

Writers' Guide to Official CompanyName Style

Resistance is Futile

Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you
can. That is the only secret of style.

- Matthew Arnold

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Chapter 1 General Style Information

Why is style important?

Readers want information that they can understand quickly, whether it is print or online. The best way to transmit or convey information to our readers is provide them with clear documentation that has good style.

At CompanyName, documentation with good style not only meets the needs of our readers, it also provides many cost benefits. For example, the risk of a meter installer incorrectly installing a meter is minimized if the procedure is written simply and clearly. Well-written documentation can also reduce support costs.

Two guidelines for good writing

Keep these two principles in mind when writing technical documentation:

- **Write in a straightforward and concise manner.** Anything that impedes the readers' understanding is bad style.
- **Provide accurate content.** Anything that compromises the document's validity is bad style.

Write simply, directly, and accurately

Straightforward, uncluttered writing is easier to understand than convoluted text. Keep sentences and syntax simple. Use short, familiar words. Respect your reader's level of technical knowledge and competency, and make sure that your writing does not convey an arrogant or patronizing tone.

A reader expects you to be an expert on the subject or product discussed in your document. Write in a style that affirms your expertise. Avoid sentences that include "you can" or "it is recommended," which can confuse your reader who asks "but **should** I do this?" Use imperative verbs that tell a reader accurately and concisely what to do.

Chapter 2 Mechanics of Writing

This chapter outlines how to use words in CompanyName documentation. If you follow these guidelines consistently, your documentation will have good style.

Capitalization

Writers tend to capitalize words unnecessarily. Proper nouns are capitalized, where common nouns are not. A **proper noun** identifies a specific member of a class, whereas a **common noun** denotes either the whole class or any random member of the class.

Capitalize a word that refers to a particular member of a class:

Check the Multi-function Meter Module display.

As a rule, do not capitalize the class itself:

Check the meter module display.

Refer to the “CompanyName Technology Glossary” to verify capitalization for CompanyName terms.

When to capitalize

In general, capitalize:

- abbreviations and acronyms
- the first term used in figure callouts and proper nouns in figure callouts
- the words “table,” “figure,” “appendix,” “chapter,” and “section,” when followed by a letter or number

Turn to Chapter 3.

Turn to the next chapter.

- the names of function keys on a keyboard

Control key

Escape key

- the first word in a sentence, unless the sentence begins with a literal command name or other literal computer term that is not capitalized (try to write in a way that avoids such occurrences)

Use the `format` utility to divide the disk into slices.

-
- the first word of a complete sentence following a colon
 The software saves time: You can now press a single key to accomplish what used to take hours of complex calculations.
 - the first letter of any word in a title. Do not capitalize conjunctions and articles, prepositions of fewer than four letters, and the “to” in infinitives, unless they appear at the beginning or end of the title
 See Chapter 3, “Using the Mouse.”
 - the second element of a hyphenated compound in a title **if** it is a proper adjective that has **equal** force with the first element
 Installing a Half-Inch Disk Drive
 Using a Look-up Table
 - the first word in figure captions, table captions, and headings

When not to capitalize

In general, do **not** capitalize:

- the word “page” or “step” when followed by a number
 Refer to page 45.
 Skip step 3 if you are not installing a CD-ROM drive.
- words or phrases that ordinarily appear in a shortened form in capital letters (unless they are themselves proper nouns)
 field-replaceable unit FRU
 direct memory access DMA
- strictly for emphasis (use italics for emphasis)
- variable names used in code examples
- alphanumeric keys in a key combination
 Control-q Escape-m
- words in figure callouts other than the first word or proper nouns
- in a chapter title, conjunctions, articles, prepositions of fewer than four letters, and the “to” in infinitives, unless they appear at the beginning or end of the title
 Elements of the User Interface
 Using the Numeric Keypad to Enter Data
 Saving Time With ACME Software
- words in a heading, except for the first word

Contractions

You can't write naturally without using contractions, but:

- Don't overuse them.
- Avoid obscure contractions and nonstandard usages and regionalisms.

 mustn't mightn't shan't
 ain't don't (to mean "does not")

- Never create your own contractions.
- Use **it's** correctly. **It's** is the contraction of **it is**. **Its** is the possessive of **it**.

 It's the correct contraction to use.

 Its features are many.

- Use **you're** correctly. **You're** is the contraction of **you are**. **Your** is a possessive adjective.

 You're looking at the data entry window.

 Check the settings on your modem.

- Use **their**, **there** and **they're** correctly. **They're** is the contraction of **they are**. **Their** is a possessive adjective. **There** is an adverb indicating location or place.

 Their car went into the ditch over there, so now they're stuck.

Numbers and numerals

A **number** is a characteristic that describes a unit within a collection. A number is expressed by **numerals** (1, 2, 3, 4) or by words.

Spelling out numbers

Spell out:

- numbers from zero through nine, unless the number is part of a measurement

 three computers (a count)

 3 inches (a measurement)

- approximations

 You can choose from hundreds of applications for your computer.

- extreme values, such as "million" and "billion," but precede them with a numeral

 3 million instructions per second

-
- any number that begins a sentence
Ten files are required.
 - the first number, if a numeral immediately follows the number
Print the twelve 500,000-byte files.

Using numerals

Use numerals for:

- numbers 10 or greater
- numbers less than 10, if they are of the same type and appear in the same paragraph as numbers of 10 or greater

The menu offers 11 options, but you will use only 4.

- negative numbers
- most fractions (See “Using fractions” on page 6.)
- all percentages
- all decimals, including the leading zero

0.15

1.25

- all measurements
- chapter, section, part, page, figure, and table numbers

6 pounds

0.5-inch socket

Part 4

Chapter 6

Punctuating numbers and numerals

Numbers and numerals generally require the same punctuation as words. Punctuating numbers and numerals becomes troublesome, however, when they are compounded.

- Do not hyphenate numbers or numerals when they serve as single modifiers.

Your file comprises 500,000 bytes.

- Hyphenate numbers or numerals in compound modifiers.

Print your 500,000-byte file.

- Do not use a comma in numerals of four digits.

1028

6000

- Use a comma in numerals of more than four digits.

10,000

60,000

Using fractions

The usage of numerals for fractions depends upon the context. Sometimes spelling out the fraction or using decimals is the preferred form.

- Use numerals for fractions in tables and for units of measurement, but spell out common fractions in running text.

1/2-inch tape drive

half the users in the test

- Use a space between a numeral and its related fraction.

8 1/2 inches

- Insert a hyphen between the fraction and the term it is modifying.

8 1/2-inch width

- Use decimals when that is the industry standard.

5.25-inch drive

3.5-inch diskette

1/2-inch tape drive

- Spell out a numeric modifier of a fraction.
- ten 1/2-inch tape drives (10 tape drives for 1/2-inch tape)
- 10 1/2-inch tape drive (tape drive for 10 1/2-inch tape)

Using Decimals

When writing decimal numbers less than one, always include a leading zero

0.25 Btu

0.075 in.

Punctuation

This section reviews basic punctuation rules and guidelines for the English language, and notes exceptions that are specific to technical documentation.



Punctuation marks take on specialized meanings in the context of programming languages. One example is that of quotation marks in the C shell, which provide specialized meanings for single quotes (`'`), double quotes (`"`), and back quotes (```). Watch for these in your writing and editing.

Period

Use a period:

- **to end a sentence.** Use a period to end a declarative or imperative sentence.

Technical documentation must be grammatically precise.

Whenever possible, avoid ending a sentence with a verbatim command that must be typed. A reader might misinterpret the sentence's ending punctuation as an integral part of the command.

“Type `boot` to restart the computer.” vs.

“To restart the computer, type `boot`.”

- **with abbreviations.** A period follows some common abbreviations.
- **in file and directory names.** A period is sometimes part of a file name (separating a file name from a file extension).

The procedures are in the `howto.doc` file.

The `ls -a` command lists `.cshrc` and `.orgrc` among your hidden files.

- In the UNIX system, a period also serves as an abbreviation for the current directory.

To copy a file into the current directory, type: `cp ~/work/
budget.`

Comma

- Use a comma:
- **in a series.** Commas separate the items in a series of three or more words, phrases, and clauses.

Among your hidden files are `.cshrc`, `.defaults`, `.login`, `.logout`, and `.mailrc`.

Use the same procedures to select, move, and reduce windows, or to enlarge from icons.

If an independent clause already contains a comma, use a semicolon to separate items in a series.

The window has a menu bar, which lists available menus; a palette, which shows graphics tools; and a working area, where you draw.

- **to separate parts of a sentence.** Commas break long sentences into comprehensible parts.

A comma separates independent clauses joined by the coordinating conjunctions “and,” “but,” “yet,” “for,” “nor,” and “or.” Place the comma before the conjunction.

You don’t have to back up your files, but doing so is prudent.

She lost all of her work, yet she still doesn’t back up files.

Omit the comma between two short independent clauses in a sentence.

Back up your work or you’re fired.

Display the menu and choose Save.

Use a comma to separate a subordinate clause or long introductory phrase from the rest of the sentence.

Using the text editor, change the last line of the file.

By recording transactions and automating billing, the financial software saves time and prevents costly errors.

Use a comma after a dependent adverbial clause that starts a sentence, but not if the clause appears in normal order in the sentence.

Because this feature automatically updates system files, it saves time.

This feature saves time because it automatically updates system files.

A comma separates an introductory modifier from the rest of the sentence.

Hopefully, he entered the personnel office.

Confident she had saved her work, she logged out.

A comma sets off introductory interjections or transitional words.

Oh, did you need more information?

Fine, go ahead and set up that meeting.

- **with nonrestrictive phrases.** Use a comma to set off nonrestrictive clauses or phrases.

The mail icon, which looks like a mailbox, flashes.

Writers often refer to this book, which is a style guide, for writing technical publications at CompanyName.

- **with parenthetical text.** A comma sets off parenthetical material that is not enclosed by parentheses.

The software, with its simple interface, will decrease input time by 50 percent.

-
- **in addresses.** Use a comma to set off components of an address when the address is linear within a sentence.

Write to ACME Systems, Santa Maria, California.

- **with appositives.** In most cases, use commas instead of dashes to set off a single appositive.

The monitor, hardware that looks like a television set, has only one function.

- **in dates.** A comma separates components of a date. Do not use a comma when there are only two components of the date.

She was hired on January 1, 1989, and left six months later.

She was hired in January 1989.

Colon

Use a colon:

- **to introduce a list.** A colon helps introduce a list or a series. See “Lists” on page 24 for guidelines to use when punctuating lists.

Note that the colon takes the place of introductory phrases such as “as follows” and “listed below.”

Default settings include four secondary groups: operator, devices, accounts, and networks.

Three options available from the Diagnostics menu are:

- Test computer
- Inspect computer
- Upgrade firmware

When the introduction to a list or steps in a procedure is a complete sentence, use of the colon is optional. However, judge whether the ensuing list seems to flow naturally from the introduction; in effect, to complete the introductory sentence. If so, use a colon. Examples of different approaches follow:

- Learn how to send a message by following these steps:
- To send a message:
- Follow the steps in the next exercise to learn how to mail a message.

- **before explanatory text.** A colon indicates that the initial clause will be further explained or illustrated by information that follows the colon.

The colon serves as a substitute for phrases such as “in other words,” “namely,” or “for instance.” Notice in the following example that the first

word following the colon is capitalized. Capitalize the statement if it is a complete sentence; don't capitalize it if it's a fragment.

It was a software package doomed from the start: Its price was \$12,000, its language written in ALGOL, and its documentation was printed on 300 sheets of unbound paper.

- **after an introduction.** A colon appears after an introduction to a long, formal statement or question.

Here is the choice: Do you want to save the file or delete it?

Semicolon

Use a semicolon:

- **before explanatory statements.** Use a semicolon before a phrase that introduces an explanatory or summarizing statement.

The Open key is a toggle key; that is, a key with alternating functions.

Some of the options are not available; for example, the Undo option is grayed out and the Spell option is not displayed.

- **with independent clauses.** Use a semicolon to separate independent clauses joined by conjunctive adverbs, such as “hence,” “however,” or “therefore.”

Because this software is supplied in source-code form, users may adapt it for use on other systems; however, modified source code is not supported by ACME Systems.

A semicolon also separates independent clauses not joined by a conjunction.

Don't write the introduction; all introductions are now written by Marketing.

- **in a series.** A semicolon separates items in a series when the items themselves include commas.

Create a Product Vision that documents the features, performance, and quality; one schedule with a set of key milestones; and product/project costs.

Parentheses

Use parentheses:

-
- **with digressive text.** Use parentheses to enclose relevant material that should not be part of the main sentence, either because it would be confusing if punctuated otherwise, or because it is digressive.

The Font menu, which provides four options (Regular, Italic, Bold, Bold Italic), is easy to use.

You can save these settings in a “quick-start” file (explained fully in the next step) to load them automatically.

- **for elaboration.** Parentheses enclose material that further explains an element of the main sentence, but is not critical to the sentence’s meaning.

To suppress the printing of address information (particularly useful for messages with many addresses), remove the check from the Print Header box.

- **in lists.** Use two parentheses to offset letters or numerals that designate items listed within a sentence.

Choose from (a) keyboard entry, (b) mouse entry, and (c) voice entry.

- **with first occurrences.** Parentheses enclose special keyboard symbols and abbreviations and acronyms when they first appear in text.

The operating system inserts a tilde (~) when a file name is too long.

The software package tracks maintenance on your heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems.

- **to enclose an entire sentence.** Use parentheses to enclose an entire sentence that is relevant to information presented in the paragraph, yet dispensable to the paragraph’s meaning. When an entire sentence is enclosed in parentheses, place the final parenthesis after the sentence’s final punctuation mark.

Whole paragraphs should never be parenthetical.

Position the pointer on the top scrollbar and click the left mouse button. (For detailed instructions on scrolling windows, see page 33.)

Quotation marks

Use quotation marks:

- **for quotes.** Quotation marks indicate that material—other than literal computer commands, system messages, file names, and so forth—was taken verbatim from another source.

Don't enclose verbatim commands, system messages, file names, and so forth in quotation marks. In some cases a reader may be misled into thinking that the quotation marks are an integral part of what is to be typed.

- **around chapter titles.** Use quotation marks to enclose titles of chapters in a book.
- **for highlighting.** Quotation marks highlight a word or phrase when it is used in an uncommon way, or when it is itself the subject of discussion.

You can use the `tee` command to take a “snapshot” of your keystrokes.

The word “menu” is often used in technical writing.

- **around single letters.** Quotation marks also surround single letters.

The letter “x” denotes...

No single rule governs the placement of quotation marks that are next to other punctuation marks. Whether the final quotation mark follows or precedes another punctuation mark depends upon context.

- Place the final quotation mark **after most** adjacent punctuation marks, no matter how long or short the quoted material is.

“Yes,” he replied, the program is written.

- Always place the final quotation mark **before** a colon or semicolon.

There are three buttons on your “mouse”: left, middle, and right.

Some of your files are “hidden”; that is, their names do not appear in a standard `ls` directory listing.

- Place the final quotation mark **after** a question mark or an exclamation point when the question or exclamation is part of the quoted material.

The system prompts, “Do you want to continue?”

The user guide answers the question, “What does it do?”

But place the final quotation mark **before** a question mark or exclamation point that is not part of the quoted material.

How do I display a list of files that are “hidden”?

Hyphen

Because the computer industry has developed unique terminology, the use of hyphens has become troublesome. Technical documents are often littered with unnecessary hyphens.

If you can't find a specific word or term in the "CompanyName Technology Glossary," apply this general rule: Hyphenate a multi-word expression when used as a modifier; do not hyphenate the expression when used as a verb or noun.

the check-in procedure	check in the material
the direct-access password	if you have direct access
the end-user application	writing for end users

When to use a hyphen:

- **with compound modifiers.** With some exceptions, use a hyphen to form a compound modifier when the modifier is used before the noun. Use hyphens with numerals in compound modifiers, as well.

This applies only to user-defined functions.

Print your 500,000-byte file.

Hyphenate a compound modifier when it appears **before** the noun.

Usually, when it appears **after** the noun, a compound modifier should not be hyphenated.

An easy-to-remember mail alias is a person's first initial and last name.

A mail alias that is easy to remember is a person's first initial and last name.

Occasionally, the initial elements of two or more compound modifiers within the same sentence share the same final element. In these constructions, hyphenate the initial elements, even when they are not joined directly to the final, common element.

The sending application and the receiving application expect 8- and 7-bit characters, respectively.

These computers have file-, directory-, and labor-saving features.

- **to prevent ambiguity.** Hyphens clarify ambiguous text.
"Ed owns a toy-repair store" vs. "Ed owns a toy repair store"
- **with prefixes and suffixes.** A hyphen often is used between a prefix or suffix and a root word when the combination results in double

letters. However, use the guidelines found in **Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition** for some terms.

re-enable	co-organizer	shell-like
reentry	unnumbered	misspell

Use a hyphen to join numbers and proper nouns or adjectives with the following prefixes. (These same prefixes, however, are usually joined without hyphens to common nouns and modifiers.)

anti-	mid-	neo-	non-
pan-	pro-	un-	

Almost without exception, hyphens join the following prefixes with the main word of a compound.

all-	ex-	self-
------	-----	-------

- **in fractions.** A hyphen separates the components of a spelled-out fraction.

The resulting core file will take up nearly one-third of your system memory.

When not to use a hyphen:

- **for industry-accepted terms.** Do not hyphenate compound words that have come into general acceptance as single words.

backup	database	online
--------	----------	--------

- **to construct verbs.** Do not hyphenate two words that are used as a verb, but that are hyphenated when used as a compound modifier.

Dial up only after reading the dial-up instructions.

Look up the value in the look-up table.

- **with a compound modifier (adverb) ending in “ly.”** Never hyphenate a compound modifier that includes an adverb ending in “ly.”

An easily remembered mail alias is a person’s first initial and last name.

- **with numerals as single modifiers.** Do not hyphenate numerals or numbers when they serve as single modifiers.

Your file comprises 500,000 bytes.

- **with some prefixes and suffixes.** Do not use a hyphen in a word that uses a common prefix and is listed as unhyphenated in **Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition.**

bi	inter	meta	micro
mini	multi	non	pre
post	un	under	

to indicate a range. Use a dash instead of a hyphen to indicate a range. Do not put a space either before or after the dash. For information on how to use a dash, see Dashes.

Apostrophe

Use an apostrophe:

- **in contractions.** Apostrophes replace omitted letters in contractions.

can't	aren't	it's	you're
-------	--------	------	--------

- **in place of numerals.** Apostrophes also replace omitted numerals.

Class of '66	Spirit of '76
--------------	---------------

- **for possessives.** Use apostrophes to note the possessive case of nouns.

Robert's car	Scumberger's policy
--------------	------------------------

Avoid the possessive apostrophe with proper nouns.)

the CellMaster antenna	the Tech Pubs home page
------------------------	-------------------------

If nouns do not end in "s," add an apostrophe and an "s" to most indefinite pronouns, singular nouns (including collective nouns), and plural nouns.

the file's properties	someone's system
the group's privileges	women's rights

To form the possessive of singular nouns ending in "s" (or its sound), you often add an apostrophe and an "s."

the bus's capacity	the mouse's buttons
--------------------	------------------------

When the addition of an "s" produces an awkward sound, add only the apostrophe.

ACME Systems' employees

- In a few cases, however, either is acceptable.
M. Travis's files employees M. Travis' files
- Add an apostrophe to form the possessive of plural nouns that end in "s."
the Travises' files the boards' interrupts
- Add an apostrophe and an "s" to the last word of the compound to form the possessive of most compound constructions.
each other's files anyone else's business
- The possessive of two or more proper nouns depends upon ownership. In the first example, ownership is joint; in the second, individual.
Malcolm and Mary's files Malcolm's and Mary's files
- Add an apostrophe and "s" to form the plural of abbreviations or acronyms that use internal periods.
M.S.'s Ph.D.'s
- Do not use an apostrophe when you are forming the plural of two or more unitary uppercase letters or numerals.
plug in all CPUs operating system of the 1990s

Brackets

Do not substitute brackets for parentheses. Use brackets:

- **with parenthetical text.** Use brackets when inserting a parenthetical word or phrase into material already enclosed by parentheses.
It often makes sense to place comments within a menu file (see page 154 of **Advanced Skills**, Revision A [May, 1991] for more information).
- **in optional command-line entries.** Brackets can set off an optional part of a command line.
date [yymmddhhmm]

Dashes

In general, use a dash with no space before or after the dash. (The policy of no spaces around the dash is a change from older style preferences.) In general, use an **em** dash (—) in phrases, and an **en** dash (–) with numbers and ranges.

- **with an appositive series.** Use an **em** dash before and after an appositive series.
Three vital pieces of hardware—the keyboard, the system unit, and the monitor—are packed in the largest carton.

Use of dashes in the example above avoids the confusion that could be caused by using commas both within the series and to set off the series from the rest of the sentence.

In most cases, use commas instead of dashes to set off a single appositive.

The monitor, hardware that looks like a television set, sits on top of the system unit.

- **to show abrupt changes.** An **em** dash shows an abrupt change in thought or sentence construction.

Log in to the system—but that’s an obvious first step.

- **for emphasis.** Use an **em** dash to set off material for emphasis.

Become superuser—you must type **su** to do this—and delete all files in M.Travis’s directory.

All of the options—Create, Modify, and Save—enable you to customize the software’s features.

- **to indicate a range.** Use an **en** dash, without surrounding spaces, to indicate a range, such as pages in a book.

Refer to pages 16–24.

- **in lists.** In an unnumbered (bulleted) list, you can use a dash to separate an introductory word or phrase from its explanation. When you use this list format, put a space before and after the dash.

The word processing software features:

automatic save – saves changes every two minutes

automatic backup – creates a backup file when you exit

automatic recall – tracks the last 20 transactions

Ellipsis mark

An ellipsis mark comprises three ellipsis points. It looks like three periods with a space between each point. Use a space to separate the ellipsis mark from preceding and subsequent text and punctuation.

Use an ellipsis mark:

- **for omissions.** An ellipsis mark shows that something has been omitted from a sentence, phrase, or clause.

When the system displays, “Do you want the ... settings now?”

Add a period when a complete sentence ends with an ellipsis mark or when you have omitted entire sentences from quoted matter.

You see this message on the screen: “If you like, you may press the Stop key”

The system then displays this message: “This system is being configuredWhen this system is configured, it will finish booting.”

- **for pauses.** Use an ellipsis mark to indicate a pause when quoting a displayed message.

Reformatting page. Wait ...

Technical terms, abbreviations, acronyms, and units of measure

Technical documentation requires extensive use of abbreviations, acronyms, and units of measurement, many of which have become generally accepted words in the industry language. As with any word in a sentence, it is important that you use these terms, abbreviations, acronyms, and units of measurement accurately and consistently in your documentation. To do this, rely on CompanyName and industry definitions and usage.

For a comprehensive list of these terms and acronyms, see the CompanyName Glossary. Reference books on this subject include **The New IEEE Standard Dictionary of Electrical and Electronics Terms**, **Newton’s Telecom Dictionary**, and **Microsoft Press Computer Dictionary**.

Abbreviations and acronyms in text



It is important to exercise care using acronyms when you are writing about CompanyName Technology. Acronyms are commonly employed to describe various CompanyName components and processes. Each needs to be explained on first use, or expanded in the “Terms” or Glossary section of the document.

An **abbreviation** is a shortened form of a word or phrase that is used in place of the entire word or phrase. Examples of abbreviations include “CPU” for central processing unit and “Btu” for British thermal unit.

An **acronym** is an easily pronounceable word formed from the initial letters or major parts of a compound term. “Pixel” for picture element and “ROM” for read-only memory are common acronyms.

Sometimes, the terms are used interchangeably. When using abbreviations or acronyms, follow these guidelines:

- In most cases, write out the full word or phrase and enclose its abbreviation or acronym in parentheses the first time it is used. Then continue using the abbreviation or acronym alone.

For example, a local area network (LAN) comprises computer systems that can communicate with one another via connecting hardware and software. LANs are often used today.

- If you cite a term only once or twice in a document, don't shorten it unless the abbreviation or acronym is well known.
- If an abbreviation or acronym appears often in your document, repeat the spelled-out version in each chapter where it is used.
- Do not shorten trademarked terms or spell out trademarked terms that appear to be abbreviations or acronyms.
- When using an acronym, make sure that its pronunciation is natural and obvious to a reader.

The acronym "SCSI," for example, is pronounced "scuzzy." A user who doesn't know that "SCSI" is pronounceable may expect to see "an SCSI port," not "a SCSI port." In such cases, provide a pronunciation key when you first use the acronym by itself, as in this example:

A small computer system interface (SCSI — pronounced "scuzzy") cable connects the disk drive to the SCSI port.

Punctuation of abbreviations and acronyms

While you usually do not have to add any punctuation to abbreviations and acronyms, there are a few exceptions.

- Always use a period at the end of abbreviations that form words.

fig. in. gal.

- Use periods or other punctuation marks in abbreviations or acronyms when it is standard form.

in. I/O 3-D

- Add an "s" and no apostrophe to form the plural of abbreviations or acronyms that contain no periods.

PCs ISVs GUIs

- Add an apostrophe and "s" to form the plural of abbreviations or acronyms that use internal periods.

M.S.'s Ph.D.'s

Units of measurement

Follow these guidelines when abbreviating units of measurement:

- Do not abbreviate common American units of measurement, such as “inches,” “pounds,” and “feet,” unless space conservation (such as within a table column) is an overriding concern.
- Use standard abbreviations for units of measurement with great care.

For example, the difference between Mb and MB is the difference between a megabit and a megabyte. Avoid this confusion by consistently spelling out a term like “megabyte” or by using the less-abbreviated form, “Mbyte.”

- Be aware that abbreviations for units of measurement already account for plurals.

1 kW 10 kW

- Always leave a space between the numeral and the abbreviation, whether an abbreviation consists of letters or symbols.

12 mm 8 Ω 120 V

Exception: do not leave a space when the symbol is a common punctuation mark

12” 15’

- Include the metric or U.S. equivalent of a unit of measurement, when appropriate.

1 in. (2.54 cm) 1 m (3.2808
ft.)

Chapter 3 Constructing Text

This chapter provides information about the use of text and graphic elements in CompanyName technical documentation.

Section headings

A heading concisely describes the material in the section that follows. Place document headings according to the content and flow of information, keeping in mind the page layout.

Writing headings

Section headings group topics within a chapter and provide points of reference for a reader. Headings are hierarchical; you must carefully build headings and text in a logical and understandable progression. Level-one headings provide the broadest division, followed by level-two headings, and so on.

When writing headings:

- Make sure that the headings summarize the information discussed within a section.
- Write “About communication connections” rather than “Introduction.”
- Use level-one headings for the broadest summaries, and become more specific as you progress to level-three headings. Don’t go beyond level-three headings.
- Try to balance the placement of headings within a chapter.

You may need to reorganize your text if there are three or more level-one headings on a single page. Try to have at least two headings at each level you’re using.

- Use parallel grammar for headings at the same level.

If a heading level includes gerunds (for example, “Opening,” “Installing”), then write all other headings at that level with gerunds.

- Refer back to the subject in the first sentence of the paragraph following a heading, rather than using a pronoun to represent it.

Remote digital loopback

Like this: The remote digital loopback test examines...

Not like this: This tests the system’s ability to...

- Avoid starting headings with articles or with a technical term that begins with a lowercase letter. One exception is when programming commands are the only text used in the heading. (Don't use special formatting to represent commands that are in a heading.)
- Don't repeat the exact text of higher-level headings in subheadings.
- Avoid repeating the text of same-level subheadings throughout a document.
- Break headings of more than one line according to phrasing.

Capitalizing and punctuating headings

Our style for capitalizing and punctuating headings complements the design of figure and table captions in our documents. Following these guidelines:

- Use no punctuation at the ends of headings, except for a question mark when needed.
- Capitalize only the first letter of the first word (sentence case) in headings and any proper nouns or acronyms.

Types of Headings

Unnumbered headings are generally used within documents that are conceptual, such as manuals, while **numbered headings** are reserved for more technical reference, test reports, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and Manufacturing Process Instructions (MPIs).

Numbering headings

Numbered section headings use the chapter number as the first digit. This digit is separated from the next digit, which represents the level-one heading. The third digit represents the level-two heading, followed by the digit for the level-three heading. All digits are separated by a period.

The section number 4.2.3.1 tells readers that the text is in Chapter 4, the second level-one heading, the third level-two heading, and the first level-three heading. Sections would be numbered in this way:

4.2
 4.2.1
 4.2.2
 4.2.3
 4.2.3.1

Unnumbered headings

Use unnumbered headings only when writing manuals.

Lists

Lists enable you to break out information from the paragraph format and put it into an easier-to-read format. Lists must comprise at least two entries. Be sure that your lists are unmistakably lists; that is, that they cannot be confused with steps, which denote actions. Although you may need to use secondary entries, remember that complex entries defeat the easy-to-read format of a list.

Use unnumbered lists (bullets) when the entries are not dependent upon the sequence in which you present them.

When the entries are dependent upon sequence, use numerals and letters to build the hierarchy.

The templates you use predetermine how lists are aligned and spaced in relation to the paragraph text.

Introducing lists

Introduce a list with one of the following:

- sentence fragment that ends with a colon
- complete sentence that ends with a colon
- complete sentence that ends with a period
- full paragraph

When you use a sentence fragment and a colon to introduce an unnumbered list, be sure that the syntax of the items in the list agrees with the syntax of the introduction, as shown in the next example.

Right:

You can send a mail message by:

- composing a new one
- replying to one sent to you
- forwarding one

Wrong:

You can send a mail message by:

- compose a new one
- reply to one sent to you
- forward one

When you use a complete sentence to introduce the list, use a colon or a period to punctuate it.

For example, you could use either of these statements to introduce the same list:

Send a mail message in any of the following three ways:

The operating system provides three convenient ways to send mail messages.

Parallelism in lists

Make all items in the list parallel. If one item begins with a verb, so must the others.

Right

Take care to:

- use grammar properly
- check your work carefully to eliminate errors
- understand your audience

Wrong

Take care to:

- use grammar properly
- checking your work carefully to eliminate errors
- audience understanding

Capitalizing and punctuating lists

Be consistent when you construct the items in lists. Avoid mixing complete sentences and sentence fragments in the same list. In lists that mingle complete sentences with sentence fragments, a logical system of capitalization and punctuation becomes difficult to establish.

Our style specifies that you:

- Do not capitalize the first word of each entry in the list **unless** the entry is a complete sentence.
- End sentence fragments with no punctuation.
- End all complete sentences with appropriate punctuation.
- Capitalize all list items if proper nouns are used as the first words of most of the list items.

Writing unnumbered lists

Use unnumbered lists whenever the sequence of the entries is not important.

- Make sure that the items in unnumbered lists are similar in value.

Right:

The workstation you purchased comes with a:

- system unit
- monitor
- keyboard and mouse

Wrong:

The workstation you purchased comes with:

- system unit
- monitor
- keyboard and mouse
- maybe a cd-ROM drive
- maybe a modem

The last two entries in the example are not similar to the first three, because they are options, not standard equipment.

- Use an introductory phrase for each entry, when needed.

Lists sometimes begin with a summary word or phrase, followed by an explanation. In these cases, you have to define a format and type style for the lists. The next example shows a style that specifies the summary in italics, a dash to separate the summary from the explanation, and a capital letter for the first word of the explanation.

The workstation you purchased comes with:

- system unit** – This houses the...
- monitor** – This is a 19-inch...
- keyboard and mouse** – These are input...

Writing numbered lists

Use numbered lists to establish priority or sequence.

Avoid using verbs in the imperative form for a simple numbered list because they could lead a reader to believe that the numbered lists are a complete set of instructions. Use gerunds or participles instead, as in the first example, where the discussion is **about** the processes

involved in doing something, but do not give specific procedural instruction. The second example, using imperative verbs, seems to be moving toward procedure, but isn't there either.

Right:

Creating a file with the `vi` Editor involves four basic operations:

- 1.starting `vi`
- 2.adding text to the file
- 3.writing the file to save its contents
- 4.quitting `vi`

Wrong:

Creating a file with the `vi` editor involves four basic operations:

- 1.Start `vi` .
- 2.Add text to the file.
- 3.Write the file to save its contents.
- 4.Quit, or stop use of, `vi`.

Steps and procedures

Steps (instructions) are sequential. Decide what the reader needs to do first, next, and last. Write clearly, and number the steps, so that the reader understands exactly what to do. Verbs do most of the work in instructions. Use imperatives when writing steps, and reserve participles and gerunds for lists.

Screen captures do not substitute for steps.

Introducing steps

Introduce steps with one of the following constructions, making sure that you create an effective context for the procedure:

- full paragraph
- complete sentence that ends with a period
- complete sentence that ends with a colon
- sentence fragment that ends with a colon

Capitalizing and punctuating steps

Unlike lists, steps **always** should be complete sentences.

- Use sentence-style capitalization.
- End the sentence with appropriate punctuation.

Writing steps

Use steps whenever you instruct a reader to complete a task.

- Never place steps within a paragraph.
- Always use numerals and letters (for sub-steps) when a procedure has two or more steps.
- Use single-step procedures when needed, but don't number them.

If you assign a numeral "1" to a single-step procedure, a reader looks for "2" and may think you incorrectly omitted a second step.

- If a reader must perform different actions depending upon the outcome of a step, use bullets to show the **alternatives**.

1. From any directory, type the appropriate command to run the desired report.
 - Either run the default report format for CBCs using selectable data-logging:
Type:
`cbc_history`
then press Return.
 - Or run the alternate report format for CBCs using fixed interval data-logging:
Type:
`cbc_history .full`

- Use letters to show sub-steps.
 1. Display the data for the device you need to delete.
 - a. Supply the RTU ID.
 - b. Select Update Display from the Operations menu.
 - c. Check the information to verify that you have identified the device you intend to delete.
- Determine the correct order in which to present the steps.
- Write each step as a complete, correctly punctuated sentence.
- Begin steps with an active verb in the imperative form.

For example:

1. Click the Open button.
 2. Press the Standby switch to turn off the power.
- Provide as many visual cues as you can, and tell the reader what to expect after each step.

For example, show a reader the screen that is displayed after successful completion of the step, or describe the screen.

- Don't combine two tasks into one step.

An exception to this guideline is when you conclude a step with “and press Return,” because that keystroke is a necessary component of the step. However, if all steps in a procedure conclude with “and press Return,” you could inform a reader of this in the text that introduces the procedure, and eliminate the redundancy from the steps.

- Avoid redundancy in the text.

For example, “check to make sure” is a redundancy that creeps into many steps. You don’t need to tell the reader to “check,” only to “make sure.”

- Avoid cross-references in the instructions.

When performing a task, readers may become frustrated if they have to frequently flip through pages or go to another document to find required information.

Tables

Tables are an ideal format for presenting statistical information or facts that you can structure uniformly. (Information that is conceptual or explanatory is best written in a narrative paragraph.) Also, tables are easy for a reader to find when you list them with the table of contents. To do this, use captions with tables, in most cases.

Standard table styles for various needs are provided for you in some templates. If you need to create your own tables, see the samples presented later in this chapter.

Be aware that if your document will be converted to HTML, tables are not likely to convert properly (and will not, in any case, look the same as they did in the source document) because the tools available for formatting tables in your word processor give far more options and flexibility than HTML supports.

Writing text for tables

Tables typically include a number, caption, column headings, and table text. Use spaces and rules (vertical and horizontal lines), as necessary, to format the table text. Some tables, such as those that contain code, are often not numbered and may have no captions.

Table introductions

Introduce the context of a table to your readers.

- Refer to the table in the text that immediately precedes it.

Refer to the table number (“Table 1-1 shows...”) rather than the table’s position on the page (“The table below shows...”).

-
- Introduce the table with a complete sentence, not a phrase ending in a colon.

Table captions

The style for table captions parallels the style we use for section headings and figure captions; it is sentence-style caps, meaning only the first letter is uppercase.

When constructing table captions, do the following:

- Number tables.
Using a standard table and caption style from the template will automatically provide a numbering style.
- Capitalize first letter of the first word and proper nouns only. Punctuate only if the caption is a complete sentence.

Table headings

Table headings concisely summarize information in the columns.

- Avoid starting a table heading with an article.
For example, write “Alternative Backup Schedule” rather than “An Alternative Backup Schedule.”
- Avoid end punctuation, except for a question mark if required by the text.
- Use initial caps, with the exception of articles and prepositions under four letters (title case), for table headings.

Table text

The table text is the main body of information, formatted into rows and columns.

- Use sentence case, when possible. Use parallel construction, capitalization, and punctuation within the table.
- For footnotes in a table, use numerals whenever possible. When numerals might be confusing (due to numbers in the table text or many footnotes in the text), use these symbols:
 - asterisk (*)
 - dagger (†)
 - double-dagger (‡)
 - section mark (§)

Determining the type of table to use

Tables should present information in concise categories. There are several ways to design a table, depending upon the information you need to present. Table 3-1 is an example of a standard table with columns and rows separated by space. A standard table has a shaded heading, with thin rules above and below. In addition, a thin rule marks the end of the table. There are no side rules. Rows and columns do not automatically require rules, but you may use them when necessary.

The standard table is flush left and takes up the entire width of the page.

Table 3-1 Meter accuracy test equipment (sample table)

Description	Manufacturer	Model Number	Serial Number	Calibration Due Date
Digital Multimeter	Goldstar	DM-311	311016123	6/30/01
Watt-hour meter test	AVO	ATB-3P Sigma	113187-009/1	4/19/01

Table 3-2 uses horizontal rules to group information into rows. Use horizontal rules for grouping when a cell has three or more lines of text.

Table 3-2 Table with horizontal rules

Name and Address	Corporate Office	Sales	Service
ABC Corp. 624 Main Street Chelmsford, MA 01824	(617) 555-9731	(617) 555-1632	(617) 555-4932
DEF Corp. 90 Columbia Avenue Los Angeles, CA 94043	(213) 555-8413	(415) 555-5940	(415) 555-3662
GHI Corp. Colorado Springs, CO 80920	(719) 555-8842	(719) 555-9013	(719) 555-4701

Table 3-3 uses horizontal and vertical rules to separate information. Use this style when clarity requires it.

Table 3-3 Table with horizontal and vertical rules

Table Heading	Table Heading	Table Heading
Table text	Table text	Table text
Table text	Table text	Table text

Table 3-4 uses side and top headings to create a grid. Both the top and side headings are bold. A vertical rule separates the side headings from the table text.

Table 3-4Table with side and top headings

Permission	User	Group	Others
Read	4	4	4
Write	2	0	0
Total	7	5	5

More tables for additional purposes may be available in your template. Use them, maintaining consistency in style as much as possible.

Code examples

Code examples are portions of computer programs that you include in your document to help explain a topic. Code examples may include only the code that a person inputs into the computer or the dialogue between a user's input and the computer's responses.

Because programming code is precise, you must reproduce the code exactly, even if there appear to be errors in spelling, grammar, or punctuation.

To make sure that a reader can distinguish the code from regular paragraph text, follow these writing and formatting techniques:

- Break out a code example from paragraph text. Using a plain, boxed table to do this is a good idea.
- Start an example on a new line, either flush under the paragraph text or indented.
- Use a caption for lengthy code examples.

A caption highlights the example and categorizes it for a reader. If you use captions, you can compile a list of code examples in the table of contents.

- Use a monospace font (like Courier) for code. You will find a suitable character style in your template's list.
- Use the bold monospace font from your template's character styles to distinguish the user's input from the computer's response.

For example:

Code Example 3-1

```
% mt -f /dev/rmt/0 status
Archive QIC-150 tape drive:
sense key (0x0)= nosense resid-
ual= 0  retries= 0
file no= 0  block no= 0
```

- Avoid including code examples as screen shots or bitmap images. These tend to lose clarity when enlarged or printed, and detract from the professional look of the document.

Error messages

Error messages are text strings that software provides to show that something is wrong. When you explain error messages in your document, make sure that you copy the message exactly.

- Format error messages in a way that differs from paragraph text.
- Always follow an error message with text describing why the message appears and what a reader can do to correct the problem.
- If you are documenting numerous error messages, consider compiling them into an appendix.

This is one way to format error messages:

Error 50 - Internal Printer Malfunction

Caused by: Fusing assembly malfunction

Response: Turn off the printer for at least 15 minutes. If the error persists, a qualified technician must repair the printer.

Error 51 - Internal Printer Malfunction

Caused by: Beam detection malfunction

Response: Hold down the ALT key and click the Continue button to resume printing. If the error persists, a qualified technician must repair the printer.

Cross-references

Cross-references identify additional information about a specific topic that is available within the document or a different source. To be useful, cross-references must be specific and accurate. Include any detail that will help a reader find the information easily. Use sparingly, so as to not interrupt the text unnecessarily.

However, you should never use a cross-reference:

-
- when the information is vital for a reader to understand the discussion
 - Instead, provide the vital information. If the information is extensive, you can summarize it and also include a cross-reference to the source.
 - when the additional information is brief and you can just as easily repeat it
 - to cite the current page
 - to cite safety information that describes how to protect a person, or hardware or software

For safety information, use caution or warning tables.

Writing cross-references

Cross-references break the flow of your discussion; therefore write them so that a reader easily recognizes when you have given a reference.

- Make sure that you introduce cross-references with clear phrases.

Right: For instructions on how to reboot, see Chapter 4.

Wrong: To reboot, see Chapter 4.

- If cross-references are brief, include them within the sentences. If the cross-references require lengthy text references, put them in separate sentences.

Examples:

For details about each of the supported commands, also called applications, see Chapter 4.

To prepare the code image for the download, LSU creates a download source (DSC) object. See “Creating the downloadable source object” on page 32 in the **LSU Theory of Ops**.

Fonts, punctuation, and capitalization

There are several acceptable ways to write cross-references, dependent upon where the cited information is located (within your document, another document produced by your company, or a third-party document) and the length of the reference.

Standard formats available from your templates make using the proper cross-reference format easy. In general:

- Use italics for the title of a book, journal, or magazine.
You can find that information in the **CompanyName Product Life Cycle** manual, part number 98-1000.
- Use quotation marks around a chapter or section heading.
Refer to Chapter 2, “Product Vision,” in **CompanyName Product Life Cycle**.
- Capitalize “chapter,” “appendix,” “part,” “section,” “table,” or “figure” when followed by a number or letter—and don’t abbreviate.
...as shown in Figure 9, “The System Controller.”
- Don’t capitalize “page” or “step” when followed by a number.
Go to step 4.
Refer to page 42 for further information.

Cross-references to third-party documents

- For a cross-reference to a third-party book, include the title and author, with the publisher and year in parentheses.
For networking reference, see **Newton’s Telecom Dictionary** by Harry Newton (Flatiron Publishing, Inc., 1996).
- Do not use a cross-reference to a specific chapter or section of a third-party book.

Cross-references to text within your document

You can provide a cross-reference to a chapter, appendix, section, figure, or table within your document.

- Refer to material by section heading, chapter, or appendix name and page number only. Follow the example below.
See “Installing the CellMaster,” on page 18.
- Refer to a figure or table, bringing up the numbered caption. Follow the example below.
See Figure 4, “Battery pack installation.”

Cross-references to another document produced by CompanyName

When citing another document produced by CompanyName, include the company’s name, the book’s title, and part number.

Refer to the **CompanyName Product Life Cycle Guidebook**, part number 98-1000.

Notes, cautions, and warnings

Notes, cautions, and warnings provide important information that diverges from the topic under discussion. A note, caution, or warning is preceded by a strong visual cue, which draws a reader's attention to the text. Notes, cautions, and warnings are created as tables, but are not used as such.

A note usually provides related, parenthetical information, such as an explanation, tip, comment, or other useful, but not imperative, information. However, overuse of notes is a sign of disorganized writing. If a page contains three or more notes, decide whether you can incorporate some of the note text into the paragraph text.

Cautions and warnings are mandatory text to protect the user from personal injury or to protect hardware or software from damage. In CompanyName documentation, we precede the text of notes, cautions and warnings with graphical symbols that are like those specified by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). These internationally accepted symbols were designed to alert the person working with software or handling equipment about important information.

Writing notes

There are few constraints on the text or format you can use in a note. Consistency in both writing style and format is important, so that a reader learns to recognize a note interjected into the text.

Some guidelines:

- Use a note to break out related, reinforcing, interesting, or other special information that you want to be sure a reader sees.
- Keep your note short and relevant.
- Never use a note to cite safety information.



This is an example of a note. Keep the text short and relevant.

Writing cautions

Unlike a note, a caution is not optional.

- Use a caution whenever anything you describe poses possible damage to data, to software, or to the operating system.
- Be direct when writing a caution. Describe the potential hazard, the data or application that may be damaged, and the measures to take to guard against the damage.

- Add a visual cue, such as the internationally accepted exclamation point inside a triangle, to make sure that a reader sees the caution.

Here is an example of a caution.



Resetting the MCC (that is, pressing the Reset and Abort buttons, the Reset button alone, or a power cycle) will erase all data in the ODE database.

Writing warnings

Warnings, like cautions, are not optional.

- Use a warning whenever you describe a situation that poses personal injury to a person, or when there is a risk of irreversible destruction to equipment.
- Make sure that your documentation meets all government regulatory standards for the mandated use of warnings.
- Write directly to the point, in plain and clear language. Explain what could go wrong if a reader does not follow the instructions precisely.
- Explain the risk, and advise a reader how to avoid the risk.
- Use the lightning bolt symbol when there is danger of physical harm to a person or damage to equipment due to an electrical hazard.
- Use the exclamation point symbol when there is risk of personal injury from a nonelectrical hazard, or risk of irreversible damage to hardware.

Here are some examples of warnings.



RTUs can be dangerous. Closing a switch at the wrong time can kill someone. CompanyName personnel should **never operate** an RTU in the field or program a CBC's internal parameters.



Align the corners of the expansion card with the four stand-offs and the expansion bus connector on the card with the one on the system module board. Press gently and evenly to seat the connector. Then screw the four Phillips screws into the stand-offs to fasten the card in place. **Do not force any of the connectors.**

Chapter 4 Other Considerations

Avoid humor

Writers are sometimes tempted to use humor to relieve the reader's (or author's) uneasiness with the material. Resist this temptation.

Avoid jargon

Writers frequently incorporate jargon into their documentation to demonstrate mastery of the subject, or to add color to documentation. Resist this. Jargon can impede comprehension.

When documenting CompanyName technology, be sure that terms are explained on first use, and defined in the glossary or terms section.

Be consistent

Consistency reduces the impact of the mechanics of communication on your readers' understanding. Readers project significance onto every change in tone, language, or typographic convention you use. This is one of the most valuable aspects of good style. Refer to Chapter 3, "Constructing Text," for consistency guidelines.

Avoid sexist language

CompanyName is a strong advocate of equal opportunity in the workplace. Our call is to avoid sexist language in all documentation.

Solutions

Consider the following suggestions as ways to avoid sexist language:

- Write plural antecedents and pronouns as often as possible.
Awkward: Tell each user to shut down his machine.
Better: Tell the users to shut down their machines.
- Eliminate the possessive as much as possible when you're writing in the third person.
Awkward: Ask your system administrator for his advice.
Better: Ask your system administrator for advice.

- Use the word “you.”
Awkward: If the user decides he wants to change the settings...
Better: If you want to change the settings...
- Repeat the pronoun’s antecedent instead of using a personal pronoun.
Awkward: If a system administrator installed the software, wait until he can help you.
Better: If a system administrator installed the software that you’re having trouble with, wait until the administrator can help you.

Grammatical Considerations

When working to eliminate sexist language:

- Do not use “s/he.”
- Do not use “their” to refer to a single person. “Their” relates only to a plural antecedent. “Ask your system administrator for their advice” is grammatically incorrect.
- Avoid using “his or her.” It is grammatically correct, but unnatural.

Never dehumanize people with the pronoun “it.”