

Communication Guidelines

(alpha release)

Writing gets real when it is read. Before that, it is a dream in letters. Writing to get read makes you careful, responsible, and considerate.

— [Oliver Reichenstein](#)

The way you communicate a thing creates the thing. The thing does not exist apart from its own communication.

— [Matt LeMay](#)

Introduction

Communication is integral, not additive, to architecture — because it clarifies thinking, enables collaboration and supports scale.

This document encourages UXA practitioners to communicate by providing guidelines for efficient, consistent and memorable material. Practitioners are expected to be familiar with UX concepts, that are only explained here when they have a specialized meaning in architecture. This document is thus a reference handbook: it inventories UXA conventions, but doesn't explain nor justify them.

This document is relevant for reference material, like best practices, and pedagogical material, like trainings. It's not relevant for pitching, marketing nor UI copywriting.

Conventions

Henceforth, every statement that's not an explicit **must**, **must not** or **could** is assumed to be a **should**.

Some terms used throughout this document have a particular meaning in the UXA context:

Documents vs Presentations

Documents are text-heavy, usually long-form material for individual reading or reference. They are exported from [Marked](#).

Presentations are figure-heavy, usually short-form material for group training or evangelization. They are presented from [Deckset](#).

Figure

Any diagram, chart, gif, illustration, photograph or screenshot.

Inline figures vs Full-screen figures

Inline figures are presented alongside text, and are usually laid-out complementary to it. Full-screen figures take up the entirety of the page or slide.

Keyword

Reference to a formally defined entity, rather than a generic notion.

Practitioner

The UXA agent this guide is addressed to.

Section

A distinct part of a document. Its length and presentation differs depending on the complexity and format of the document. It's usually defined by headings or pages or slides break.

1 Content

What to communicate, in what order, to what level of detail.

1.1 Providing an Overview

Expose an overview before the details.

An overview is easy to internalize for the audience and provides a mental scaffold upon which further details can be gradually added. It’s difficult to learn without this initial understanding.

Moreover, an overview may be the only way to get acquainted with the material, as some audiences may not have the time, interest or prerequisites to go through more elaborate content.

Good overviews are:

Property	Description
Short	Better be 80% right in a few words, than 99% right in a few pages
Broad	Describing all of the subsequent document, without being so generic as to be irrelevant
Plain	Using everyday language
Focused on intentions	Exposing the intention or purpose is shorter than explaining behaviour or describing properties

It’s likewise recommended to expose guidelines, results, tips etc. upfront, for immediate actionability. Supporting data, rationales, technical details etc. can be printed afterwards or progressively disclosed.

1.2 Capturing Context

Capture context about the work, within the work.

Context-setting is critical to the audience, as it’s likely coming from a different background, level of expertise, organization or task than the practitioner. Such context has to be presented outwards, e.g. in an introduction section or slide.

Context-setting is valuable to the practitioner too. Outward context intended for the audience will eventually be useful when coming back to an old project.

Some further context, exclusive to the practitioner, should also be captured: that of conventions and intentions local to the work. Such context has to be presented inwards, e.g. in presenter’s notes or edit-mode only comments at the beginning of a file.

The last benefit of capturing context is that trying to characterize the work often ends up focusing/curating it.

Frequently captured context elements:

- Goals, scope, timeframe
- Target audience, prerequisites
- Assumptions, hypothesis
- Environment, setup, access rights, tech specs
- Terms of art
- Degree of maturity or stability, is the content a recommendation or an obligation

Note that the negatives are as important as the positives, and should be captured too. E.g: “x is in scope but y is not” or “we’re assuming that a is desired but b is not”.

1.3 Shaping Content

Strive to communicate through media other than text.

While text is often the default choice, it isn't necessarily the best. Depending on the situation, comparison tables, data tables, decision trees, flowcharts, diagrams, illustrations, etc. can be more efficient to output and learn.

When text is unavoidable, it can often be reworked into more efficient shapes such as lists, key-value pairs, presentations, etc.

1.4 Delineating Ideas

Each idea should be one section and one only.

First, express the idea in a few words.

In most cases, the direct expression of the idea is self-sufficient: it's easier to write than a full-blown rationale, and can be acted upon immediately.

Afterwards, consider adding supporting information: rationale/justification, details, best practices, alternatives or further reading (e.g. relationship to other concepts, perspectives, controversies). All considerations are optional, but if present must remain in this order.

Don't hesitate to emphasize the core idea from its supporting information through layout, type treatment, progressive disclosure etc.

Align shapes using their barycenter.

The centering that is most visually pleasing relies on the barycenter of a given shape, i.e. its center of gravity. Unless a shape is purely oval or rectangular, its barycenter is different from the center of its bounding box.

Barycenters can be obtained through plugins or visual corrections. Avoid apps default centering, as it relies on bounding boxes.

- Notion
- Rationale
- Best Practices

Organizing Ideas. Note the boldface on the idea expression.

Alineas (line breaks) can be used within a paragraph to add structure.

The preferred length of paragraphs is three or four sentences, but five or six are acceptable. The preferred average sentence is 17 words or less, but up to 20 is acceptable.

1.5 Sourcing & Attribution

1.5.1 Sourcing

Make sure content, in particular fonts or images from Internet, are explicitly allowed to be used.

This can be achieved through various means, like an open-source license or the purchase of a commercial license.

1.5.2 Attribution

Most documents or presentations are built upon on other people's ideas, data or work. It's important to only ever use authorized material, and credit it properly.

Provide attribution for other people's material.

Inline attribution, located directly where the material is, is preferred. It works well for most quotes, tables or figures. Reference attribution, separate from the material and gathered at the end of the document, is possible when inline attribution isn't appropriate for aesthetic or technical reasons. It's mostly for full-slide images.

If the author asks for a specific an attribution format, use it. If not, use the following:

- Inline: <work title>, <author name>, <work year>
- Reference: <page/slide number>: <work title>, <author name>, <work year>

Do not use footnotes for attribution.

2. Writing Style

2.1 Actionability

Apply a [parallel structure](#) whenever possible.

Apply a [must/could/should](#) or a do/don't structure whenever possible.

2.2 Vocabulary

Be very mindful of vocabulary.

Prefer generic terms over terms of art. Terms of art (words or phrases that have a precise, specialized meaning within a particular field or profession) are an essential communication tool, but should only be used to capture crucial meaning that would otherwise be lost. The only reason to use a technical term rather than a more common word is that it precisely expresses something that would otherwise be ambiguous or unclear.

Define technical terms, uncommon words and common words that are used in an unusual or special way. Define them immediately following their first occurrence in the text.

Avoid abbreviations.

When several (about 10) new terms or abbreviations are used, provide a glossary or list of acronyms. Include it in the document, or contribute and link to the **Vocabulary** (to be published).

Avoid synonyms, especially in domain-specific matters, as well as fuzzy terms and everything-buckets. Aim to reuse the same, simple words as much as possible.

Replace or clarify terms that could be interpreted in different ways. E.g. it is not clear if an “alert” is about an error message, a business rule, a push notification or an exception indicator.

Avoid fuzzy spelling, e.g. “dropdown” vs “drop-down” vs “drop down”.

When referring to existing content, such as a UI or a diagram, spell commands, labels or messaging exactly as they appear in situ.

Everything-buckets are ill-defined terms that don't really describe anything, such as “framework”. Their looseness often provide the appearance of agreement, to the detriment of actionability. Spot them and replace them with clearer explanations.

2.3 Spelling

Use American spelling. When in doubt, check the [Merriam-Webster dictionary](#).

2.4 Tone & Voice

For descriptions, use the present tense and the active form (“Selecting a value triggers validation”). For instructions, use the second person imperative (“Remove test set”).

Prefer positive wording, and statements directed to what’s true rather than what’s false; it’s quicker to check. Use negative wording for prohibition or to correct misconceptions.

In any case be assertive, impersonal and use the [singular they](#) form.

2.5. Formatting

2.5.1 Capitalization, Style & Weight

- Headings must be title case,
- Everything else, including figure captions, must be sentence case,
- Keywords must be bolded. Boldface could also be used for emphasis.
- Foreign words must be italicized, and immediately followed by their translation in parentheses.

2.5.2 Punctuation

- Avoid parentheses. Use commas or rephrase.
- Print periods in abbreviations (e.g., etc., i.e.)
- Punctuate list items with a period if it’s a complete sentence, or sentences, otherwise with commas. The last item is punctuated with a period.
- Use apostrophes to form possessives:
 - Singular nouns: add ‘s, even if they end in s (merchant’s, bus’s)
 - Plural nouns that don’t end in s: add ‘s (women’s, men’s)
 - Plural nouns that end in s: add an apostrophe (boxes’, customers’)

2.5.3 Typographic Signs

Be mindful about typographic signs. In particular:

- Apostrophes and quote marks: curly instead of straight. Run the [smart-quotes-plus](#) package to sanitize deliverables.
- Fractions: real fractions like $\frac{1}{4}$ instead of fake ones like 1/4. Real fractions are supported by Inter and iA Writer Quattro.
- Multiplication signs: \times instead of the letter x.

Refer to [Glyphy](#) to grab rarer signs like $\frac{1}{3}$, \hookrightarrow or \blacktriangle .

2.5.4 Number and Dates

These guidelines are for American English, which is the language we use as a base before translating to other languages. However, dates, numbers, and measurements may be formatted differently in other languages.

Numbers representing quantities of 10 or more must be expressed in numerals ; those representing quantities less than 10 must be expressed in words. If a number is the first word in a sentence, it must be expressed in words.

Use commas for numbers with four or more digits. Whenever possible, don't truncate numbers.

Use an en dash without a space on either side for number ranges (88–110).

In all cases, include a space between the number and the unit.

When listing out multiple measurements in a row, put the unit of measurement at the end instead of after each number (and include a space).

When possible, use the month's full name, for example, October. If there are space constraints, use 3-letter abbreviations, for example, Oct.

2.5.5 Misc

Use [semantic line breaks](#), a.k.a. [ventilated prose](#), whenever possible.

Semantic line breaks are currently well supported in Marked but not in Deckset that parses them like alineas, altering the rendering of the presentation.

3 Illustrating Style

The greatest value of a picture is when it forces us to notice what we never expected to see.

— John Tukey, Exploratory Data Analysis, 1977

3.1 Style

Use a consistent pictorial style for all comparable figures in a document, for example, all line drawings, or all photographs. Follow the style of the [moodboard](#).

Photographs or screenshots can be used as examples or explanations, but should not be used for editorial purposes. Prefer illustrations.

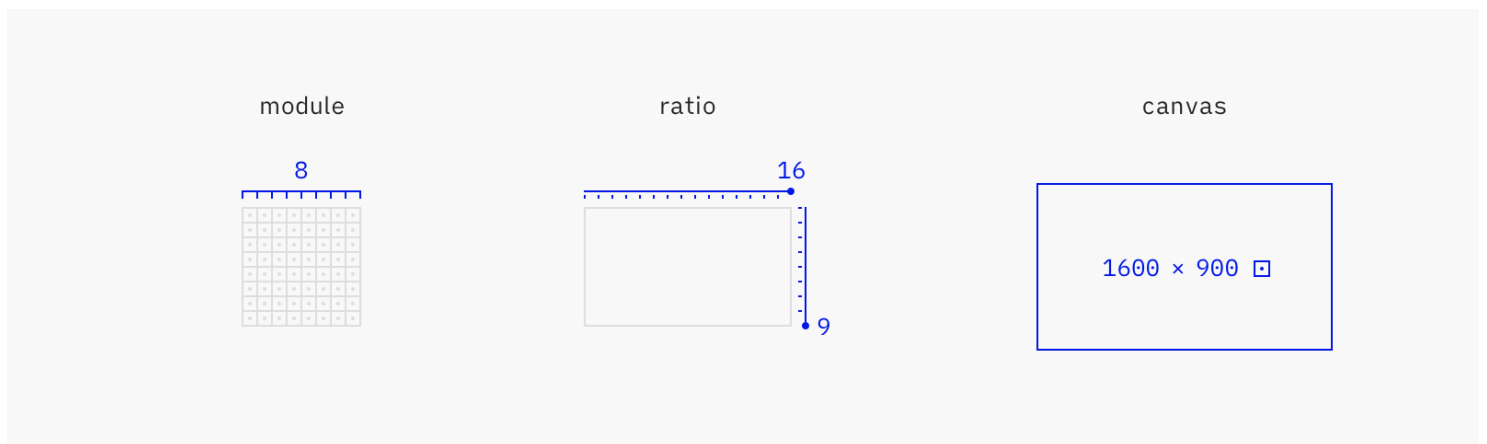
3.2 Grid

This guidance is most relevant for heavily templated tools like Deckset or Marked, that offer little control over the size, position or treatment of images. Manually laid out documents may go past the conventions covered here.

Units can be expressed as pixels (px), points (pt) or dips (dp) depending on the OS. They are hereafter noted as pixels for clarity.

3.2.1 Parameters

The UXA grid is set to an 8 px module.

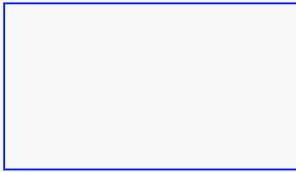


Grid Parameters

3.2.2 Form Factors/Layout

While the canonical 1600 × 900 px artboard size is well-suited to full-screen rendering, it can be unwieldy to use alongside text. Derived artboard sizes are available:

1/1 artboard
Presentation full-screen



1/2 artboard
Presentation inline



1/4 artboard
Document inline

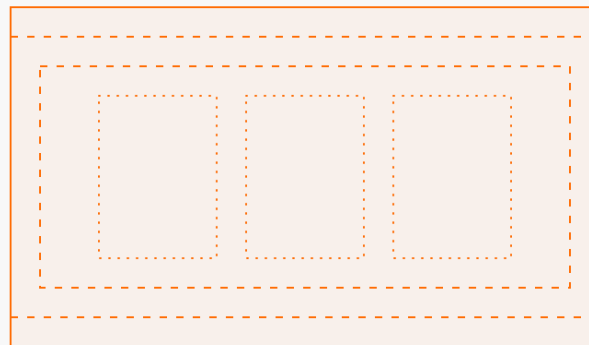


Artboards Form Factors

Type	Size (px)	Usage
1 artboard	1600 × 900	Full-screen in presentation (or stand-alone)
1/2 artboard	800 × 900	Inline in presentation (e.g. next to bullet points)
1/4 artboard	800 × 450	Inline in document (e.g. between two paragraphs)

Artboards contain various guides helping to lay out content quickly and consistently:

1. Artboard: export frame of the figure
2. Measurement origin: virtual border from which all content should be measured and aligned. Set so that content can be laid out on a 8 px grid within the larger 1600 × 900 px artboard, that doesn't support it by default.
3. Visual clearance: 40 px for docs, 40/80 px for slides (against canvas edge, not safe area edge. Exceptionally 10px, eg screenshot (and most dont qualify to begin with). full bleed only for impact, on bg stuff.
4. Content keylines: optional preferred positions for content



1. Artboard border
2. Measurement origin
3. Visual clearance
4. Content keylines

Layout Templates

3.2.3 Preferred Sizes

Specific values along the 8 px grid are preferred when working on editorial layouts.

While an 8 px module is appropriate for fine work like UI design, it's too granular for illustrations or pages layout, where elements are sized and positioned at a much bigger scale. Thus specific, bigger values are picked out of all the possible multiples of 8.

The preferred values are multiples of 8 (the UXA grid module) and 10 (another frequent grid module), ensuring scale and compatibility. Multiples of 4 (half UXA grid module) and 10 are also possible, as a second choice. Straight multiples of 8 are the last resort.

Preferred Sizes

Priority	Rythm (px)	Sample values (px)
1	8 × 10	80, 160, 240, 420, 400, 480, 560, 640, 720, 800, etc.
2	4 × 10	40, 80, 120, 160, 200, 240, 280, 320, 360, 400, etc.
3	8 × 1	8, 16, 24, 32, 40, 48, 56, 64, 72, 80, etc.

Note that these preferred values are just a starting point, merely minimizing accidental divergences. Better layouts would require further refinement, like [harmonic scales](#) or [Renard series](#).

3.4 Export

Export to SVG by default.

SVG files are scalable, interoperable, programmatically manipulable and lightweight. Some specific use cases may require other formats:

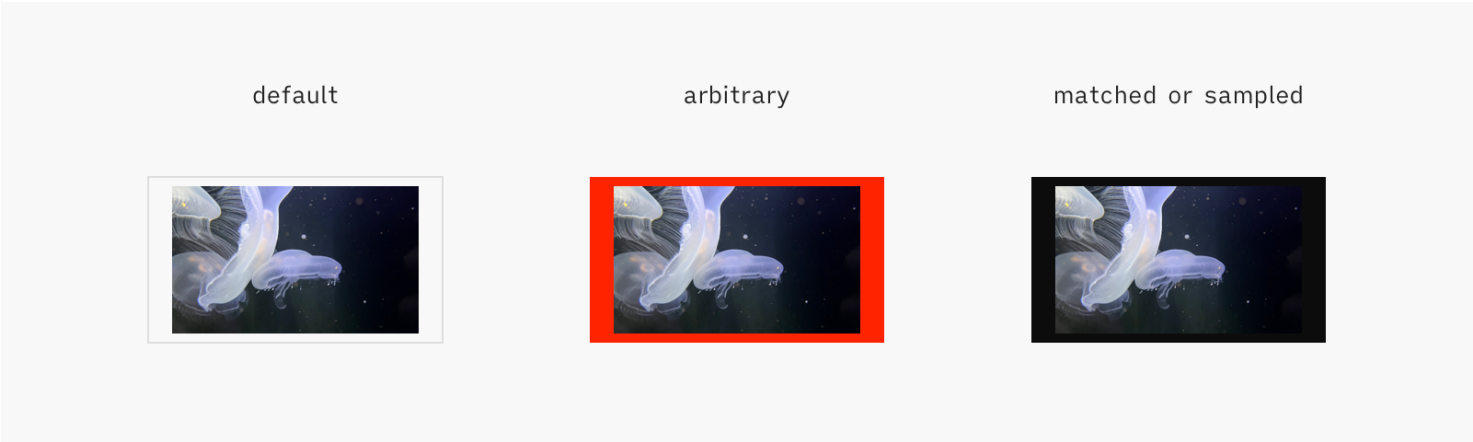
Priority	Format	Scaling	Usage
1	SVG	1x	Vector figures without text (e.g. illustrations)
2	PDF	1x	Vector figures with text (e.g. diagrams)
3	PNG	2x	Screenshots, UI mockups
4	JPG	2x	Photos, scanned documents

Set an illustration background color, `Gris 0106 Béton Clair` by default.

Illustration assets can be rendered in a variety of contexts such as a high-contrast Markdown client, a dark-mode browser or a hand-off, inspection or version control tool. Their background color is unknown, and could make the illustration foreground illegible.

Moreover, some photos may not have a 16:9 aspect ratio meaning the document background will show through. Depending on the photo, the `Gris 0106 Béton Clair` background may not work well. In this case, it's possible to select the closest-matching UXA color (e.g. `Noir 1571 Jais`), or to sample an appropriate color from the photo.

Do not pick an arbitrary background color for editorial purposes, like calling for attention or impact.



Background Color

4 Tools

Setting up [Deckset](#) and [Marked](#), the preferred tools for publishing UXA material.

4.1 Marked

One-time Marked configuration:

- Enable `Export / Prevent orphaned headlines`
- Enable `Export / Add page breaks before: Footnotes`

Recurring document preparation:

- Ensure there's a `<!--BREAK-->` tag immediately after the first H1, to yield a clean cover page
- Set the theme to [UXASF1](#)
- Select `Export As / Save PDF (Paginated)`

4.2 Deckset

Present or export Deckset files with the [UXASF1](#) theme.

A content boilerplate file [is available](#).

Do not hesitate to format Deckset presenter's notes; they will render so on Deckset and on Github.

5 Sources

- Règles de rédaction et de présentation des ouvrages scientifiques et techniques, Michel Foulon, 2003
- [Grammar and mechanics — Shopify Polaris](#), Shopify, 2022
- [Human Factors Design Standard \(HFDS\)](#), FAA, 2003
- IND6406 Ergonomie Cognitive — Les procédures de travail, Jean-Marc Robert, 2009
- [Swift API Design Guidelines](#), Apple, 2020