

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

<b>Tables</b>	Use simple tables with column headers. Describe what's in the table if needed	Complex merged cells, large tables with no context
<b>Images</b>	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
<b>Cross-References</b>	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 <a href="#">Golden Question Template</a>
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.