

**User Experience
Styles and Standards Guide**

Grammar and Verbiage

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This document defines consistent grammar and verbiage standards for all in-house Web applications and their associated documentation. The guidelines presented here represent best practices and a commitment to producing high-quality products. This guide makes no attempt to cover every possible style type, usage, or convention, but instead addresses the writing and interface issues most frequently encountered by developers in their daily work. This guidance will ensure consistency in the look and feel of materials as well as adherence to standards and constraints. The standards and constraints include:

- Information Technology (IT) best practices;
- Accessibility concerns such as Section 508 legislation of the Federal Information Technology Accessibility Initiative;
- Usability studies;
- General principles such as those listed in Apple's *Macintosh Human Interface Guidelines* and Microsoft's *Windows Interface Guidelines*;
- Interviews with staff;
- Project-developed user interface style guides.

1.2 Intended Audience/Users

This document is for managers, reviewers, team leads, designers, developers, trainers, and all other personnel who produce or review applications and IT-related documentation.

1.3 Guide Objectives

The main objective of this guide is to create a uniform and consistent standard for which all applications and supporting materials are based, to ensure that products are usable and that they function properly for end users. Consistent term usage and proper grammar and punctuation provide a better experience for the user and demonstrate a commitment to quality from the IT department.

2 Verbiage Styles and Usage

Using proper grammar, spelling, punctuation, and verbiage ensures that users have a consistent and professional experience. All applications should be proofread and peer-reviewed when possible to ensure that no errors are overlooked.

This guide contains common punctuation, terminology, and grammatical terms and conventions, and describes their proper use. All applications, supporting documentation, and Help resources should use these conventions. When possible, existing applications and materials should be modified to comply with standards.

2.1 Abbreviations and Acronyms

Acronyms and abbreviations abound within our organization as well as within the government and nonprofit agencies. It is extremely important that terms are clearly defined in documentation so that users understand what those letters represent. An *abbreviation* is a shortened form of a term that is not pronounced as a word, such as MBA. An *acronym* is an abbreviation that can be pronounced like a word, such as NASA. The terms are not interchangeable and do not mean the same thing.

Guidelines for abbreviations and acronyms:

- The first time a term with an abbreviation or acronym is used, the words must be spelled out followed by the abbreviation or acronym in parentheses.
Example: Nonprofit Agency (NPA).
- After the initial presentation, use the abbreviation or acronym by itself with no parentheses. However, if a subsequent reference is several chapters or sections removed from the prior one, repeat the full name and acronym for clarity.
- Restrict use to well-known technical and general terms.
- Acronyms and abbreviations should not stand alone at the beginning of a sentence. Instead, use “The <acronym>,” spell out the words, or rework the sentence.
- Do not use an apostrophe after the acronym or abbreviation when plural; only use one if it is possessive.
Example: XYZ’s policy is that NPAs register each year.

2.2 Active Voice vs. Passive Voice

The active voice tells who or what is performing an action in the sentence, as in: ‘The developer creates the documents.’ This is direct and easy to understand. ‘Documents will be created’ does not say who creates them. Use the active voice whenever possible. Action verbs can sometimes change a passive sentence into an active one. Use precise, simple terms to describe actions.

2.3 Person, Points of View

The *first person* is I, me, my, we, our, and so on. The *second person* is you and your. The *third person* is he, she, they, their, his, hers, him, her, and so on. Application text and support materials should never be written in the first person. The second person can only be used for instructions that tell the reader/user what actions and steps they must perform.

2.4 Capitalization

- Capitalize first words of sentences and proper nouns; follow the most recent edition of *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* for guidance if needed.
- Capitalize the title of a person when it precedes the person's name or when it occurs immediately after that person's name on an address or signature line. Example: James Wilson, Supervisor; Inspector Gadget.
- Capitalize titles of very high-ranking government officials with or without the official's name. Examples: The Senators were unable to attend. The President gave a speech.
- Capitalize words such as *department*, *office*, *branch*, and *bureau* only when they are part of an official title. Capitalize the *official* titles of organizations, business firms, and governmental agencies and their departments and other divisions. Do not capitalize generic terms used to refer to such organizations, e.g., 'The Board of Trustees met in December. The board agreed to meet next in June.'
- Capitalize the words *Federal* and *State* when they are a part of an actual agency or bureau. Examples: The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the State Regulatory Commission.
- Capitalize formal product or document names; do not capitalize descriptions of products or documents.
- When using title case, do not capitalize a conjunction, an article, or a preposition of three letters or fewer, unless it is the first or last word in a title or subtitle.
- Capitalize points of the compass that refer to specific regions. Example: The trainees came from the South.
- Do not capitalize titles or place-name designations unless they refer to a named person's title or the name of a place.

Examples of **correct** usage:

Many supervisors worked at the office.

The managers met with the supervisor of the office.

Examples of **incorrect** usage:

Many Supervisors worked at the Office.

The Managers met with the Supervisor of the Office.

NOTE: It is acknowledged that developers, testers, managers, specialists, etc. are all very important positions. However, these titles should only be capitalized when they occur before a specific person's name and when they follow that name on a signature line.

3 Punctuation

3.1.1 Apostrophes

Apostrophes have two main uses:

1. To form the possessive case of nouns.

- Singular nouns become possessive when an apostrophe and the letter 's' are added, even when the word already ends in 's.'

Examples: Manager's decision, Bill Jones's paycheck

- Plural nouns that do not end in 's' become possessive when an apostrophe and an 's' are added.

Examples: Children's books, Women's groups

- Plural nouns that end in 's' become possessive when only an apostrophe is added.

Examples: Bosses' signatures, Clients' contracts

- The possessive case can be applied to acronyms that refer to people or companies by adding an apostrophe and an 's.'

Examples: XYZ's employees, XYZ's documents

- Apostrophes should not be used to form the possessive case of products or features.

Examples: Windows interface, Word templates

NOTE: Do not add apostrophes to possessive pronouns such as *its*, *ours*, *mine*, *yours*, *his*, *hers*, and *theirs*. The contraction '**it's**' means '**it is**.'

2. To show that letters or numbers are missing.

- Contractions: When letters are removed to create a contraction, an apostrophe is used to show where the missing letter(s) would be.

Examples:

Can't (cannot)

Didn't (did not)

Shouldn't (should not)

It's (it is)

Isn't (is not)

Won't (will not)

- When known or assumed numbers are omitted, an apostrophe is used to indicate where those numbers would normally go. Be careful if using Smart Quotes that the quotation mark is not facing inward.

Examples: The Class of '02

The '08 XYZ Handbook

3.1.2 Commas

Use commas for the following conditions:

- A serial list of three or more items that has a conjunction before the last item.

Example: Mary brought cups, plates, forks, napkins, and sodas.

- A sentence when two complete thoughts are separated by a conjunction such as *but*, *or*, *yet*, *so*, *for*, *and*, or *nor*.

Example: Joe did not arrive, but he did call.

- To set off an introductory dependent clause.

Example: After we receive the requirements, we can develop a project plan.

- Between multiple consecutive adjectives if the word ‘and’ is not used.

Example: It was a rainy, windy, cloudy, gloomy day.

- To set off information that is explanatory but not critical to the meaning of the sentence.

Example: William, the experienced hiker, led the way.

- To set off the year if it follows both the month and the day.

Example: On June 9, 2002, we left for our vacation.

Do not use a comma when only the month and year are given.

Example: We left for Europe in June 2002.

- To set off the name of a person you are addressing directly.

Example: When you get home, John, please call me.

- To set off degrees, honorariums, and designators.

Example: John Smith, Jr., MD.

3.1.3 Semicolons

- Use a semicolon when a coordinating conjunction such as *but*, *or*, *yet*, *so*, *for*, *and*, or *nor* is omitted between two complete thoughts.

Example: The review team approved the storyboards; the SME did not.

(Alternative: The review team approved the storyboards but the SME did not.)

- Use a semicolon before transitional words such as *however*, *therefore*, *consequently*, *otherwise*, *moreover*, and *accordingly* because these words link two complete thoughts. Use a comma after the transitional word.

Example: John did not have a job; therefore, he could not pay his bills.

- Use semicolons to separate a series of phrases that already contain commas.

Example: The members of the conference represented several countries: Will Parker, Wales; Janet Moore, Australia; Jennifer Smith, USA; and Leo Sturgis, Germany.

- Use a semicolon if each item in a list is a phrase but does not complete a sentence.

Example: For each stage in the life cycle, the following information is presented:

- The generic order within the cycle;
- The name of the stage;
- Entry criteria for the stage;
- Exit criteria for the stage.

3.1.4 Colons

- Use a colon at the end of a phrase or sentence that introduces a list. If the list is bulleted or numbered, capitalize the first word in each item.

Example: The following are primary colors:

- Red
- Blue
- Yellow.

- If a colon is within a sentence, do not capitalize the first word following the colon unless the first word is a proper noun. Within a sentence, there should only be one space between a colon and the first word following it.

Example: The following are primary colors: red, blue, and yellow.

- Use a colon to introduce a list preceded by *that is* or *i.e.*

Example: Data is pre-populated: that is, data is already entered from the first screen on all subsequent screens.

- Use a colon after the salutation in a formal business letter.

Example: Dear Mr. Wilson:

- Use a colon to separate a title from a subtitle.

Example: *Math 1-2-3: Counting Made Easy.*

- In documents, use a colon to represent the word ‘to’ in a ratio. Use the word ‘to’ online for screen reading software.

Example: 10:1 (in print); 10 to 1 (online)

- Use a colon to separate hours, minutes, and seconds. Example: 12:19 P.M.

3.1.5 Initials

- When using initials for a person’s name, there is a single space between the periods (J. S. Bach). When abbreviating a term, there is no space between (U.S.).
- Use periods with middle initials (Johann S. Bach)

3.1.6 Quotation Marks

When using quotation marks:

- Periods and commas should be inside the closing quotation mark.
- Colons and semicolons should be outside the closing quotation mark.
- Question marks and exclamation marks can be placed either inside or outside the closing quotation marks depending on the context of the sentence.

Use quotation marks to indicate the exact words spoken. Use smart quotes when possible.

Example: The supervisor said, “Turn in your timesheets.”

Quotation marks should never be used to indicate anything other than an exact quote or item referenced. Terms or examples should be presented in an italic font or single quotes instead.

3.1.7 Parentheses

If information is important to the meaning of the sentence, do not use parentheses. Parentheses are used to set off *nonessential* information.

Example: The developers (four of them) worked overtime.

3.1.8 Dashes

Dashes are different from hyphens in both appearance and use. The *em dash* and the *en dash* are both slightly longer than a hyphen. These dashes are used to show emphasis, to set off explanatory information or sentence elements, to show an abrupt change, or to replace the word ‘to.’

To insert a dash using Word, set the cursor to the place in the document where the dash will be inserted. On the **Insert** menu, click **Symbol...** and then click the **Special Characters** tab in the dialog box. Highlight the **Em dash** or **En dash** and click the **[Insert]** button.

Em dashes (longest form of a dash: —) are used to indicate a sudden interruption of break in thought in a sentence. Use it sparingly; do not use an em dash when another punctuation mark will suffice. The em dash is used without spaces to set off a word or phrase within a sentence.

Example: The managers need to determine—before the fiscal year ends—what funding is available for next year.

The *en dash* (length in-between that of a hyphen and an em dash: –) is used without spaces when replacing the word "to" between words or numbers.

Examples: The Rome–Paris flight will be late; it is delayed for 15–20 minutes.

The en dash without a space can substitute for a minus sign to indicate negative numbers (–78) or with a space to indicate the subtraction function in equations (87 – 24 = 63).

3.1.9 Periods

Periods are used to set something apart or to show the end of something. They are frequently used to end a sentence. Avoid ending sentences with a preposition (to, are, at, etc.).

When listing sequential information, number the items in the list and use a period after the number. After the period, insert a single space before the beginning of the text.

When each entry on a list is a phrase that completes a sentence, put a period at the end of each item.

Example: Use of a clear, well-defined life cycle increases the probability that:

- Cost, schedule, and functionality will be predictable.
- The system's performance will meet the user's needs.
- High-quality products will be developed and maintained within budget and on time.
- Systems will be produced in a disciplined, repeatable, engineered manner.
- Risk will be accurately assessed and mitigated.

When a list contains only one-word or two-word entries, there is no need to punctuate the entries. Use a period after the last entry in the list.

Example: The SDLC includes the following stages:

1. Planning
2. Analysis
3. Design
4. Development
5. Evaluation
6. Implementation
7. System maintenance
8. System retirement.

3.1.10 Hyphens

Hyphens (-) connect words, prefixes, and suffixes permanently or temporarily. Certain compound words always contain hyphens. For temporary connections, hyphens help prevent ambiguity, clarify meaning, and indicate word breaks at the end of a line.

- Prefixes, including ‘pre,’ ‘post,’ and ‘re,’ are not generally hyphenated, unless not using a hyphen would result in a confusing word (such as re-engineer) or if the stem word starts with a capital letter. In case of uncertainty about using a hyphen with a prefix, consult a dictionary.
- Always use a hyphen for two or more words that, as a unit, precede and modify (describe) a noun; this is called a compound adjective. Always use a hyphen for compound numerals and fractions.

Examples:

Twenty-first chapter; one-third of the work; 80-column card

Copy-protected disk; end-user assistance; floating-point decimal

Line-by-line scrolling; month-to-month reporting

- Never use a hyphen between an adverb ending in ‘-ly’ and the word it describes.

Example of **correct** usage: highly graphical interface.

Example of **incorrect** usage: highly-graphical interface.

3.1.11 Punctuation for Lists

When writing lists of items, instructions, and explanations, the same types of lists should be presented consistently every time within an application or body of instructional material. Maintaining internal consistency makes it easier for readers to concentrate on the information without being distracted. Because there are many different kinds of lists, there is a lot of flexibility in punctuation; authors should use common sense and strive for internal consistency.

General guidelines for list presentation:

- Start each item with the same type of word; for example, use all verbs or all nouns. However, avoid starting each item with the exact same word; place it before the list instead.
- Use numbers for each item when presenting sequential steps or instructions.
- Use bullets if the order of presentation is not important. Use the same bullet type throughout the application or document for consistency.
- Capitalize the first word of each item, including single words.

- When each item completes the presenting sentence, end each item with a period.
- When each item is a phrase composed of several words but does not complete the presenting sentence, end each item with a semicolon.
- No punctuation is necessary at the end of each item in a list if each item is only one or two words long.

3.1.12 Menu Instructions

Use ‘>’ to separate items in a path of instructions. Do not make it bold.

Example: Go to **File** > **Save** to save your document.

3.1.13 Numerals versus Words

Spell out numbers zero through ten or numbers at the beginning of a sentence.

Examples: Five programs, zero probability, two days, one week, three months, five years.

Use numerals for numbers 10 and greater, for units of measure—including fractions and decimals—and for dimensions.

Examples: 20 manuals; 4 feet, 6 inches; 0.25 ounce; 4 bytes; 3 by 5 card; 800x600 screen resolution; $\frac{1}{4}$ cup.

- Exceptions are numbers that begin a sentence, title, subtitle, or heading; accepted usage such as idiomatic expressions; numbers used as pronouns.
- Spell out ordinals *first* through *tenth*.

If one number in a group of related numbers is greater than nine, use numerals for all the numbers.

Example: We requested 5 user guides, but you sent 50.

Present large numbers in the simplest way possible.

Example: \$6 billion *or* six billion dollars instead of \$6,000,000,000.

3.1.14 Spacing

Punctuation marks should have a single space following them before the start of the next item, word, etc. Machines such as typewriters were not able to properly *kern*, or space out, letters, and double-spacing letters after punctuation marks created greater legibility with typeset materials. However, computer word processing software automatically adjusts the kerning of letters; therefore, there is no longer a need for double-spacing items.

4 Grammar, Terms, and Abbreviations

The table below shows the correct usage of words and terms that are in daily use within the IT department. Even though there may be alternate or generally accepted formats for some of these terms, the usage of words and terms listed here is our standard. This editorial style guide contains frequently used words and is based upon grammar, spelling, and vocabulary rules that apply regardless of the style book used. Current word usage is based on the most recent edition of Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, available online at <http://www.m-w.com/>.

A

a vs. an (TIP: how does the sound of the next word start?)

- *A* is always used before a word that starts with a consonant sound, such as 'a one-o'clock appointment,' 'a computer system,' and 'a historical occasion.'
- *An* is always used before a word that starts with a vowel sound (A, E, I, O, and U) as in, 'an elephant' 'an L,' 'an SMS message,' and 'an apple.'

-able and -ible (suffixes)

Words with these suffixes can be found in the dictionary to confirm correct spelling. Some general guidelines are:

- The suffix '-able' is much more common than '-ible.'
 - For most words ending in 'e,' drop the 'e' and add 'able.'
- Examples: Scalable, usable

Words ending in 'ce' or 'ge' keep the final 'e' and add 'able'

Examples: Changeable, manageable

- For words ending in 'y' as the final syllable, change the 'y' to 'i' and add 'able.'
- Example: Deniable

accept vs. except *Accept* means to receive; *except* means to exclude.

active vs. current

- *Active* refers to something open and operating, such as a window, file, or document. Anything active (open) can also become inactive (closed or in the background).
- *Current* refers to an element in use at the time, such as a drive, directory, or folder. The path to these things can change, but they do not, in themselves, change.

addresses Use standard abbreviations for street designations: St., Ave., Rd., N., S.

address vs. path

- *Address* is a general term for the way to access Internet or intranet sites, and to refer to domains and user names for e-mail. A Uniform Resource Locator (URL) is the Internet address for locating a specific resource on the Web; the Internet protocol name is usually 'http:/' followed by the host name and other elements such as port, directory, and file name. Use 'URL' in technical documentation.
- *Path* refers to the hierarchical structure of an operating system and gives information starting with the specific root directory of the file through the end of the file name.

affect, effect *Affect* means to influence or impact. *Effect* means to bring about or cause.

- Use *effect* every time it is preceded by the words *a, an, the, no, any, take,* and *into*, as in, ‘The law will take effect next year.’

NOTE: The words *a, an, the, no, any, take,* and *into* may be separated from *effect* by an adjective, as in, ‘The medication had a long-lasting effect.’

- Use *effect* as a noun that means *result*: The effect of the code change was to put the program into a loop.
- Use *effect* as a verb meaning *to create*: He is trying to effect a change in the process.
- Use *affect* as a verb meaning *to have an influence or impact on*: The user was affected by the change.

a lot Two words.

A.M., P.M. Use small caps: 12:00 P.M.

among vs. between

- *Among* indicates distribution throughout several entities, such as: Work is shared among all nine members of the team.
- *Between* is used to compare two items or otherwise indicate a one-to-one relationship of items, such as: Switch between the two open programs.

ampersand (&) A symbol meaning ‘and.’ Do not use ampersands in text or headings unless it specifically refers to a symbol on the interface or is used as part of a business name.

annual meeting Not capitalized in text unless referring to a specific meeting by its full name.

application vs. program

- The word *application* is used in technical documentation in reference to software with executable files and other components such as databases. End-user documentation, including training materials, should usually use the word program. Do not use the term ‘application program.’
- Authors can avoid the application/program issue by using a more definitive description of the product, such as spreadsheet, database management system, or graphics toolkit.

assure, ensure, insure

- *Assure* means to alleviate doubt.
- *Ensure* means to make sure of something or to guarantee, as in, ‘Peer reviews ensure well-written documents.’
- *Insure* means to provide or obtain insurance for, as in, ‘He paid to insure his car.’

B

biannual, biennial Biannual is twice a year. Biennial is every two years.

board Capitalize only when part of a proper name.

C

cannot One word.

CD-ROM Do not shorten to CD, unless referring to a music-only CD.

chair (e.g., chair of a commission) Capitalized only when part of a proper name.

click Used to indicate selection by cursor placement and pressing the mouse button. Do not use *click on* or *click at*. *Click in* is acceptable.

collective nouns (staff, team, etc) take singular verbs and pronouns.

committee Not capitalized unless it is part of the complete name of a specific committee.

compose vs. comprise

- *Compose* shows that the whole is made up of its parts, as in, ‘The pie was composed of fruits and nuts.’
- *Comprise* means *contain, consist of, or include*. To avoid confusion, use those terms instead of *comprise*.
- ‘Composed of...’ is correct; NEVER use the phrase ‘comprised of.’

Congress Always capitalized.

congressional Not capitalized.

client/server Two words separated by a forward slash mark and no spaces.

D

double-click Hyphenated.

drop-down menu Hyphenated. Use ‘drop-down menu’ not ‘drop-down.’

data A plural noun that takes plural verbs and pronouns.

database One word.

deadline One word.

dialog box, warning dialog box Do not shorten to ‘dialog.’

domain The meaning of *domain* depends on the context and location of the reference:

- A database domain is a set of valid values for a particular attribute.
- In LAN systems, a domain is a group of computers that share a database and a security policy.
- On the Internet, domain identifies the type of entity owning the address, such as **.com** (commercial), **.edu** (education), **.org** (organization), and **.gov** (government).

E

e-mail, e-business, e-learning Always hyphenated.

end user vs. end-user

- As a person (noun), *end user* describes someone who uses documentation or an application. ‘The accountants are the end users of the application,’ explains who uses the application. This usage is not hyphenated.
- As a descriptive phrase (compound adjective), *end-user* tells something about the type of documentation. ‘The Training Manual is end-user documentation,’ describes the type of material it is. When used as a descriptive phrase, end-user is hyphenated.

e.g., Exempla gratia; Latin, meaning ‘for example.’

- When used, a comma always follows the abbreviation and the entire example is usually enclosed by parentheses: (e.g., like this).

ensure vs. insure vs. assure

- *Ensure* means to make sure of something or to guarantee, as in, ‘Peer reviews ensure well-written documents.’

- *Assure* means to alleviate doubt.
- *Insure* means to provide or obtain insurance for, as in, ‘He paid to insure his car.’

etc. Et cetera; Latin, meaning ‘and so on’ or ‘and so forth.’

- Etc. is often used when an author is uncertain about what else to add to a list or does not want to list all the possible items. If space limitations are a consideration, then ‘etc.’ can be used.

Extranet Capitalized when used as a proper noun, as in the XYZ Extranet.

F

failover One word.

FAQs No apostrophe; FAQs is an abbreviation for frequently asked questions.

farther, further Farther refers to physical distance. Further refers to extension of time or degree.

fax Not in all caps.

federal Capitalized only when part of a company name or the formal name of a government body.

figure Do not capitalize except when indicating a specific figure.

file name Two words, no hyphen.

firewall One word.

follow up (verb); **follow-up** (noun or adjective)

fractions Hyphenate fractions used as adjectives; do not hyphenate spelled-out common fractions used as nouns.

freestanding One word, no hyphen.

G

government Not capitalized unless referencing the name of a specific government.

grassroots One word, lowercase.

H

hands-on Hyphenated when used as a compound adjective, as in, ‘This training course provides hands-on experience.’

hard copy Two words, no hyphen.

Help Capitalize when describing a computer function, such as ‘online Help feature.’

HelpDesk One word, no space between words, capitalization as shown.

high-level A compound adjective; hyphenated.

home page Two words, lowercase. The entry page of a Web site, not the site itself.

- The home page is the main page of a Web site, determined by the owner or creator of the site. This is usually the first page that the users see when connecting to the Web site.

I

i.e., Id est; Latin, meaning *that is*.

- When used, it is always followed by a comma. Do not use if presenting an example; use e.g. instead.

inbox One word, no hyphen.

insure, ensure, assure *Insure* means to cover by insurance. *Ensure* means to make certain. *Assure* means to alleviate doubt.

input One word. Use only as a noun, as in, ‘The input was sorted.’ Do not use as a verb. An example of **incorrect** use is, ‘They input new data.’

interface

- Use as a noun, as in, *user interface* and *programming interface*.
- Do not use as a verb; use *interact* or *communicate* instead.

Internet, intranet Internet is always capitalized; intranet is capitalized only when referring to the intranet within a designated institution, for example, 'NISH Intranet.' For general use, do not capitalize.

it's, its *It's* is a contraction for 'it is' or 'it has.' *Its* is the possessive form of the pronoun 'it.'

italic An adjective describing a type style. Avoid using the words 'italics' and 'italicized.' Example: The quotes were written in italic.

iWork Lowercase 'i' and uppercase 'W' as presented here.

J

Jr. Use a comma to set off: Ed Smith, Jr. For III, IV, and so on, there is no comma after the name, e.g., Henry Ford III.

JWOD No periods between letters, uppercase.

jwod.org Lowercase.

K

key combinations

- When indicating key combinations where keys are pressed and held down at the same time as another key, use the PLUS SIGN (+) between ALL CAPS bold key names. Do not bold the punctuation (including the plus sign).

Examples: **CTRL+P**, **ALT+CTRL+DELETE**.

key names

- When writing user instructions for keys to be pressed, the key name should be written in ALL CAPS bold and the user should be instructed to 'press' the key, not 'hit' it.

Examples: **ENTER**, **SHIFT**, **TAB**.

- Special character keys to be pressed should be spelled out in ALL CAPS bold, including **HYPHEN**, **PERIOD**, **COMMA**, **DOWN ARROW**, and **PAGE UP**.

- When writing about the function of keys, the key name should appear in title case (as they appear on the keyboard) and bold.

Example: The user can use the **Tab** key to go the next entry field.

key sequences

- To instruct the user to press and then release keys in sequence, use a comma and a space between each key.

Example: Press **ALT, F, D**.

L

lifestyle One word.

log in, log on, log off

- Use these terms as two separate words to indicate the process of connecting to or disconnecting from a network or application.

Examples: Log in to the system, log off the application.

login, logon

- As a single word, logon and login are used as adjectives. Do not use login as a noun or verb, such as ‘Enter your login.’ or ‘You can login to the system.’ These terms are never hyphenated.

Example: Enter your login password.

loose, lose

Loose (adj.) Unfettered, untied; the opposite of ‘tight.’

Lose (verb) Mismatch; the opposite of ‘find.’

lowercase, uppercase One word, no hyphen.

M

metadata A one-word term used to describe data that describes or contains other data.

master of arts, master of science, master’s degree Not capitalized.

N

national offices Lowercase.

NISH No periods between letters, uppercase.

nish.org Lowercase.

O

Online, offline One word, not hyphenated.

on site, off site; on-site, off-site Two words to define a place, as in, ‘The meeting was held off site.’ Hyphenated when used as a compound adjective as in, ‘on-site training.’

P

page Use when referring to a printed document or a Web display on the monitor.

percent Use the symbol % with numbers. Not hyphenated.

phase-in Hyphenated.

point and click As verbs, separate words; hyphenate only if used as a compound adjective as in, ‘point-and-click technology.’

point of contact (POC) Three separate words, no hyphens.

policymaker One word.

precede, proceed Precede means ‘before.’ Proceed means ‘to go forward.’

premier, premiere *Premier* means first class, excellent, as in ‘NISH is a premier organization.’

Premiere means the first public performance, as in a movie premiere.

presently Use it to mean *in a little while* or *shortly*, but not to mean *now*.

pretest, posttest Single words, no hyphens.

proof of concept Three separate words, no hyphens.

Q

Q&A No spaces between letters and ampersand.

R

regional Lowercase except when used as a proper noun.

right-click Hyphenated.

S

screenshot One word, no hyphen.

set up (verb)

setup (noun, adjective)

shall vs. **will** *Will* is usually the simple future indicative: this *will* happen, you *will* be surprised. *Shall* is related to the subjunctive, and means ‘let it be so’: The employee *shall* produce all required documentation, a committee *shall* be appointed.

sign on, sign off; sign-on, sign-off Two separate words when used to describe an action.

Hyphenate only if used as a modifier as in, ‘sign-off screen.’

subcommittee Not hyphenated.

Subject Matter Expert (SME) Initial capitalization of each word.

submenu One word.

- *Submenu* is the correct term for the next menu that appears when a user selects a command from a primary menu.
- Use submenu instead of ‘cascading menu,’ ‘hierarchical menu,’ or ‘secondary menu.’

sync Short for the word *synchronization*.

T

text box Two words; refers to the area within a dialog box where text can be typed.

that vs. **which** vs. **who**

- The word *that* introduces an essential clause. An essential clause is not set off by commas; it gives information that is important to the meaning of the sentence.
Example: ‘I plan to use the design that Lisa created for my home page.’
- The word *which* introduces a nonessential clause. It is set off by commas and gives additional but not necessary information about the subject.
Example: ‘The home page, which was designed by Lisa, is very colorful.’
- The word *who* refers to a person; *that* and *which* refer to things or groups.
Example: ‘Lisa is the one who will lead the discussion.’

their vs. **there** vs. **they're**

- The word *their* is the possessive form of the pronoun ‘they.’ ‘They created the application,’ could also be written, ‘The application is their creation.’
- *There* is an expletive or a false subject when used at the beginning of a sentence.
Example: ‘There were 12 members of the development team.’ It is also used to indicate a physical place, as in: ‘Put the book over there.’
- *They're* is the contraction of ‘they are’ or ‘they were,’ as in: ‘They're arriving at noon.’

then, than *Than* is a conjunction or preposition used in unequal comparisons; *then* is usually an adverb indicating time or consequence. Something is bigger *than* something else; something happens *then*.

timeframe One word.

toolbar, toolbox, toolkit One word.

U

underway One word.

United States, U.S. The abbreviation *U.S.* may be used as a modifier when it directly precedes the word it modifies; spell out ‘United States’ in all other uses.

up-to-date Hyphenated.

uppercase, lowercase One word, no hyphen.

User ID Two words, capitalized. Do not use **username** (one word, lowercase) unless that is the term used on the label or form field.

utilize In technical and business jargon, utilize has become a synonym for the clearer and more concise word *use*; choose the word 'use' or another appropriate synonym when possible.

V

virgule (/) Avoid use to indicate duality; recast the sentence to be specific, e.g., 'The student fills out his/her own application,' should be recast as 'Students fill out their own applications.'

voicemail One word, no hyphen.

W – X

Web Web is an abbreviation for the proper noun 'World Wide Web' and it is always capitalized.

Web browser, Web page, Web server, Web services, Web site Two separate words, no hyphen.

Web-based, Web-enabled Hyphenated when used as a descriptive phrase, as in 'Web-based training.'

Webcast, Webinar, Webmaster One word.

Windows, windows Initial capitalization when referring to the operating system. Lowercase when referring to a window displayed on a screen within an application.

workup (noun), **work up** (verb)

Y – Z

ZIP code An acronym for Zoning Improvement Plan. There is no comma between the two-character state postal abbreviation and the five- or nine-digit ZIP code.

5 Tips for Non-Technical Audiences

Limit use of technical jargon. Double-check to ensure human qualities are not being ascribed to inanimate objects like accounts, portals, associations, etc. Use the following table to find potential alternatives to technical terms and unessential words and phrases.

Technical Term	Potential Alternative(s)
Functionality	Feature, capability
Platform	System
Interface	Computer screen, layout, software, application
Portal	Intranet, Extranet
Information stovepipes	Inaccessible vs. central access (acronym)
Legacy	Past/previous system/process
Granular	Detailed
Stakeholder	User, participant, group impacted
Usability	User-friendly, user-centric
Intuitiveness	What it will do, how it works
Deploy, deployment	Launch, rollout, install
Gate review	Review
Sets	Formats, standards, groups
Run queries	Take several steps, perform a search, obtain a report
Release (technology)	Phase, stage, version
Unessential Words/Phrases	Potential Alternative
In order to	To
So as to	To
In order for	For
For the purposes of	For
With respect to	Regarding
Thereby	
Hereafter	
Hereby	
Therefore	
Meanwhile	
However	
Nevertheless	
Nonetheless	
In conclusion	
Stated	Said

Technical Term	Potential Alternative(s)
Additionally <i>or</i> In addition	

6 Related References

The following are recommended as additional resources to consult during the course of writing documentation and instructional materials. If there are options for correct usage that conflict with the standards stated in this document, follow this Style Guide and inform the e-business manager of the discrepancy.

- The Intranet provides a listing of acronyms and their meanings. From the home page, click **FAQs** on the footer, and then click the **Glossary of Acronyms and Terms** link.
- <http://www.m-w.com>: The Merriam-Webster online dictionary is an easily accessible resource for checking spelling and for finding accurate synonyms.
- <http://www.grammarbook.com>: This online version of *The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation* is a concise and thorough reference for grammar and punctuation usage.
- <http://www.microsoft.com/enable>: The Microsoft Accessibility and Disabilities Web site.
- <http://www.webgrammar.com/grammarbasics.html>: This Web site explains grammar, punctuation, spelling, and word usage for Web developers. There are also links to other references that will be helpful to anyone who creates documents.
- *Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications*, 2nd edition, Redmond, WA. Microsoft Press. 1998.

7 Acronyms, Abbreviations, Common Terms

Term	Meaning
BOE	Basis of estimate
CBA	Cost-benefit analysis
CBT	Computer-based training
CD-ROM	Compact disc read-only memory
CMS	Content Management System
COTS	Commercial off-the-shelf
CRM	Customer/Client/Contact Relationship Management
CRP	Community Rehabilitation Program (deprecated; use <i>NPA</i> instead)
ELCM	Enterprise Life Cycle Methodology
GUI	Graphical user interface
HTML	Hypertext Markup Language
HTTP	Hypertext Transport Protocol
IA	Information architecture
ISD	Instructional Systems Design
IT	Information Technology
LAN	Local Area Network
LMS	Learning Management System
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NPA	Nonprofit agency
PDA	Personal digital assistant
POC	Point of contact
QRG	Quick Reference Guide
RSS	Really simple syndication
SDLC	Systems (or Software) Development Life Cycle
SME	Subject Matter Expert
SOW	Statement of Work
SR	Service request
SSL	Secure Socket Layer
TCP/IP	Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol
UAT	User acceptance testing
UI	User interface
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
VPN	Virtual Private Network
WAN	Wide Area Network

WBT	Web-based training
WWW	World Wide Web