



# Style Guide

*Style guides establish general standards for writing, editing, and designing documentation. This document serves to promote consistency across all company materials and functions as a living resource, updated as needed to align with the team's evolving requirements.*

## I. Introduction

The Amida brand extends far beyond a logo or a website. It is a complex system driven by the emotions of the audiences who connect their personal experiences to Amida.

Amida believes that strong writing is essential to our company's continued success. Employees should use the following standards for all documentation unless a client specifies otherwise.

Any piece of writing should reflect Amida's three core values: Impact, Excellence, and Joy.

Templates for multiple types of documents are located within Amida's shared Google Drive:

- [Excel](#)
- [PowerPoint](#)
- [Word](#)

## II. Tone

The tone of Amida collateral can vary by medium, audience, and purpose. No matter what form it takes, our tone should always reinforce the Amida voice and our role as a trusted partner.

Amida's voice is always:

- Technical but not condescending
- Intelligent but not assuming
- Compelling but not hyperbolic

Amida's voice varies based on the audience but is usually:

- Conversational but not informal
- Inquisitive but not indecisive
- Passionate but not tangential

### A. Active Voice

The active voice is usually more direct and vigorous than the passive (*The Elements of Style* by Strunk & White). The passive voice is generally constructed with some variant of the verb "to be," although the use of the gerund ("-ing") is also typical of this voice.

*Passive: Amida was founded in 2013.*

*Active: Matt and Peter co-founded Amida in 2013.*

*Mushy: We are looking for a few good engineers who have expertise in...*

*Clear: We hire engineers with expertise in...*

In some cases, the audience may respond better to a passive voice, as in technical documentation. Strive to write in the active whenever possible.

### B. Positive Language

In writing, it is generally preferable to phrase statements in the positive rather than the negative to create clarity, promote constructive language, and maintain an upbeat tone. By framing statements as what *is* rather than what *isn't*, communication becomes more direct and

easier to understand. Positive phrasing reduces ambiguity and fosters a forward-thinking, solution-oriented mindset.

*Negative: This procedure is not difficult to follow.*

*Positive: This procedure is easy to follow.*

## III. Usage

### A. Specificity

There are two ways in which specificity is important – first, in maintaining an overall narrow focus within each piece of writing, and second, in using more specific terms whenever possible.

Basic guidelines for specificity:

- Every piece of writing should answer the four W's + 1 H – Who, When, What, Why, and How
- Maintain a tight focus in every piece of writing
- Be specific in naming what you're talking about; if you use the word "people," stop and ask yourself *who* you are really talking about, and then use *that* word instead (maybe it is end users, maybe it is staff, maybe it is clients)
- Tangents can be great in a conversation, but they are not great in writing; if you digress, go back and delete it, or consider making the digression the writing and delete everything that came before it
- Avoid using words like "currently," "at this time," or similar phrases that imply a temporal context, as they can become ambiguous over time; instead, specify a clear time frame or provide concrete details to ensure the context remains clear to future readers
  - *Example: "The system is undergoing maintenance as of January 2025," instead of "The system is currently undergoing maintenance."*

### B. Inclusivity

Writing inclusively is important and can be difficult. Many of us were taught to accept certain basic conventions, with the primary example being the use of "he" as the (exclusive) pronoun of choice. Defaulting to those norms, however, may distance you from a reader who does not identify as "he."

Basic rules for inclusive writing:

- "They" is an acceptable gender-neutral, singular pronoun
  - If you are uncomfortable using "they" or a variant (them, themselves) as a singular pronoun, rephrase your sentence
  - "He or she" is an acceptable variation, but becomes unwieldy if not used sparingly
  - Alternating between "he" and "she" may be acceptable for longer narratives, depending on the circumstances
- Don't reference a person's age, race, ethnicity, disability, etc. unless it is relevant
  - If you think it is relevant, question yourself

- If you must reference a disability, be sure to center the person and not the condition
  - Example: “She has a disability,” not “He is disabled.”
- Avoid gendered terms, for example:
  - “Server” instead of “waitress”
  - “People” instead of “guys”

## IV. Grammar

### A. Acronyms

Before using an acronym, first write out the full phrase, with the acronym in parentheses immediately afterward.

- Example: “Amida proposes the Data Reconciliation Engine (DRE) to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The DRE will strongly benefit VA.”
- Note that for the **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)**, when abbreviated, we do not use a “the” before “VA” – for example, “Amida created a status report for VA” (view VA’s own style guide [here](#))

### B. Bullets

Follow these guidelines when you use bullets:

- Do not use periods at the ends of bullet points
- If a single bullet point contains multiple sentences, separate them with semicolons or split them into additional bullets or sub-bullets
- Use parallel construction for all items in a bulleted list
- Capitalize the first letter of the first word of bulleted text (unless the first word is case-sensitive)
- If the bulleted items represent a sequence or ranking, used a numbered list instead

### C. Headings

Amida uses Lato font for our website body copy and all documents. Please adhere to the following guidelines for documents:

	Font	Style	Color	Recommended Size	Paragraph Spacing (Before/After)
<b>Heading 1</b>	Lato	Bold	RGB 38-111-160	20	0/12
Heading 2	Lato	Regular	RGB 38-111-160	16	12/2
Heading 3	Lato	Bold	RGB 0-8-14	11	0/2
Heading 4	Lato	Italicized	RGB 0-8-14	11	0/2
Normal (Body Text)	Lato	Regular	RGB 0-8-14	11	0/6
Captions/Callouts	Lato	Italicized	RGB 0-8-14	10	0/6

Footers	Lato	Regular	RGB 0-8-14	9	0/0
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Amida uses Word's default 1.08 line spacing. Do not add extra spaces between paragraphs. When you use Amida templates, the document will automatically insert spaces between lines.

#### D. Hyphens

Use en dashes ("–") alone or in pairs; *do not use* em dashes ("—") or double hyphens ("--").

- *Example: "Our first step was to establish the purpose and objective – or 'why' – of the data management plan that we introduced."*

#### E. Numerals

For numbers, spell out anything below 100 in non-technical writing. Exceptions to this rule may apply for proposal-writing and under other special circumstances.

- *Example: "In the last 365 days, we responded to fifty opportunities."*

Additional rules for numerals:

- Avoid starting a sentence with a number; if you do, always spell it out
- Always use a comma for numbers of four digits or more ("1,000"), except in a date
- Use numerals for any number that precedes percent, million, or billion ("25 percent," "2 million"), unless it begins a sentence

#### F. Periods

Only include one space after a period (or other sentence-ending punctuation).

#### G. Quotation Marks

Generally, commas and periods go inside quotation marks, while semicolons and colons go outside of them. Question marks, dashes, and exclamation points go inside quotation marks only if they are part of the quoted material.

#### H. Titles

When writing titles for anything (proposals, decks, websites), we use Title Case. Capitalize the first word, the last word, and all the main words in between – nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives – no matter how long or short they are. Any word longer than three letters – no matter what part of speech or location in the title – is capitalized. For example, "between" gets capitalized despite being a preposition; "of" does not get capitalized.

- When referring to the title of a document, italicize it and do not use quotation marks; for example: "Please reference the *Amida Causal Analysis Framework* document for additional details."

## V. Word List

Amida created a Word List for commonly confused or misspelled words. If you have any additions for this list, please let the Technical Editor know.

- **built-in** not built in
- **cyberattacks** not cyber-attacks

- **cybersecurity** not cyber security or cyber-security
- **code sets** not codesets or code-sets
- **end user** when used as a noun; **end-user** when used as an adjective
- **healthcare** not health care
- **open source** when used as a noun; **open-source** when used as an adjective
- **public sector** not public-sector
- **set up** = verb, **set-up** = noun (You set up the set-up.)
- **software** is never plural
- **user-friendly** not user friendly
- **web-based** not web based
- **e.g.** = “exempli gratia” or “for example” – always followed by a comma (e.g., like this)
- **i.e.** = “id est” or “that is” – use this to define, clarify, or restate something in a different way; should always be followed by a comma
- **Machine Learning / Artificial Intelligence / Natural Language Processing** not machine learning / artificial intelligence / natural language processing

## VI. Mechanics

Our use of correct and consistent grammar ensures that the audience gains a clear understanding of Amida’s vision and message. Amida relies on the [AP Style Book](#) to guide grammar decisions.

### Essential Grammar and Style Rules

Please follow the guidelines below regarding common grammar questions and errors.

- In a list of three or more, always include the serial (Oxford) comma before the conjunction
  - Example: “Peter asked for updates on Indaba, Orange Rx, and DRE.”
- No “hanging words” in slide decks (i.e., no single word that hangs alone on its own line)
- Avoid repeated use of a word within a sentence, across a pair of sentences, or in a paragraph
- Do not use “and/or” in formal writing
- Do not use contractions in formal writing
- Avoid the use of “&” and “etc.” in formal writing
- Avoid the use of second-person pronouns (“you” and “yours”) in formal writing
- Do not use unnecessary gerunds
  - Example: “Do not use” is better than “Avoid using”

## VII. File Naming Conventions

Amida relies on standardized folder and document naming conventions to ensure consistent organization, labeling, and storage of documents across Google Drive and SharePoint. When we follow these conventions, we improve document identification, searchability, and archiving. To ensure consistency and ease of access, all documents – whether for internal or external use – must adhere to Amida’s standardized naming conventions, as detailed in the [Documents and Folder Naming Convention Policy](#).