3020

✓ messages IGY3009–IGY3020

- When you show a range of measurements, include the unit of measurement only after the second number.

✗ You need 16 MB–20 MB of free space.

✓ You need 16–20 MB of free space.

✗ The voltage can be 210 V AC–240 V AC.

✓ The voltage can be 210–240 V AC.

✗ Leave a clearance of 1.02 in.–1.77 in. (26 mm–45 mm).

✓ Leave a clearance of 1.02–1.77 in. (26–45 mm).

- If a number range is part of a compound adjective, hyphenate the number and unit, and use a preposition if that is clearer. You can omit the unit from the first compound in a number range.

✗ a 1-character-through-8-character field

✓ a 1-character through 8-character field

✗ a 1-through-8-character field

✓ a 1- through 8-character field

See [Dates and times](#) for information about using the en dash to show ranges in dates and times.

See specific guidance for [Marketing](#).

## Em dashes

---

The em dash also derives its name from typesetting: the length of an em dash is the width of an uppercase *M* in the same font. Em dashes are longer than both hyphens and en-dashes. Most keyboards do not have a key for an em dash, but many authoring tools provide a symbol for an em dash, and some authoring tools create an em dash if you type two hyphens together.

Do not use em dashes in technical information. More common punctuation marks, such as commas, parentheses, or a colon, provide the same result. Rewrite the text or use different punctuation. See specific guidance for [Marketing](#).

✗ Security, reliability, scalability, and availability—these are priorities for an enterprise system.

✓ Security, reliability, scalability, and availability are priorities for an enterprise system.

✗ Developers must know how to separate a business operation to both create and resolve—in either direction—an intermediary state.

✓ Developers must know how to separate a business operation to both create and resolve, in either direction, an intermediary state.

✗ If you make a mistake—for example, a typographical error—you can correct it easily.

✓ If you make a mistake (for example, a typographical error), you can correct it easily.

✗ You can apply a pattern in two ways—you can select an existing pattern or create a new one.

✓ You can apply a pattern in two ways: you can select an existing pattern or create a new one.

---

## Ellipses

Avoid using ellipses in text in most cases. If you use an ellipsis, apply the correct spacing.

## Contents

---

- [General text](#)

- [Examples and quotations](#)
- [User interfaces](#)
- [Spacing and punctuation](#)

## General text

---

Usually, an ellipsis indicates a pause or an omission. Avoid using ellipses in most technical information. The continuation or omission can be unclear and can make reading and translation difficult. In general, write in complete phrases, include information that is important, and eliminate information that is not. See specific guidance for [Marketing](#).

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## Examples and quotations

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You can use an ellipsis in an example or quotation if you can convey the information without presenting the entire text. However, do not use ellipses at the beginning or end of a direct quotation; start and end quotations with words, even when the text is truncated.

✓ Use *select* for checkboxes and use *click* for radio buttons, as in the following examples:

- Select the **Prompt before saving** checkbox to ...
- Click **Prompt before saving** to ...

✓ He started the seminar by explaining that *Many small businesses ... are not profitable for a few years.*

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## User interfaces

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Usually, an ellipsis in the user interface indicates that more user input is required to complete an action or that an action is in progress. When you write about a user interface, do not include ellipses that are part of an interface element label unless one of the following conditions applies:

- The omission of the ellipsis causes confusion.
- You use a tool that extracts the wording from the label, including any punctuation, for use in the documentation.

✗ Click **Save As...** and type a file name.

✓ Click **Save As** and type a file name.

✗ After you click the icon, a **Generating report ...** message appears.

✓ After you click the icon, a **Generating report** message appears.

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## Spacing and punctuation

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For ellipses in user interfaces, apply the spacing that the interface design guidelines for the product specify, or be consistent with existing instances in the interface.

✓ **Saving the file ...**

✓ **Caching information ... 40% complete.**

For ellipses in text, some authoring tools provide an ellipsis symbol with default spacing between the periods. If you must type an ellipsis, do not insert spaces between the periods.

For both ellipsis symbols and typed ellipses, follow these guidelines:

- Insert one space before the ellipsis.
- ✓ Use a comma after most introductory words, clauses, and phrases, as in the following examples:
  - To create a diagram, ...

- In general, ...
- Insert one space after the ellipsis. However, if a punctuation mark follows the ellipsis, do not insert a space between them.
  - ✓ He concluded the seminar with this advice: *Plan for startup costs ... and expect the unexpected.*
  - ✓ Implement these edits to the **File** menu: change **Save As** to **Save As...**, move **Paste** to the **Edit** menu, and delete **Print Again**.
- If an ellipsis occurs at the end of a sentence, do not insert a period after the ellipsis.
- Keep all the periods in an ellipsis together on one line.
- See specific guidance for [Punctuation and symbols](#).

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## Exclamation points

Punctuate sentences with exclamation points sparingly and only positively. Exclamation points can cause the sentence tone to be interpreted negatively, for example, as aggressive, condescending, or overly informal. They also look inappropriate in a professional product UI.

Avoid expressions of enthusiasm. Such expressions can be viewed as insincere or convey a tone of unnecessary excitement. Offer readers encouragement, but do this through stating clearly what they have achieved so far.

Convey urgency or emphasis with the appropriate words, not with exclamation points. To call attention to important hints, tips, guidance, restrictions, or advice that might be overlooked, consider using a note that has a meaningful label. For more information, see [Notes](#).

- ✗ Complete this step first!
- ✓ You must complete this step first.
- ✗ You must change the default settings!
- ✓ **Important:** You must change the default settings.
- ✗ You completed the first lesson in the tutorial!
- ✓ You completed the first lesson in the tutorial.

For emails or in-product onboarding, you can use an exclamation point, where positivity sets the tone.

- ✗ Welcome, Marie.
- ✓ Welcome, Marie!
- ✓ Great news! You've earned 200 BluePoints.
- ✓ We are looking forward to seeing you at the next session!

Avoid exclamation points where a primarily functional tone is appropriate. Use exclamation points sparingly and use only one at a time, if at all.

- ✗ Whew! Your inbox is empty!!!
- ✓ Your inbox is empty.

---

## Hyphens

Use hyphens to increase clarity by connecting related information. For example, use hyphens in compound adjectives to show which words modify another word if it is necessary to avoid ambiguity, and use hyphens with numbers to show how they relate to measurements, words, or other numbers.

**Note:** Hyphens and dashes can be easily mistaken for each other, but they are different. See [Dashes](#) to learn the proper uses of en and em dashes.

## Contents

---

- [Prefixes and suffixes](#)
- [Capitalization](#)
- [Compound words](#)
- [Numbers](#)
- [Ranges](#)
- [Related resources](#)

## Prefixes and suffixes

---

In most cases, do not use a hyphen to connect a prefix or suffix to a word.

There are cases where a hyphen between a prefix and root word adds clarity. For more information, see [Prefixes](#).

## Capitalization

---

Follow these guidelines for capitalizing hyphenated words. See also [Capitalization](#).

- When a hyphenated word occurs at the beginning of a sentence, capitalize only the first element in the word unless a subsequent element is a proper noun or proper adjective.
  - ✗ Power-Saving techniques are important for notebook users.
  - ✓ Power-saving techniques are important for notebook users.
  - ✗ All-american manufacturing is less common than it used to be.
  - ✓ All-American manufacturing is less common than it used to be.
- When a hyphenated word occurs at the beginning of a heading with sentence-style capitalization, capitalize only the first element in the word unless a subsequent element is a proper noun or proper adjective.
  - ✗ Case-Sensitive languages
  - ✓ Case-sensitive languages
  - ✗ Non-European-Based companies
  - ✓ Non-European-based companies
- When a hyphenated word occurs in a heading with headline-style capitalization, capitalize the first element in the word; the last element in the word, regardless of its part of speech; and any element that is not an article, preposition, or coordinating conjunction.
  - ✗ Designing Interfaces for Non-English-speaking Users
  - ✓ Designing Interfaces for Non-English-Speaking Users
  - ✗ Self-contained Sensors
  - ✓ Self-Contained Sensors
  - ✗ Once-a-day Notifications
  - ✓ Once-a-Day Notifications

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## Compound words

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To clarify which noun is being modified, avoid long compound phrases and noun strings, and use hyphens where appropriate. Consider using a prepositional phrase after a noun instead of a compound adjective.

When you write compound phrases, use hyphens to avoid ambiguity, but do not use hyphens unnecessarily. Follow these guidelines:

- Hyphenate compound adjectives and adverbs before a noun if readers might misinterpret the term or phrase.
  - ✗ data driven businesses
  - ✓ data-driven businesses
  - ✗ object oriented programming languages
  - ✓ object-oriented programming languages
  - ✗ a cost effective procedure
  - ✓ a cost-effective procedure
  - ✗ well formed XML
  - ✓ well-formed XML
  - ✗ once only delivery
  - ✓ once-only delivery
  - ✗ operating system file (*a system file that is operating or the file for the operating system*)
  - ✓ operating-system file (*the file for the operating system*)
- Do not use a hyphen after an adverb or adjective that ends in *-ly* because such terms are never ambiguous.
  - ✗ fully-qualified path
  - ✓ fully qualified path
  - ✗ highly-parallel processing
  - ✓ highly parallel processing
  - ✗ monthly-maintenance schedule
  - ✓ monthly maintenance schedule
- When a compound adjective follows a noun, you can omit the hyphen unless it is necessary to avoid ambiguity.
  - ✓ Today's businesses are becoming increasingly data driven.
  - ✓ Several programming languages are object oriented.
  - ✓ The procedure proved to be cost effective.
  - ✓ The issue is thought-provoking. (*Without the hyphen, a possible interpretation is that the issue is thought of as provoking.*)
- Hyphenate all the words that function as the compound adjective before the noun.
  - ✓ state-of-the-art technology
  - ✓ multiple-phase-commit transactions
- Hyphenate the prefix to a hyphenated compound.
  - ✓ non-case-sensitive languages
- When hyphenated compounds in a series have the same first word or last word, repeat the common word. Omitting words makes translation more difficult and slows comprehension.
  - ✗ F-, U-, and V-mode files
  - ✓ F-mode, U-mode, and V-mode files
  - ✗ For type-1, -2, and -3 SVC routines
  - ✓ For type-1, type-2, and type-3 SVC routines

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## Numbers

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Use hyphens with numbers in the following situations. See also [Numbers](#).

- To spell out fractions
  - ✓ three-fourths
  - ✓ two-sixths
- To spell out numbers 21 through 99, regardless of the part of speech
  - ✓ twenty-four
  - ✓ eighty-seven
- To clarify a compound that consists of a number and a spelled-out unit of measurement. Do not use a hyphen if the unit is an abbreviation. However, if a numeral precedes the number-abbreviation combination and it is not practical to reword the text, hyphenate the number-abbreviation combination.
  - ✓ an 8-foot clearance
  - ✓ a 5.25-inch clearance
  - ✓ an 8 ft clearance
  - ✓ a 1 GB memory module
  - ✓ a 32-bit operating system
  - ✓ 3840 4-KB pages
- Between a whole number and a numeric fraction. In this case, do not include a hyphen between the number and unit of measurement.
  - ✓ a 5-1/4 inch clearance

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## Ranges



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Do not use hyphens for ranges, use en dashes instead. For detailed guidance about how to use en dashes for ranges, see [Dashes](#).

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## Related resources

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- [IBM Terminology database](#) 
- [Merriam-Webster dictionary](#) 
- [Word usage](#)

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## Parentheses

Use parentheses to identify items such as abbreviations, symbols, and measurements, but avoid using parentheses in general text.

## Contents

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- [Abbreviations, symbols, and measurements](#)
- [General text](#)
- [Plurals](#)



## Abbreviations, symbols, and measurements

---

If you write out the name of an abbreviation, punctuation mark, or special character, enclose the abbreviation, mark, or character in parentheses following the text.

- ✓ The Object Management Group (OMG) maintains specifications for the Unified Modeling Language (UML).
- ✓ Object names cannot contain characters such as dollar signs (\$) or question marks (?).

If you provide a measurement, you can include an equivalent value from an alternative system in parentheses following the measurement.

- ✓ One rack unit is 44.45 mm (1.75 in.) high.

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## General text

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Avoid using parentheses in general text because text in parentheses is decreased in importance. Include information that is important and eliminate information that is not. Parentheses can also interrupt the flow of a sentence. Try to rewrite the text or use other punctuation instead of parentheses. If you must write a sentence that includes text in parentheses, ensure that the sentence is grammatically correct and technically accurate if you omit the parenthetical text.

- ✗ The fan (and the enclosure) are optional.
- ✓ The fan and the enclosure are optional.
- ✗ The installation finished (but some files might not have been installed).
- ✓ The installation finished, but some files might not have been installed.
- ✗ To remove static electricity, touch the device to a (metal) part of the system.
- ✓ To remove static electricity, touch the device to a metal part of the system.

If the parenthetical text is not a complete sentence, include the parenthetical text in the sentence to which it pertains. Do not use an initial uppercase letter on the first word unless it is otherwise required, and do not insert a period inside the parentheses.

- ✗ You can sort the work items by their state (open, working, or closed.)
- ✓ You can sort the work items by their state (open, working, or closed).
- ✓ *Preferred:* You can sort the work items by their state: open, working, or closed.
- ✗ Install the bracket (Included in the kit).
- ✓ Install the bracket (included in the kit).
- ✓ *Preferred:* Install the bracket, which is included in the kit.

If the parenthetical text is a complete sentence, you can include the parenthetical sentence in the sentence to which it pertains, or you can enclose it in parentheses as a separate sentence. If you include the parenthetical sentence in the sentence to which it pertains, do not use an initial uppercase letter on the first word, and do not insert a period inside the parentheses. If the parenthetical text is a separate sentence, use an initial uppercase letter on the first word, and insert the period inside the parentheses.

- ✗ You cannot include punctuation marks in the name (you are prompted to remove punctuation marks if you include them).
- ✓ You cannot include punctuation marks in the name. (You are prompted to remove punctuation marks if you include them.)
- ✓ *Preferred:* You cannot include punctuation marks in the name. You are prompted to remove punctuation marks if you include them.

Do not use parentheses as a way to convey two types of information in the same sentence.

- ✗ The range (default) is 12 - 750 (500).
- ✓ The range is 12 - 750; the default is 500.

Do not use parentheses to abridge text if doing so sacrifices clarity. In the following example, writing both parameter options in full is clearer than saving some space by referring to both options by using a single term with the prefix in parentheses.

- ✗ Set the (UN)ABRIDGED option of the INFO parameter.
- ✓ Set the ABRIDGED or UNABRIDGED option of the INFO parameter.

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## Plurals

Do not use the letter *s* in parentheses (*s*) to indicate that a noun can be singular or plural. Some languages form plural nouns differently than English, and the construction (*s*) can cause translation problems. Instead, use the plural form or, if it is important to indicate both singular and plural options, use the phrase *one or more*.

- ✗ Select the item(*s*) from the list.
- ✓ Select the items from the list.
- ✓ Select one or more items from the list.

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## Periods

Use periods correctly.

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- [General text](#)
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## General text

Use a period 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.

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## Abbreviations

Follow these guidelines for using periods with abbreviations. See more examples in [Abbreviations](#).

- Omit periods in uppercase abbreviations.
  - ✓ EST, ID, US
- Omit periods in abbreviations for units of measurement unless they can be confused with words.
  - ✓ bps, rpm, in.
- Omit periods in abbreviations for academic degrees.
  - ✓ BA, MA, PhD
- Include periods in abbreviations for social titles.

✓ Dr., Ms., Jr.

- If an abbreviation that requires a period occurs at the end of a sentence, do not include another period.

✓ In American system units, the dimensions are 4 in. × 6 in. × 12 in.

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## File name extensions

---

Include a period before a file name extension. Assume that the period in a file name extension, such as .exe, is pronounced as *dot*, and use the indefinite article *a*.

✓ Save your notes in a .txt file.

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## Headings and titles

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Do not end a heading with a period. See more examples in [Headings](#).

✗ Creating test cases.

✓ Creating test cases

In books, use a period in titles for chapters and appendixes. Insert the period after the name of the entity and the identifying number or letter, and before the descriptive name.

✓ Chapter 1. Introduction to InfoBase

✓ Appendix A. Performance considerations

✓ Appendix B. Conversion tables

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## Introductory text

---

Use a period or a colon after the introduction to a figure or table. Either punctuation mark is correct if it follows a complete sentence. Choose the punctuation mark that best suits the context. For example, you might use a colon if the introduction immediately leads in to the item that follows. Use a period if the introduction is more descriptive or is interrupted by an intervening sentence. In your information set, be consistent with the punctuation marks that you apply for the context. For more information about introducing figures or tables, see [Figures](#) or [Tables](#).

✓ The diagram ends with a stop node, as shown in the following figure:

✓ Table 10 shows the results from the first test, and table 11 shows the results from the second test. The results in both tables are accurate to two decimal points.

Use a period after the introduction to a vertical list (including a procedure or substeps in a procedure) when a sentence intervenes between the introduction and the first item. Otherwise, use a colon. For examples, see [Colons](#). For more information about introducing lists or procedures, see [Lists](#) or [Procedures](#).

✓ *Vertical list:*

When you configure the computer, set the following items. The order in which you set them does not matter.

- Date and time
- Drive startup sequence
- Passwords

✓ *Procedure:*

To install the product, complete the following steps. This procedure installs the program in the default location.

1. Click Install program.

2. In the wizard, follow the instructions on each page.
3. Click Finish.

✓ *Substeps:*

1. Connect the cables:
  - a. Connect the keyboard cable.
  - b. Connect the mouse cable.

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## Lists

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Write lists so that all or none of the items start with complete sentences. If list items comprise only complete sentences, include a period after each sentence. See more examples in [Lists](#).

✓ Follow these steps to reinstall the adapter:

1. Remove the cover.
2. Remove the adapter.
3. Replace the adapter.
4. Replace the cover.

If list items comprise only sentence fragments, do not include any end punctuation.

✓ Consider these factors when you design a web page:

- Background patterns and images
- Font styles and colors
- Layout options

If a list contains list items that start with sentence fragments, and one or more of the fragments are followed by complete sentences, include periods after all sentence fragments and sentences.

✓ Session management can store session-related information in several ways:

- In application server memory. This storage option is local to the application server and cannot be shared with other application servers.
- In a database.
- In another WebSphere Application Server instance.

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## Messages

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As the guidance about messages in [Messages](#) recommends, write messages as complete sentences that end with a period.

## Numbers

---

Use a period on the line (.), not a raised dot (·), as a decimal separator unless the comma (,) is a legal requirement in the country for which you are writing. See more examples in [Numbers](#).

- ✗ The clearance is 4·6 cm (1·8 in.).
- ✗ *Incorrect in most cases:* The clearance is 4,6 cm (1,8 in.).
- ✓ *Correct in most cases:* The clearance is 4.6 cm (1.8 in.).

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## Parentheses

---

If the parenthetical text is not a complete sentence, do not insert a period inside the parentheses. See more examples in [Parentheses](#).

- ✗ You can sort the work items by their state (open, working, or closed.)
- ✓ You can sort the work items by their state (open, working, or closed).

If the parenthetical text is a complete sentence, you can either include the parenthetical sentence in the sentence to which it pertains or in parentheses as a separate sentence. If you include the parenthetical sentence in the sentence to which it pertains, do not insert a period inside the parentheses. If the parenthetical text is a separate sentence, insert the period inside the parentheses.

- ✓ You cannot include punctuation marks in the name (you are prompted to remove punctuation marks if you include them).
- ✓ You cannot include punctuation marks in the name. (You are prompted to remove punctuation marks if you include them.)

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## Quotation marks

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For details about using periods with quotation marks, see [Quotation marks with other punctuation](#).

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## Quotation marks

Use double quotation marks (“ ”) and single quotation marks (‘ ’) correctly. See specific guidance for [Marketing](#).

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## Terminology

---

The term *quotation mark* refers generically to a double quotation mark character or a single quotation mark character. When you refer to quotation marks in text, specify whether you mean *double quotation marks* or *single quotation marks*.

To refer to the position of the characters, use the terms *opening* and *closing*.

- ✓ Ensure that each set of opening quotation marks has a matching set of closing quotation marks.

Do not use the term *quotes* to refer to quotation marks or to the text between quotation marks. Use the term *quote* only as a verb, and use *quotation* as the noun.

- ✗ Enclose the value in quotes.
- ✓ Enclose the value in double quotation marks.
- ✗ The introduction includes an infamous quote.
- ✓ The introduction includes an infamous quotation.

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## Emphasis

---

Do not use quotation marks to emphasize words or phrases. Quotation marks can clutter the text. To emphasize words as words, use italic font.

✗ The service processor is also referred to as the 'baseboard management controller.'

✓ The service processor is also referred to as the *baseboard management controller*.

To call attention to information that might be overlooked, consider using a note that has a meaningful label. For more information, see [Notes](#).

✗ “Do not” close the lid until the unit is seated.

✓ **Important:** Do not close the lid until the unit is seated.

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## Double quotation marks

---

Use double quotation marks for the following items:

- Quotations.
- Words that are used in a special sense, but only if no other word clearly expresses the meaning. Do not overuse quotation marks for this purpose. Using a word in a special sense can cause problems for translation.
- Citations that have sentence-style capitalization and do not have any other highlighting.
- Hardware label names.
- Interface elements that have sentence-style capitalization and that need to be distinguished from surrounding text.

For more information and examples, see [Highlighting](#).

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## Single quotation marks

---

Use single quotation marks for the following items:

- Quotation marks inside double quotation marks
  - ✓ After the conference, he explained, “When she said ‘Know your target audience’, I knew we had work to do.”
- Code examples, code syntax, and programming elements that require single quotation marks
  - ✓ `&NAME = 'JANE B. DORMANZ'`
  - ✓ `Execution PARM='CORE=200000,DBRC=N'`
- Hexadecimal numbers
  - ✓ `X'C1'`
  - ✓ `X'14'`

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## Quotation marks with other punctuation

---

If a punctuation mark is part of a quotation (or of a programming element that uses quotation marks), place the punctuation mark inside the closing quotation mark; otherwise, place it outside the closing quotation mark. If a sentence ends with a quotation, use only one period, question mark, or exclamation point to end the sentence, placing it inside the closing quotation mark if it is part of the quotation, and outside if it is not.

✓ For more information, see the chapter that is named “Semantic tagging”, which provides examples and a tutorial.

✗ She said, “You meet all the requirements for promotion.”.

✓ She said, “You meet all the requirements for promotion.”

✓ I can never remember how to spell “occurred”.

✓ Paul said, “I erased the storage medium.”

- ✓ Did Paul say, “I erased the storage medium”?
- ✓ I thought Paul asked, “Who erased the storage medium?”
- ✗ Did Paul utter the exact phrase “Who erased the storage medium?”?
- ✓ Did Paul utter the exact phrase “Who erased the storage medium?”
- ✓ Did Paul use the word “medium” or “media”?
- ✓ If you use the keyword operand **PGMID="PAYCOM"**, you must ...
- ✓ In the program segment, ensure that the value is X'FF'.
- ✓ Use the following code in the calendar application:

```
vout("Mon.", "Tues.", "Wed.", "Thurs.", "Fri.")
```

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## Typographical considerations

You can generate quotation marks directly through the keyboard, by using tagging in an authoring tool, or by using HTML or unicode characters in the source to produce the right characters in the output.

To follow IBM Design Language best practices, use curly quotation marks instead of straight quotation marks where possible.

The following table describes the key combinations to use depending on the operating system you’re using.

Character	Unicode representation	Windows	Mac	HTML
Opening single quotation mark (‘)	U+2018	Alt+0145	option+]	&lquo;
Closing single quotation mark (’)	U+2019	Alt+0146	option+shift+]	&rquo;
Opening double quotation marks (“)	U+201C	Alt+0147	option+[	&ldquo;
Closing double quotation marks (”)	U+201D	Alt+0148	option+shift+[	&rdquo;

When writing code samples, code syntax, hexadecimal numbers, or hypertext links, always use straight quotation marks.

Character	Unicode representation	Keyboard key
Straight single quotation mark (')	U+0027	' key
Straight double quotation marks (")	U+0022	" key

Always check the published output to verify that the characters render properly. Some application have settings that automatically replace straight quotation marks with *smart quotes*, which is another name for curly quotation marks. A typographic character that you specify in an authoring tool might not be converted properly when the source file is published. Checking the output ensures that you can find and address any formatting surprises.

## Related resources

- [IBM Design Language>Punctuation](#) 

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## Semicolons

Use a semicolon to separate independent clauses or items in a series that has internal punctuation. If a sentence is complex, difficult to read, or longer than 32 words, consider rewriting it, separating it into multiple sentences, or presenting its contents in a vertical list.

## Semicolons between independent clauses

Use a semicolon between independent clauses that are not connected by a coordinating conjunction. Coordinating conjunctions are *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, and *yet*. Use a coordinating conjunction when you need to show the relationship between clauses; use a semicolon when the relationship between clauses is clear.

- ✓ Remove the lid carefully; place it on a soft surface.
- ✓ Type the command as shown; the program is case-sensitive.

Use a semicolon between independent clauses that are connected by a conjunctive adverb or a transitional phrase. Conjunctive adverbs include *also*, *besides*, *consequently*, *conversely*, *finally*, *however*, *instead*, *likewise*, *next*, *otherwise*, *similarly*, *specifically*, *still*, *subsequently*, *then*, and *therefore*. Transitional phrases include *at the same time*, *for example*, *in addition*, and *on the contrary*.

- ✓ This product is sold worldwide; however, the US market remains a major focus.
- ✓ Enter a command; for example, type SETUP.
- ✓ Right-click the selected text; then click **Text Properties**.

## Semicolons between items in a series

---

Use a semicolon between items in a series that has internal punctuation.

- ✓ Save the executable file, run.exe; the readme file, rm.txt; and the image for the splash screen, screen.jpg.
- ✓ You can press the yellow, green, or blue button; the off switch; or the mouse button.

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## Slashes

Avoid using forward slashes (/) and backslashes (\) in most text and in dates.

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## General text

---

Follow these guidelines for using slashes in general text:

- In most cases, do not use slashes in text because they can be ambiguous. For example, *1/2* can mean *one half*, *one and two*, *one of two*, and *one or two*. Rewrite the text using *and*, *of*, or *or*.
  - ✗ The meeting has a scheduled tea/coffee break.
  - ✓ The meeting has a scheduled tea and coffee break.
  - ✗ You must complete 3/4 tasks.
  - ✓ You must complete three of four tasks.
  - ✗ An emergency contact is often a relative/close friend.
  - ✓ An emergency contact is often a relative or close friend.
- Do not use the construction *and/or*, which can be ambiguous and cause problems for translation. Instead, consider whether both conjunctions are needed; if not, use *and* or *or*. If both conjunctions are needed, use the construction *option A*, *option B*, or *both*.



- ✗ Connect your printer and/or scanner to the computer.
- ✓ Connect your printer and scanner to the computer.
- ✓ Connect your printer or scanner to the computer.
- ✓ Connect your printer, scanner, or both to the computer.
- In a few cases, use a forward slash (/) in terms where the slash construction is an industry standard.
  - ✓ client/server
  - ✓ I/O
  - ✓ input/output
  - ✓ P/N
  - ✓ publish/subscribe
  - ✓ read/write
  - ✓ S/N
- Where space is limited, it is acceptable to use a forward slash (/) to mean *per*.
  - ✓ visitors/yr
  - ✓ wk/mo
  - ✓ in./ft
- Do not insert a space before or after a forward slash or backslash.
  - ✗ input / output
  - ✓ input/output

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## Dates

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Do not use slashes in dates. For guidelines on how to express dates, see [Dates and times](#).

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## Fractions

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Whenever possible, use decimal numerals instead of fractions to represent fractional parts of units.

- ✗ Avoid: 1 1/2
- ✓ Prefer: 1.5
- ✗ Avoid: 3 3/4
- ✓ Prefer: 3.75

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## Mathematical equations

---

Use a forward slash (/) as an operational symbol for division. Do not insert a space before or after the forward slash.

- ✓  $(a + b)/(c + d) = -5$

For more information about mathematical equations, see [Mathematical equations](#).

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## Path names

---

When you refer to a subdirectory by using a full path name, such as */usr/bin/samples*, use a forward slash (/) or backslash (\) according to the convention of the operating system. For information that applies to multiple operating systems, be consistent and describe the convention if necessary.

✓ Windows operating systems use a backslash (\) to delimit directories in a directory path. AIX operating systems and web addresses use a forward slash (/) as a delimiter. This information uses forward slashes for all delimiters. Depending on your operating system, you might have to enter directory paths differently from what is shown in the examples.

If a path does not fit on one line, end the first line after an existing slash, and continue the path on the next line. Do not add a hyphen to indicate a break in a path.

✗ C:\Documents and Settings\Administrator\IBM\Lotus\Symphony\applications\eclipse\plugins

✓ C:\Documents and Settings\Administrator\IBM\Lotus\Symphony\applications\eclipse\plugins

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## Tables

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Do not use slashes, tabs, or spaces to arrange tabular information. See [Accessibility considerations](#).

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## Web addresses

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Follow these guidelines for using slashes in web addresses:

- If the protocol is HTTP, you can typically omit the protocol, colon, and forward slashes (http://); because most browsers default to an HTTP connection. However, some tools convert addresses into live links and require the full address, including the protocol name. If the protocol is not HTTP, always include the protocol in the web address.

✗ ftp.ibm.com

✓ [www.ibm.com](http://www.ibm.com)

✓ <ftp://ftp.ibm.com>

✓ <http://www.ibm.com>

✓ <https://www.ibm.com/cloud>

- Do not include a forward slash at the end of a web address.

✗ [www.ibm.com/](http://www.ibm.com/)

✓ [www.ibm.com](http://www.ibm.com)

✗ <https://www.ibm.com/cloud/>

✓ <https://www.ibm.com/cloud>

- If a web address does not fit on one line, end the first line after an existing forward slash (/) or double forward slash (//), and continue the address on the next line. Do not add a hyphen to indicate a break in a path.

✗ [www.ibm.com/software/commerce/net-commerce/action.html](http://www.ibm.com/software/commerce/net-commerce/action.html)

✓ [www.ibm.com/software/commerce/netcommerce/action.html](http://www.ibm.com/software/commerce/netcommerce/action.html)

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