# General Style Guide

Structure, Minimalism, Precision, Simplicity, Usability

## Introduction

This general style guide aims to provide formatting and writing guidance for documentation and other technical writing purposes.  The main objective of this guide is to provide consistency across an organization.

Most of this guide applies to any organization.  Sections indicated by brackets [ ] must be updated to include specific organizational formatting and styling information.

## Table of Content

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# True statements

Documentation may be legally binding for your company.  Information listed in documentation must be true and updated regularly for accuracy

# Structure

Organize text in logical chunks.  Text should be easy to skim with plenty of white space.

## Headings

Use clear heading ranks.

# [Heading 1 - Arial 20, black

## Heading 2 - Arial 16, black

### Heading 3 - Arial 14, #434343, dark gray 4 (Docs)

#### Heading 4 - Arial 12, #666666, dark gray 3 (Docs)]

## Paragraphs

Paragraphs should be short with 1 main idea for each.  [They should be no more than about 2 inches vertically in a standard 12pt font.]

## Sections

Break into sections when applicable.  [Documents with more than 4 sections must have a table of contents with anchor links if available.]

## Tables

Use sparingly since tables are not mobile-friendly.

## Bulleted lists

Use bulleted lists when the order of the list does not matter, such as a features list.

- Video
- Audio
- Images

## Numbered lists

Use numbered list when the order of the list does matter, such as sequential steps.

1. Click subscribe
2. Enter your email address
3. Click save

# Be minimal

When there are multiple correct ways of doing something, use the one which uses the least space.

## Visuals

Add visuals where possible including screenshots, diagrams, schemes, etc. [Add style for visuals such as color scheme]

Visuals must always include alt text for accessibility.  Alt text should be descriptive and fit the context of the visual.

✔ Screenshot of file menu with new, save, and print options

✘ Screenshot

Reference this article from Harvard University on Digital Accessibility for more information about crafting alt text. https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/describe-content-images

## Write concisely

If you can omit words or phrases without changing the meaning, do so.

✔ To receive the newsletter, enter your name and e-mail address.

✘ If you want to receive the newsletter to keep you informed, enter your name and current e-mail address. If you are not interested in receiving it, do not enter your name and e-mail address.

## Short, simple sentences

Do not put too much information into a single sentence.  Split longer sentences or use bullets and tables where appropriate.  Use simple language and grammar.

✔ Change your password to something only you know. To change your password, follow the instructions on the login screen.

✘ It is vital for security reasons to choose a password that only you know; if you do not know how to change your password, follow the steps in the instruction on the login screen.

## Cross refer information

Information copied from other locations may be transferred incorrectly and be difficult to keep up to date.  Refer and link to information instead of copying whenever possible.

✔ Refer to Employee Handbook section 2.3 (with link)

✘ Employee Handbook section 2.3 says…..

## Redundancies

Check text for repetition at different levels

# Grammar and sentence structure

## Positive language

Keep your writing in a positive tone.

✔ The software is up to date

✘ No updates are available

## Active voice

Always write who does what.  Make it clear if the user or system is performing the action.

✔ The system will automatically assign accounts to users.

✘ Users are assigned accounts.

## Simple present tense

✔ The system will automatically assign accounts to users.

✘ The system automatically assigns accounts to users.

## "What" before "how"

Ensure users understand the consequences before preforming an action.

✔ To delete all captions, click the trash can icon.

✘ The system automatically assigns accounts to users.

## Chronological sequence

Describe actions in sequence.

✔ Enter your email and click submit.

✘ Click submit after you enter your email address..

# Terminology and word choice

## Tone

[Our organization's tone is informal and friendly.]  This tone applies to all documentation and writing.

## Terminology

Use correct and consistant terminology. [Refer to the organizational glossary (with link).  The glossary should include terms specific to your product but also general items that may have different naming conventions such as icons.  Example: three dots menu vs. three dots vertical menu vs. kebab menu]

## Abbreviations

Avoid abbreviations where possible.  When abbreviations are necessary, spell out the first occurrence and induce the abbreviation in parenthesis directly after it.

[Refer to the organizational glossary (with link) for standard abbreviations].

# Can vs may

Can - something is possible for the user or system
May - a possible state or outcome


# Must, must not, should, should not, and may

Must = absolute requirement
Must not = absolute prohibition
Should = recommended
Should not = not recommended
May = optional


# Spell check and dictionary

You must spell check all documentation.  [The Google Workspace spell check is our required spell checking application.  If you believe a term is missing from the spell check dictionary, please contact an administrator to add it.]


# Jargon, slang, idioms, and colloquialisms

Use words and phrases understood globally.  [Identify any slag or idioms that are used as part of an organizational identify]

✔ Running 3 or more applications simultaneously may cause the system to delay processing.

✘ Running 3 or more applications simultaneously may cause the system to bog down.


# Stereotypes and assumptions

Use phrases and examples that are free from stereotypes and assumptions relating to gedner, age, culture, race, ability, or similar.

✔ The system automatically creates a new account for the user.  He then receives the new account password by email.

✘ RunThe system automatically creates a new account for the user.  The user then receives the new account password by email.