



EDITORIAL STYLE GUIDE

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Introduction

Following a well-defined editorial style gives your writing a professional sheen and brings it in line with our established brand platform. It also ensures that all writers address questions of style in a consistent manner. Our editorial style is based on The Associated Press Stylebook, with exceptions and additions as noted. When this style guide conflicts with AP style, follow this guide. To resolve questions of spelling, we rely on Dictionary.com.

Unlike a traditional style guide, our guide goes beyond basic grammar and style points. And we do occasionally break a few grammar rules for clarity, practicality, or preference. We've divided the guide by topic based on the type of content we publish, so you can reference it as needed.

Writing Goals + Principles

With every piece of content we publish, we aim to:

- **Educate.** Tell readers what they need to know, not just what we want to say. Give them the information they need, along with opportunities to learn more.
- **Respect.** Treat readers with the respect they deserve. Be considerate and inclusive. Don't just talk at your audience; communicate with them.
- **Guide.** Think of yourself as a guide and mentor. You are not the hero in the story; you are the friendly and helpful guide. The reader is the hero.

In order to achieve those goals, we make sure our content is:

- **Smart.** Understand the topic you're writing about. Do the research, relying on primary sources wherever possible. Define your terms, but write for an educated audience.
- **Useful.** Before you start writing, ask yourself: What purpose does this serve? Who is going to read it? What do they need to know? How will this piece add value?
- **Friendly.** Write like a human. Channel your favorite college professor and don't be afraid to break a few rules if it makes your writing more relatable.

Writing About People

We write from a person-first perspective and use a voice and tone that is compassionate, inclusive, and respectful. In this section we'll lay out some guidelines for writing about people.

Age

Don't reference a person's age unless it's relevant to what you're writing. If it is relevant, include the person's specific age, offset by commas. Avoid referring to people using age-related descriptors such as "young," "old," or "elderly."

Disabilities + Medical or Mental Conditions

- Avoid disability-related or mental-health-related idioms like "lame," "falling on deaf ears," "crazy," or "insane."
- Never assume that someone has a disability or a medical, mental, or cognitive condition.
- Don't refer to a person's disability, medical condition, mental condition, or cognitive condition unless it's relevant to what you're writing.
 - When writing about a hypothetical person, use person-first language ("they have a disability").
 - When writing about a real individual, ask whether they prefer person-first language or identity-first language ("they are disabled").
- Do not refer to a person with disabilities as "handicapped." Do not use the words "suffer" or "victim" to describe a person with a disability.
- Don't describe a person as "mentally ill."

Gender + Sexuality

- Don't call groups of people "guys." Don't call women "girls."
- Avoid gendered terms in favor of neutral alternatives, like "server" instead of "waitress" and "businessperson" instead of "businessman."
- Use "they" as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun.
- Use the following words as modifiers, but never as nouns:
 - lesbian
 - gay
 - bisexual
 - transgender (never "transgendered")
 - trans

- queer
- LGBT
- Don't use these words in reference to LGBT people or communities:
 - homosexual
 - lifestyle
 - preference
- Don't use "same-sex" marriage, unless the distinction is relevant to what you're writing. (Avoid "gay marriage.") Otherwise, it's just "marriage."
- When writing about a person, use their communicated pronouns. When in doubt, just ask or use their name.
- When writing about a named hypothetical person, choose a pronoun.
- When writing about a hypothetical person who is not named, use "they."

Groups

- Never refer to groups of people, such as your audience, prospective clients, clients, partners, or contacts, as "it." Always refer to groups of people as "they."
- When referring to a group of people, use the relative pronoun "who."
- When referring to a group of corporations, states, or similar entities, use the relative pronoun "that."

Hearing + Vision

- Use "deaf" as an adjective to describe a person with significant hearing loss. You can also use "partially deaf" or "hard of hearing."
- Use the adjective "blind" to describe a person who is unable to see. Use "low vision" to describe a person with limited vision.

Ethnicity, Race, Heritage + Nationality

- Don't use hyphens when referring to someone with dual heritage or nationality. For example, use "Asian American" instead of "Asian-American."
- When writing about race, capitalize "Black." Do not capitalize "white."

- When writing about a specific individual, ask how they prefer to describe themselves and honor their wishes.

Why do we capitalize “Black” but not “white” when writing about race?

According to the Columbia Journalism Review, “Black” is often used by members of that racial group to describe a community with a shared sense of identity. “White” is not used in the same way, except by white supremacists.

Grammar + Mechanics

Adhering to certain rules of grammar and mechanics helps us keep our writing clear and consistent. This section lays out our house style and starts with the basics:

- **Write for everyone.** Some people will read every word. Others will skim. Help your reader by grouping related ideas together and using descriptive headers and subheaders.
- **Focus your message.** Create a hierarchy of information. Lead with the main point or the most important content.
- **Be concise.** Use short words and sentences. Avoid unnecessary modifiers.
- **Be specific.** Avoid vague language and hyperbole. Cut the fluff.
- **Be consistent.** Stick to the copy patterns and style points outlined in this guide.

Guidelines

Abbreviations + Acronyms

- If there’s a chance your reader won’t recognize an abbreviation or acronym, spell it out the first time you mention it and indicate the abbreviation in parentheses. Then use the short version for all other references.
- If the abbreviation or acronym appears as a main entry in the dictionary, such as HTML or NASA, use it without spelling it out.
- If an abbreviation or acronym only appears once, and it does not appear as a main entry in the dictionary, there is no need to indicate the abbreviation in parentheses.
- Use abbreviations and acronyms sparingly.

Active Voice

- Use active voice. In active voice, the subject of the sentence does the action: “Marti logged into the account.”
- Avoid passive voice. In passive voice, the subject of the sentence has the action done to it: “The account was logged into by Marti.”
- To emphasize the action over the subject, you may choose to use passive voice.

Numbers

Spell out numbers one through nine and all numbers at the beginning of a sentence. Otherwise, use the numeral. This includes ordinals.

Punctuation

Apostrophes

To make a singular word that already ends in an “s” possessive, add an ’s. If the word ends in an “s” and is plural, just add an apostrophe.

Colons

Use a colon to offset a list or join two related phrases. If a complete sentence follows the colon, capitalize the first word.

Commas

When writing a list, use the serial comma (also known as the Oxford comma).

Dashes + Hyphens

Use a hyphen without spaces on either side to link words into a single phrase or to indicate a span or range. Use an em dash (—) with spaces on either side to offset an aside.

Ellipses

Do not use ellipses (. . .) to indicate that you’re trailing off before the end of a thought. Use them only to show that you’ve omitted words in a quote.

Exclamation Points

- Use exclamation points sparingly, and never more than one at a time.
- Exclamation points go inside quotation marks. They go outside parentheses when the parenthetical is part of a larger sentence, and inside when the parenthetical stands alone.

Periods

Periods go inside quotation marks. They go outside parentheses when the parenthetical is part of a larger sentence, and inside parentheses when the parenthetical stands alone.

Plus Sign

In headers and subheadings, use the plus sign in place of the word “and.” Do not use an ampersand unless it is part of a company or brand name.

Question Marks

Question marks go inside quotation marks if they’re part of the quote. They go outside parentheses when the parenthetical is part of a larger sentence, and inside when it stands alone.

Quotation Marks

- Use quotes to refer to words and letters, titles of short works such as articles and poems, and direct quotations.
- Periods and commas go within quotation marks. Question marks within quotes follow logic — if the question mark is part of the quotation, it goes within. If you’re asking a question that ends with a quote, it goes outside the quote.
- Use single quotation marks for quotes within quotes.

People, Places + Things

File Extensions

- When referring generally to a file extension type, such as a GIF, PDF, or JPG, use all uppercase without a period. Add a lowercase “s” to make plural.
- When referring to a specific file, the filename should be lowercase.

Quotes

When quoting someone, use the present tense “says” form of attribution.

Names

The first time you mention a person in writing, refer to them by their first and last names. On all other mentions, refer to them by their last name.

Text Formatting

- Use italics to indicate the title of a long work (like a book, movie, or album), to emphasize a word, and to reference a navigation label in a set of instructions.
- Don't use underline formatting, and don't use formatting combinations.

Write Positively

Use positive language. Whenever possible, avoid “don't” and “can't.”

Web Elements

Every piece of content we publish is supported by web elements. This section lays out our style.

Guidelines

Alt text

Alt text is a way to label images. It's especially important for people who can't see the images on our website. It should describe the image in a brief sentence or two.

Buttons

Buttons should always contain actions. The language should be clear and concise. Use all caps.

Forms

- Form titles should clearly and quickly explain the purpose of the form.

- Use title case for form titles and sentence case for form fields.
- Keep forms as short as possible.
- Only request information that we need and intend to use. Don't ask for information that could be considered private or personal.

Headings + Subheadings

- Headings and subheadings organize content for readers. Be generous and descriptive.
- Headings (H1) are used for page and blog titles.
- Subheadings (H2, H3, H4.) break articles into smaller, more specific sections. They give readers avenues into your content and make it more scannable.
- Headings and subheadings should be organized in a hierarchy, with heading first, followed by subheadings in order.
- Include the most relevant keywords in your headings and subheadings, and make sure you cover the main point of the content.
- Use sentence case in all headings and subheadings.
- Service and product names are written in title case.

Links

- Provide a link whenever you're referring to something on an external website. Use links to point users to relevant content and trusted resources.
- Don't include preceding articles (a, an, the, our) when you link text.
- If a link comes before a punctuation mark, only link the text.
- Avoid using "Click here!" Instead, write the sentence as normal and link relevant keywords.

Related articles

Every blog post should include a list of three related articles. The first of these should be cornerstone content. Avoid repeating links from the body text in related articles.

Catchline
Communications