

AI-Ready Documentation: Formatting Guidelines for Ingestion

As internal Cisco teams adopt the Unified AI Assistant platform, one recurring blocker is that product documentation — though customer-facing — isn't always formatted in a way that AI systems can effectively ingest.

To maximize the Assistant's accuracy and usefulness, documentation must follow a structure that prioritizes **clarity, completeness, and machine-readability**.

Best Practices for AI-Ready Documentation

Content Type	AI-Friendly Approach	Avoid This
Headings	Use structured headings (H1 , H2 , H3) to segment content by topic	Skipping headings, inconsistent formatting
Paragraphs	Write standalone, complete thoughts that don't depend on previous sections	"As described above" or "see previous step" references
Terminology	Define terms clearly. Use consistent, unambiguous labels for features and UI elements	Jargon, acronyms without explanation
Steps & Procedures	Use numbered lists for steps. Bold UI elements (e.g., Settings , Submit)	Dense blocks of instructions, steps hidden inside paragraphs
Links (URLs)	Use full descriptive links (e.g., "See Firewall Policy Guide")	"Click here", links without context, links in image maps

Tables	Use simple tables with column headers. Describe what's in the table if needed	Complex merged cells, large tables with no context
Images	Use alt text for all diagrams or screenshots (e.g., "Topology showing 3 firewall zones"). Caption clearly if used in guides	Relying on images to explain key steps; image-only tutorials
Cross-References	If needed, restate the content briefly instead of linking only (e.g., "as explained in Section 2: Policy Types...")	Excessive internal cross-links without context

Handling Specific Elements

Images

- Add **alt text** to all product screenshots and architectural diagrams.
- Include a caption if the image supports a step.
- If a screenshot demonstrates UI navigation, **describe the sequence** in the text too.
- **Avoid** instructions like "click the button shown below" without naming the button or location.

URLs / Links

- Use **full descriptive anchor text**:

See the [Duo MFA Configuration Guide]

(https://example.com/docs/duo-config)
- **Avoid** vague or incomplete links:

Click here

See this page (link)

Tables

- Keep tables **clean, consistent, and labeled**.

- Prefer plain Markdown or HTML tables (avoid images of tables).
- Describe the **purpose** of the table in a lead sentence if it isn't self-explanatory.

Cross-References

- Restate important content if it's linked elsewhere (especially if answering a “how do I...” type question).
- If you must refer to another section, label it clearly (e.g., "See Section 4: Creating Policies").
- **Avoid** circular or blind references.

Quick Checklist for Ingestible Docs

Checkpoint	Description
Clear H1-H3 structure	Docs are logically organized by topic
Short, standalone sections	Each paragraph is understandable on its own
No vague references	Avoids “see above”, “click here”
Explicit links & tables	Descriptive links, well-structured tables
Screenshots described in text	Image usage supplemented with clear instructions
No content hidden in images	Key data is not embedded in visuals only

Why This Matters

Well-structured documentation allows the AI Assistant to:

- **Parse knowledge** into atomic Q&A-style insights
- **Provide accurate answers** even out of context
- **Avoid hallucinations** by relying on verified source material
- **Index policies, steps, and settings** as discrete concepts

How We Can Help

The AI team can assist you with:

- Reviewing your existing customer-facing docs and identifying ingestion gaps

- Providing templates for AI-ready docs in **Markdown, Sharepoint, Confluence**, or **Google Docs**
- Offering documentation workshops and 1:1 content support during onboarding

Deliverables for Your Team

Requirement	Description
Public-facing URLs	Share the live docs your customers use today
“Golden Questions + Answers”	See Golden Question Template
Reviewed Content for Ingestion	Format following the AI-ready checklist

Next Steps

If you’re unsure whether your documentation is AI-ready, reach out to the AI Content Team. We’ll review your materials and help optimize them for ingestion — so your AI Assistant can deliver useful, accurate, and confident answers from day one.