

AT&T SDC Editorial Style Guide

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AT&T SDC Editorial Style Guide

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AT&T SDC Editorial Style Guide

Introduction

This style guide is a resource for anyone writing or editing copy for the AT&T SDC to help ensure consistency and to help make the copy easy to read and comprehend. The purpose of the AT&T SDC site is to streamline the API development process by providing clear and concise direction in a format and tone that delivers an optimized user experience. We hope to do that in a way that's not mind-numbingly tedious for the user to read.

This document does not offer a comprehensive guide to usage. When in doubt, please consult the *Chicago Manual of Style*, <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>, or the Merriam Webster Dictionary and Thesaurus, <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

Exceptions to the *Chicago Manual* are listed in the final section of this document, *Specific Conventions*.

Tone

The overall tone of content should be approachable, conversational, confident, and helpful. The majority of the content is instructive and API developers are located across the world, so avoid colloquialisms or slang that may not translate to a broad base of users. That said, don't be afraid to make it fun to read.

- Edit content heavily to ensure that text is clear and concise, cutting out repetition
- Use simple expressions
- Avoid words and expressions unfamiliar to non-native English speakers
- Use language that promotes diversity and inclusion

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Web Copy Style

The most important ideals are clarity and economy of expression. API Developers come to the SDC site to accomplish activities, take on new assignments, train and collaborate. Keeping in mind that many readers have short attention spans for web copy in the best of circumstances, and even less so on a deadline crunch, the web copy style should be focused on the task at hand.

In most cases, users have come to expect task-based documentation instead of descriptions of features. They want to know how to accomplish goals, rather than how to understand the meaning of individual interface elements isolated from a meaningful user workflow. Write in sentences that are easy to understand and keep the subject matter focused. Topical focus helps the reader evaluate the page content quickly. It also offers advantages for search engine visibility, where a clear and quickly identifiable content theme is important.

Online readers generally skim text to get an overview of a page before settling into full-fledged reading. The structure of the SDC website has been set-up to accommodate this user behavior. Positioning keywords at the beginnings of sentences, headings, and links makes skimming more effective. Initial keywords also help with link and heading lists.

Always, always, always use the simplest words and phrasing possible. Scott Adams offers a perfect example in *The Dilbert Principle*: "I utilized a multitined tool to process a starch resource." Translation: "I used my fork to eat a potato." Go for the latter approach.

Here's another actual example Scott Adams received from a fan:

"This change will allow us to better leverage our talent base in an area where developmental roles are under way and strategically focuses us toward the upcoming Business System transition where Systems literacy and accuracy will be essential to maintain and to further improve service levels to our customer base going forward."

I was planning to offer a translation, but to be honest, I have no idea what that says. Really. No idea at all. My best guess: *"Better training in our system will allow us to provide better and more accurate customer service in the future."*

The point is, don't let your writing become something Scott Adams will someday use as a bad example in a Dilbert cartoon. Your job is to inform, not to confuse.

In short:

- Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- Always cut words, wherever possible

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- Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Tips

Focus On Tasks

The SDC site is task-focused from start to finish. Content should enable and empower the users in each task they attempt. Translate random features into meaningful tasks. Start by understanding what the users *do* (both what they *want* to do and what they *need* to do). It helps to understand their workflow. Also, know the *whys* as well as the *hows*.

Strategies: Brainstorm! There is no substitute for a concentrated brainstorming session, preferably with other team members. Make it a casual exercise, maybe even over lunch or coffee. A lot of great ideas start on napkins. Take notes. No one should judge or critique anyone's idea. Bad ideas can spark great ones.

Afterward (and only afterward), combine similar concepts, trash inappropriate tasks, and begin to arrange the results into a logical order. Make sure to name the tasks in a way that is meaningful to the users.

Signify Through Structure

Well-structured information is far more effective than big blocks of text. Users let their eyes skim over large blocks of text, often missing critical details. Let the structure of the site guide your content. There are clear sections that help break up content and define where it should appear.

Strategies: Use clear formatting cues, such as numbers with hanging indents for steps, and consistent repetition for layered information, notes, tips, etc. Always keep the users in mind, particularly where and how they use the tools you're providing. Make sure the visual presentation of the information is appropriate for the media and comfortable to use.

Some specifics for structure:

Editorial landmarks such as titles and headings are the fundamental human interface device in web content. A consistent approach to titles, headings, and subheadings helps your users navigate through a complex set steps and procedures.

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Headline style: bold, capitalize initial letters of words

- Document titles
- References to other web sites
- Titles of documents mentioned in the text
- Proper names, product names, trade names

Down style: bold, capitalize first word only

- Subheads
- References to other sections within the site
- Figure titles
- Lists

Page titles

The title is the first thing users see. It also becomes the text for any bookmarks the user makes to your content. In addition, most search engines regard the page title as the primary descriptor of page content.

The page title should:

- Contain carefully chosen keywords and themes for the page
- Form a concise, plainly worded description of the page contents
- Be unique, if possible

Always consider the length of your page title. The page title also becomes the bookmark text, and some web browsers truncate long page titles (more than sixty-five characters, including spaces) in a way that makes them less legible.

For example:

How to install Java

is better than:

Developers, Scrum Masters, and other AT&T technical personnel working in the Software Development Center should follow this set of instructions provided below to install the Java software onto their development machines when appropriate for their specific tasks and environments

Always consider what your page title will look like in a long list of bookmarks or in a list of search results. Make sure users can tell at a glance that they've likely found the right article.

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Walk Through the 'Why'

Some procedures are quite obvious; others require some explanation to give users the motivation to perform the task.

Strategies: Write a sentence or two as an introduction directly after the procedure title. This is your chance to explain what the procedure is for, why or when users need to do it, and also to distinguish between similarly-named procedures. When appropriate, provide cross-references.

List the Prerequisites

Let's say you're baking a cake. The recipe tells you you'll need chocolate, sugar, flour, eggs, and milk. You run to the store and get everything you need. Then, halfway through, the recipe tells you to add the baking powder. You look back over the list of ingredients. Baking powder isn't listed. *Grrrr*. You're at a crucial point. You can't stop and go back to the store. So you try baking soda instead, thinking that's probably the same thing. It isn't, and your cake is ruined. How do you feel? Think about that when writing your instructional copy. Prevent user frustration and task failure by carefully listing all real prerequisites for the task after the introduction.

Strategies: Brainstorm: tools, information, software installation, time, previous tasks, and system privileges are a few ideas. Don't list the obvious. Your users probably know they need, say, a computer. (If not, there are bigger problems). Again, think of a cookbook — a recipe probably won't tell you you need a stove. (If you don't know that, you're not ready to be cooking.) It will, however, list any special or unusual tools that the typical person might not have around, like a spiralizer (I don't know what one is either) or a meat thermometer.

Smooth out Steps

Steps are the main part of the procedure. We all know how to write clear, short imperative statements, but we sometimes fail to edit the steps to make them absolutely clear and unambiguous.

Strategies: First, make sure that you yourself can perform the step. Seriously, you can't write about it clearly if you don't know how to do it. Don't depend on research. If you can't do it yourself, find someone who can walk you through it, step by step. Then, have them validate your notes and final copy.

Next, decide how to chunk the information. This can be difficult. A single step for an advanced user may require finer chunking (more steps) for a novice. Keep actions that go together logically together (for example, "Select the expiration date and click **OK**.")

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Finally, limit the number of steps. Long procedures have a higher failure rate simply because users tend to lose their place and skip steps. Solve this problem by using subheadings for logical sections of the overall task, restarting the numbering at 1 in each section.

Finally, remember to use parallel construction when writing your steps.

Layer Levels

Minimalist documentation can be frustrating, because it assumes that no one needs the detail. On the other hand, stating the blatantly obvious in a step ("enter your name in the Name field") is a waste of time. However, sticking with the Name Field example, you might need to tell users information that's not blatantly obvious, like the length of the field, if any characters are not allowed, how the field is used by the application, etc. Find a balance.

Strategies: Go beyond the obvious. Offer extra information in the form of layered text (that is, less visually-prominent text that sits under the main step).

- Like this. This can include:
 - Clarification
 - More details to help novice users
 - Advanced tips for experienced users
 - And stuff like that
 - You can add more levels if you need to. Make it easy for the user to scan. That's the goal.
- Most bullet lists don't use periods, unless they are complete sentences, or multiple sentence above.
- Make sure that you use consistent visual cues that will allow users to skip over this extra info if they don't need it, and to actively seek it if they want more details.
- By the way, these bullets are a visual example of what we're talking about here. Visual examples are good tools to use.

Highlight Hazards

Alerting users to potential problems — and when they might occur — is key.

Strategies: Look for hidden hazards. Look for clues in the information you receive from SMEs. Ask scenario-based questions ("What will happen if...?") to determine the actual ramifications of an action. Think of the worst case scenario.

Once you have identified hazards, classify them. But don't confuse the user with different signal words. For example, no one notices the difference between Caution and Warning, even if the distinction is spelled out somewhere in the content.

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Start the hazard text with a clear 'do' or 'do not' statement. If necessary, explain why. In some cases, you may need to include a work-around in case the hazard was ignored (i.e. if you accidentally start the Zombie Apocalypse, board up the doors and windows and gather weapons). Finally, place the hazard appropriately; it needs to be directly *before* the potentially hazardous action. Not after. Like: “Find — but do not press — the detonate button on the nuclear warhead” is better than: “Find the detonate button on the warhead. It is large and red and should be located on the bottom. Don’t press it.”

Get Graphic

When you document a physical task (installing a piece of hardware, removing the batteries from a camera, etc.), a graphic is usually essential. It can simplify and reduce the text, while providing users with clear orientation and confirmation.

Strategies: Decide if you really need a graphic. A screen grab of a simple dialog box is usually not needed, while a line drawing with direction arrows can mean the difference between success and failure when trying to explain a complicated user interface (another tip: don’t make complicated user interfaces). Position the graphic with clear proximity to the action, and annotate it to focus the reader's attention.

Developing your visual literacy is a worthwhile investment, but don’t forget the text. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but they still benefit from captions. A combination of text and graphics communicates more than either alone. Ikea, I’m looking at you.

Test, Test, Test!

Your responsibility does not end with a draft procedure. (Nice try, Ace.) Remember, we are working in an Agile environment. Documentation usability testing lets us refine, correct, and clarify.

Strategies: Identify which procedures need testing. Focus on those that were long, complex, or very difficult to write (if it was hard for you, it’ll probably be hard for them. Your job is to make sure that’s not so.). If this is a new version of an existing procedure, talk to developers, Scrum masters, and anyone else familiar with the process to find out which tasks caused problems previously. Find testers who match your audience. Provide your draft copy of the procedure and ask the tester to think out loud while attempting to complete the task. You can often spot problems, such as places where you assumed knowledge, accidentally left out a step, or interrupted the flow with unnecessary detail. Based on your observations, you can go back and refine the procedures.

Best Practices

Keeping a few guidelines in mind can go a long way toward making your words easy to understand:

- Get to the point. Use short words and phrases and omit unnecessary words.
- Use contractions like it's instead of it is, or they're instead of they are. It makes your writing sound more conversational, and it increases both comprehension and reading speed.
- On a related note, remember that "it's" is a contraction for "it is." When making it possessive, use "its." For example: "It's time we got started" and "That is its purpose." This is an exceptionally common error — and it's one that's often made by the people who know its correct usage best.
- Make sure your article is easy to scan and is organized logically.
- Never use a TLA (Three Letter Acronym) without defining it, no matter how common it is in your work environment.
- Keep it simple. Express one thought at a time and use plain language.
- Aim for a friendly, conversational style. While you want to be as clear and concise as possible, there is no reason it has to be tedious. Even instructional copy meant to be absorbed at a glance can be fun to read.
- Focus on specific tasks and the steps needed to accomplish those steps.
- Use clear formatting cues, such as numbers with hanging indents for steps, and consistent repetition for layered information, notes, tips, etc. When designing the layout, always keep the users in mind, particularly where and how they use the information.
- Plan before you write. Focus on the needs of the reader/user. What do they want to accomplish? How can they do so best? Try to find ways to make their jobs just a little easier.
- Look for ways to replace blocks of copy with bulleted lists or, better yet, with illustrations.
- Begin each article with a summary that lists everything that's covered, such as every tool that will be accessed/used and every step that will be accomplished. This helps users scan quickly to ensure they've accessed the correct content and also helps with search. Write a sentence or a paragraph as an introduction directly after the headline. This is your chance to explain what the procedure is for, why or when users need to do it, and also to distinguish between similarly-named procedures.
- On a related note, when there is possible confusion with similarly-named or related topics, provide clarification and cross-references.

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- Provide pre-requisites. Let the reader know if previous steps need to be taken to accomplish the task (i.e. training, software installation, etc.).
- State the Purpose and Targeted Audience. Writers and editors can assist readers in finding those communications that are relevant to them if the targeted audience is listed and a purpose statement is included.
- Provide a Contact Method for Feedback. All publications should contain a way for end users to contact the publication owner. This may be in the form of a hyperlink to a group mailbox address, a name and telephone number, or a feedback form. It is important to provide end users with a point of contact should questions or issues arise (e.g., broken links, corrections, questions, etc.)
- Write Globally. Keep in mind that we are a global company operating in locations throughout the world. Avoid slang and obscure idioms that may not be familiar to non-native English speakers. The more basic a word is, the better the chance is that it will be understood. ("Big" is a better choice than "enormous" for example. "Make" is a better choice than "manufacture.") The phrase "hanging by a thread" is an English idiom, or figure of speech. Non-native English speakers or those unfamiliar with the phrase won't immediately understand its meaning.

Finally:

- Have a Defined Review Process in Place. It's important to review publications for accuracy, spelling, grammar, and content thoroughly before distribution. To ensure publications containing errors are not distributed, it is important to have a review process in place and that it be utilized each time prior to publication.
- As a part of that review process, always have someone else read your work. It is virtually impossible to proof your own work. Trust me; there was actually a typo in that previous sentence that a co-worker caught. Besides, if something goes wrong, you'll want someone else to blame. (Kidding!) When possible, have an actual user test the copy to ensure that your intent is understood clearly.
- Use Version Control. To avoid confusion and rework, maintain a standard system of version and change control. This may be systematically enforced (i.e., document repository with check-out/check-in capabilities) or manual (version/change control table with the publication, version number on header or footer, etc.).

When you've finished, read over it one last time and ask yourself these questions:

- Would I be comfortable reading this communication out loud?
- Is the tone of my communication friendly and conversational?

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- Am I using simple and easily understood language?
- Am I providing the right information and enough detail to inform my readers and not confuse them?
- Am I focusing on the benefit?
- Am I inviting readers into the conversation by talking *with* them instead of *at* them?

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Section by Section Guidelines

The following sections provide “before and after” looks at edited copy. Feel free to use these as guides when creating new content. The revised content provides the user with a streamlined experience from activity to activity. It is divided into sections consistent with each activity, providing an at-a-glance view of the scope of the task – from a summary to number of steps required.

The sections of content include:

t-Terms

When creating content, keep in mind any new terms or acronyms that may be introduced. You can scan the existing glossary to see if you should add any terms that appear in your content. The t-terms are populated for each page to create an at-a-glance glossary for the developers as they work through the process.

When adding to t-Terms, follow this format:

TLA — A three-letter acronym, or three-letter abbreviation, is an abbreviation, specifically an acronym, alphabetism, or initialism, consisting of three letters.

Tools

Tools are links or documents that the user might find beneficial while in the development process. Some examples include wiki links, library resources, etc.

When adding to the Tools section, include a hyperlink and any instructions that may be required.

Summary Section

The summary section appears at the top of each page and provides the user an at-a-glance overview of the task and/or its requirements. It is a broad overview of the activity and/or definition of program, why it is necessary and what may be required in order to complete the task.

Let’s Get Started/How To

This content provides simplified, step-by-step instruction on how to complete the task. It should appear in a numbered list format.

Example I

Current:

Setup Access – Obtain a New Service Id

How To

M2E bundles and stand alone single services use hydra and register with LDAP – a directory service that is used for looking up M2E bundles and stand alone single services and also used by management tools. A service id is not needed if the service or bundle uses DME2.

For DME1, as part of a initial registration process, an x500 name and service id is created to identify the bundle or stand alone single service.

In order to test and successfully run a bundle or stand alone single service, follow these steps to request an x500 name and corresponding service id:

- Go to Universal Self Help website
- Select "REQUEST A NEW SERVICE ID" option and click next.
- Fill relevant service information and submit.
- You will be notified via email once the request is complete.

Note that service id should only be requested for DME1 Bundle services and stand alone single services and not for individual Operations within the Bundle. A service id is not needed if the service or bundle uses DME2.

t-Terms

M2E - Model to Execution. The M2E framework is an AT&T developed high-performance runtime implementation for CSI services.

LDAP - Lightweight Directory Access Protocol; a directory service that is used for looking up M2E bundles and stand alone single services and also used by management tools; Middleware Management Tool (MMT) for DME 1.0 or GRM GUI for DME 2.0.

DME - Direct Messaging Engine

Tools

Key Documents - Use this to see a categorized list of links to documentation and sites.

M2E Developer Guide – The purpose of this document is to explain how to build a service yourself.

Universal Self Help website – Learn more

http://ushportal.it.att.com/step2.cfm?proc_id=312073&app=9565&home=ush

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New:

Get a New Service ID

Summary:

A Service ID is only needed for API Developers working with DME1 (Direct Messaging Engine) Bundle services and standalone single services. It is not needed for individual Operations within the Bundle or if the service or bundle uses DME2. You'll need to follow four steps to request an x500 name and corresponding service ID.

Wait a minute. Why do I need this?

M2E (Model to Execution) bundles and standalone single services use hydra and register with LDAP (Lightweight Directory Access Protocol) — a directory service used for looking up M2E bundles and standalone single services. Management tools also use LDAP. For DME1, an x500 name and service ID is created to identify, test, and successfully run a bundle or standalone single service as part of the initial registration process.

Let's Get Started:

1. Go to the [Universal Self Help website](#).
2. Select "REQUEST A NEW SERVICE ID" option and click next.
3. Complete the relevant service information and submit.
4. Receive email notification once request is complete.

That's it!

t-Terms

M2E — Model to Execution. The M2E framework is an AT&T-developed, high-performance runtime implementation for CSI services.

LDAP — Lightweight Directory Access Protocol is a directory service used to look up M2E bundles and standalone single services, and also by management tools — Middleware Management Tool (MMT) for DME 1.0 or GRM GUI for DME 2.0.

DME — Direct Messaging Engine.

Tools

Key Documents — Use this to see a categorized list of links to documentation and relevant reference sites.

M2E Developer Guide — A document that explains how to build a service yourself.

Universal Self Help website — Learn more

Example II

Current:

Setup Environment – Install Maven

How To

Maven is used to auto generate code, perform builds and project management of M2E services.

Apache Maven is a software project management and comprehension tool. Based on the concept of a project object model (POM), Maven can manage a project's build, reporting and documentation from a central piece of information.

- *Download Maven 2.2.x from [Software Asset Management website](#).*

 - *Unzip Maven distribution to a desired directory on local system.*
 - *Add the location to bin directory of Maven installation (i.e. <location of Maven>/bin) to Windows PATH environment variable.*
 - *Define the recommended MAVEN_OPTS Windows environment variable as:
MAVEN_OPTS=-Xmx1024m -XX:MaxPermSize=256m*
 - *Ensure that JAVA_HOME environment variable is defined and %JAVA_HOME%/bin is added to Windows PATH environment variable.*
 - *Open a new command prompt and run mvn --version to verify that it is correctly installed.*
 - *Copy settings.xml from [here](#) under .m2 directory usually created under C:\Documents and Settings\<user name> folder. Once saved, edit the file to update local Repository tag to indicate exact path to .m2 directory on the system.*
- Refer to [this wiki site](#) for further information.*

t-Terms

M2E - Model to Execution. The M2E framework is an AT&T developed high-performance runtime implementation for CSI services.

Tools

Key Documents - Use this to see a categorized list of links to documentation and sites.

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New:

Install Maven

Summary

This article tells API Developers how to download and install Apache Maven, a software project management and comprehension tool based on the concept of a project object model (POM). Use Maven to manage a project's build, reporting, and documentation from a central piece of information. Use Maven to:

- Auto-generate code
- Perform builds
- Project management of M2E services

Let's Get Started

If you're an API Developer, follow these steps to download and install Maven:

1. Download Maven 2.2.x from the [Software Asset Management website](#).
2. Unzip Maven distribution to your desired directory on your local system.
3. Add the location to bin directory of Maven installation (i.e. <location of Maven>/bin) to the Windows PATH environment variable.

4. Define the recommended MAVEN_OPTS Windows environment variable as:

```
MAVEN_OPTS=-Xmx1024m -XX:MaxPermSize=256m
```

5. Ensure that JAVA_HOME environment variable is defined and %JAVA_HOME%/bin is added to the Windows PATH environment variable.
6. Open a new command prompt and run mvn-version to verify that it's installed correctly.
7. Copy settings.xml from [here](#) under .m2 directory — usually created under C:\Documents and Settings\

t-Terms

M2E — Model to Execution. The M2E framework is an AT&T-developed, high-performance runtime implementation for CSI services.

Apache Maven — a software project management and comprehension tool based on the concept of a project object model (POM).

Tools

Refer to [this wiki site](#) for further information.

[Key Documents](#) — A categorized list of links to documentation and sites.

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Specific Conventions

Again, this is not meant to be a comprehensive guide to style. When in doubt, refer to the *Chicago Manual of Style* (<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>) or the Merriam Webster Dictionary and Thesaurus (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>).

In some cases, however, there are more than one correct answer, like whether or not to use the Oxford or Serial Comma (spoiler alert: we do) or whether or not to capitalize the word “web.” Certain conventions (“Web” and “website,” for example) reflect predominant usage online over style that is technically correct.

However, *consistency is important for professionalism, as well as readability and clarity*. So the following list defines our “house style.” *Always follow it.*

acronyms

Use all caps for acronyms of two to four letters, except for letters that represent prepositions or determiners (*a*, *an*, or *the*). For example, for the Museum of Modern Art, write *MoMA*. In general, use initial caps for acronyms five letters and longer. For example: *Nasdaq*. There is one exception: *WYSIWYG*. Ours is not to reason why. Write the full name of an abbreviation or acronym followed by the abbreviation or acronym in parenthesis at the first mention of the name. You may then use the abbreviation or acronym for the remainder of the article. As mentioned above, never use a TLA (Three Letter Acronym) without defining it. Do it just like I did in the previous sentence, or like in this one, to be an Instructional Copy Genius (ICG).

agreement

Words referring to aggregates of individuals are treated like any other word (i.e., agreement is determined by whether the word is plural or singular). For example, *The San Francisco Giants are going to win the pennant; They are going to win the pennant; The team is going to win the pennant.*

Company names that are written in plural form take singular verbs and pronouns. For example, *Cisco Systems is headquartered in San Jose, Calif.* Generally, you can distinguish the two cases by introducing the word ‘the’ in front of the name in question. For example, *The Giants are going to win the pennant.* Not: **The Cisco Systems are headquartered in San Jose, Calif.*

Company names take the neuter pronoun *it*. For example, *Microsoft restated its earnings.*

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Words referring to aggregates of individuals are treated like any other word (i.e., agreement is determined by whether the word is plural or singular). For example, *The San Francisco Giants are going to win the pennant; They are going to win the pennant; The team is going to win the pennant.*

apostrophe

There is never, ever a time when it is correct to make a word plural by adding an apostrophe and an s. The apostrophe makes a word possessive. For example, use the 1980s to refer to the decade, unless you are someday, for some reason, describing something that belongs to the 1980s. Like, that is the 1980's new car. I can't imagine that will ever happen, but you never know.

ampersand (&)

It is appropriate to use the ampersand in the names of IT organizations, but never in place of *and* in a headline or body copy (except when referring to an IT organization).

AT&T

Our company name must be used accurately and consistently across our communications to convey one unified, global brand and avoid confusion. The following guidelines for using our company name will help others accurately refer to and understand our organization:

- When using our name in text, never use lowercase letterforms to represent our company or legal name (e.g., at&t or at&t, Inc.).
- Always use all uppercase letterforms (e.g., AT&T or AT&T, Inc.) when referring to our company or legal name in text.
- Our signature (i.e., company logo) is the only application to use lowercase letterforms.
- Do not place our signature in a line of text.

bulleted lists

Introduce a bulleted list with a colon. Capitalize the first letter of the first word of each bulleted item. Bulleted items must be parallel in construction. End bulleted sentences with periods (not semicolons or commas), but do not punctuate the end of fragments.

Capitalization

Avoid unnecessary capitalization. Only capitalize job titles if they precede the title holder's name. For example, *Chief Executive Officer Jack Welch*. Do not use all-caps for company

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names unless the name is an acronym. For example: *AT&T*, *IBM*, *One Touch Systems Inc.* (not **ONE TOUCH Systems Inc.*).

company names

Avoid unnecessary punctuation and symbols in company names. For example, *Yahoo*, *CNet*, *E-Trade Securities*, *Avanti*. Where a company name is spelled with an initial lowercase letter, do not capitalize the name at the beginning of a sentence. For example, *eBay*.

dashes

Use em-dashes (either coded as a dash (—) or typed as two hyphens (--)) to set off distinct thoughts within a sentence. Better, try to rephrase your thoughts to avoid dashes in the first place. When used, treat an em-dash as a word, with a space on either side. For example, *No one disputes that Thom — who spells his name with an 'h' — is a totally rad dude.*

dates and times

Local conventions for specifying dates vary. To avoid ambiguity, either specify a date's month by name or letter abbreviation, or use the international standard date notation, *yyyy-mm-dd*. For example, *Feb. 24, 1998*, or *1998-02-24*.

Specify time of day by either using a 24-hour clock or omitting the seconds and using *a.m.* and *p.m.* For example, *17:15:23*, or *5:15 p.m.* Noon is *12:00:00* or *12:00 p.m.*

In general, include the relevant time zone abbreviation when specifying the time of day. Time zone abbreviations are capitalized and separated from the time by a space. For example, *10:54 a.m. ET*.

decimals

Place a 0 before decimals less than 1. For example, *0.27*. In describing quantities in millions, use one decimal place at most. For example, *\$2.7 million*. In describing billions (one billion being equal to one thousand million), use no more than two decimal places.

In general, use decimals instead of fractions.

dollars

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Abbreviate with a dollar sign (\$) when used to describe an amount. Spell out only when discussing the type of currency itself. Do not hyphenate adjectival phrases. For example, *A \$5 million bonus.*

e-commerce

email

Do not hyphenate.

emoticons

Avoid. :-(

etc.

Etc. is the abbreviated form of et cetera meaning “and other things.” It should never be used in reference people. *Etc.* implies that a list of things is too extreme to write, but writers often seem to run out of thoughts and tack on *etc.* for no real purpose. Also, two redundancies often appear with this abbreviation: (1) *and etc.*, which is poor style because *et* means “and,” and (2) *etc.* at the end of a list that begins with *e.g.*, which properly introduces a short but not complete list of examples.

extranet

hard drive

his/her

When an indefinite antecedent is male or female, try to rephrase your sentence to avoid this construction. For example, *Good reporters protect their sources* rather than *a good reporter protects his sources.*

homepage

HTML

Accepted abbreviation for *HyperText Markup Language.*

hyphens

In general, a phrase is hyphenated when used as an adjective, but not when used as a noun. Again, ours is not to reason why. For example, *a high-net-worth investor; a highly intuitive solution; a more involved project.*

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i.e. and e.g.

i.e. is an abbreviation for *id est*, meaning “that is.” *e.g.* is the abbreviation for *exempli gratia*, meaning “for example.” Always put a comma after either of them when using them in a sentence. Of course, you can always just say “that is” or “for example.” It’s your call.

Internet, the Net

intranet

jargon

Avoid technical terms if you can; most can be rephrased into meaningful English. If a term cannot be rephrased, it should be avoided, unless it is commonly used, accepted and understood. This is the “show pity on the new hires” rule.

Java

JavaScript

JPEG

Accepted acronym for *joint photographic experts group*, and for a technique of compressing color images.

log in (v.); log-in (n., adj.)

log out (v.); log-out (n., adj.)

m-commerce

Acceptable abbreviation for mobile e-commerce.

measurements

Do not use " for inches or ' for feet: For example, *A 12-inch ruler; A 10-foot pole.*

Spell out the following:

inches

feet

miles

pages

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pounds

yards

Use the following abbreviations (and don't spell out when preceded by a numeric value):

cm (centimeter)

dpi (dots per inch)

fps (frames per
second)

GB (gigabyte)

GHz (gigahertz)

Hz (hertz)

Kb (kilobit)

Kbps (kilobits per
second)

KB (kilobyte)

KBps (kilobytes per
second)

KHz (kilohertz)

Mb (megabit)

Mbps (megabits per
second)

MB (megabyte)

MBps (megabytes per
second)

MHz (megahertz)

mm (millimeter)

mph (miles per hour)

ms (millisecond)

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ppm (pages per
minute)

Do not hyphenate adjectival phrases using measured quantities with abbreviated units of measure. For example, *He bought a 1200 dpi printer and a 10 GB hard drive.*

Do hyphenate such phrases when the units are not abbreviated. For example, *There was a 20-second delay before he dropped them both off the 200-foot cliff.*

Million, billion

One *million* is equal to 1,000,000, and can be abbreviated by *M*. For example, *Mom & Pop Co. took a \$23M accounting charge in 2002.*

One *billion* is equal to 1,000,000,000, and can be abbreviated by *B*.

Numbered lists

Bullet points are preferred unless the exact order or the exact number of items is significant (as in steps in a process). Numbered lists follow the rules for bulleted lists outlined above.

Numerals

Spell out numbers *zero* through *nine*. Use digits for *10* through *999,999*. Above 1 million, spell out *million*, *billion*, *trillion*, etc. (One billion is one thousand million; one trillion is one million million.) For example, *The company shipped 1 million units, but only 780,000 arrived intact.*

Do not go more than one decimal place when spelling out the magnitude in millions, and two decimal places for billions. For example, *\$5.1 million*. *\$5,104,300* also is acceptable.

Where describing a range, use *to*, not a dash. For example, *There will be 20 to 25 people at the party.*

Spell out all numerals (except for years) that begin sentences. For example, *Twenty units were completely destroyed. 1999 was a very good year.*

Always use numerals in addresses.

Always use numerals for measured quantities. For example, *He was driving 5 mph. The PC ships with a 7 GB hard drive.*

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On to

Do not shorten (to *onto*) unless the combination is used to mean "end up on top of." For example, *Let's move on to better things; You can log on to the server; He jumped onto the car.*

offline

Always one word, no hyphen, when used to mean "not connected to the Internet." In all other uses, spell as two words, hyphenated. For example, *The tracking system is still off-line.*

online

Always one word, no hyphen, when used to mean "connected to the Internet."

onscreen

onsite

open source

over

Generally describes a spatial relationship, not a relative quantity or amount of something. In the latter case, use *more than*.

percent

In general, spell out. Use numerals when spelling percentages. For example, *A 5 percent increase.* Do not hyphenate when forming compound adjectival phrases. For example, *We discovered a 30 percent drop-off.* The word percent can be abbreviated in graphs and charts. Drop the first "percent" when providing a range. For example, *25 to 35 percent.*

P.O. Box

pop-up window

publication names

Italicize the names of newspapers and magazines in print. For example, italicize the name of the *Wall Street Journal*, but not WSJ.com.

punctuation

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Follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* (<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>).

real time (n.); real-time (adj.)

Serial/Oxford Comma

Always use the serial comma, also known as the Oxford comma. The Oxford comma is a comma before the word 'and' at the end of a list: *We sell books, videos, and magazines*. While this comma is not used in newspapers, it is generally accepted style in most other media, and has been shown to enhance reading speed and comprehension, and to eliminate confusion. For example? Compare:

Amanda found herself in the Winnebago with her ex-boyfriend, an herbalist and a pet detective.

Amanda found herself in the Winnebago with her ex-boyfriend, an herbalist, and a pet detective.

The second sentence makes it clear that Amanda is with three different people. In the first sentence, Amanda could be with three people, or with one ex-boyfriend who is both an herbalist and a pet detective (which likely explains why he's an ex). If the first example is, in fact, your intention, consider rewording to avoid confusion.

While the Oxford comma may not always seem necessary, use it always to be consistent.

spam (n., v.)

As a noun, this means unsolicited email. As a verb, *to spam* means to send unsolicited email. Capitalize Spam only when it refers to a meat-like product. Hey, it might come up. You never know.

titles

Accepted abbreviation: *CEO*. Acceptable abbreviations: *CFO*, *COO*, and *CTO* (chief technology officer). Unacceptable abbreviations: **VP*.

Chief executive is not a title and is not capitalized when preceding a name. For example, *Apple chief executive Steve Jobs led the company out of its past woes*. Vice presidents are ascribed divisions with *of* (not with commas). For example, *Joseph Johnson was promoted to vice president of marketing*.

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TLAs

Three Letter Acronym. See acronyms.

URL

Accepted abbreviation for *uniform resource locator*.

voicemail (n., adj.); voice-mailbox

web, World Wide Web

(Note: The word *web* is a proper noun, and would normally be capitalized, but is often not capitalized in web copy. It is, however, usually capitalized in other media.)

web addresses

Follow the style for website names when referring to the site as a whole. When referring to the address of a specific web page (including a site's homepage), write out the full address, including the *http://*.

web links

Use hyperlinks selectively, and keep them short. When linking text, link from a noun or noun phrase if possible, but link to a verb phrase if necessary to avoid confusion.

website

(Note: The word *website* is often treated as one word in web copy, but is typically written as two words (*Web site*) in other media (in which the word *Web* is also often capitalized). For consistency of usage, use *website* even though it's not technically correct.

website names

In general, drop the *www*. For example, *MetaFilter.com*. Capitalize as the site treats its own name (avoiding excessive caps). For example, *CNet.com*, *craigslist.org*.

Wifi

For consistency of usage, use *Wifi* even though *WiFi* is technically correct.

