*This document is meant to be customized for an organization to use in all of their communications — look for terms in [brackets] to customize for your organization. As your team asks new questions, you’ll add the answers to this document. You’ll also review this document on a regular basis to make sure it is up-to-date and to address any style changes. You can delete anything that is not relevant; however, some teams find extra context useful. Furthermore, many of the terms in the Specific Style Guidelines section are included because of unexpected questions. Let your team refer to this guide for as much as possible rather than requiring a response from the team leader before moving forward.*

***Guiding Principles***

This section provides an ‘at a glance’ look at how all content should be written. You may also want to link to your strategy documents for more in-depth discussions of these topics.

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| **audience** | The ideal audience member is [descriptor], [descriptor], and [descriptor]. They are looking for information about [topic]. |
| **organization** | All content should be categorized appropriately for its publishing platform.  Blog Categories:   * [Category]: [What to include in the category]   Blog Tags: Every post should have a minimum of one tag. Tags can include   * Post topics * Individuals mentioned or interview * Product names * Type of post (i.e. tutorial)   Twitter Hashtags: Not every Twitter update requires a hashtag. Hashtags should be used to connect to a larger conversation, such as discussions of a particular event. |
| **tone** | The overall tone of communications is [tone].  While a little humor is often appropriate, remember to handle topics with professionalism. Humor about an individual or group should never refer to facets of their identity (race, gender, etc.). If you aren’t sure if the joke will land, *leave it out*. |
| **topics to avoid** | Competitors: Avoid direct mentions of or links to these direct competitors.   * [Competitor]   Topics to Avoid:   * [Topic]   Avoiding controversy is not necessarily the goal. However, to meet the organization’s goals, avoid controversy outside of the core topics this organization deals with. |

***General Style Guidelines***

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| **acronyms** | Write out the whole term or name for the first reference. Using an acronym on the second reference or after is appropriate. |
| **all caps** | Avoid capitalizing full words for emphasis. Bold or italicize terms instead. |
| **alt text** | Add descriptive text for any image, including infographics. A **caption** generally cannot be used as alt text. |
| **anchor text** | See **link attribution** |
| **bio** | Contributors may include a bio of up to three lines to be attached to all their content (excluding social media). Bios should include relevant expertise and social media links. |
| **call to action** | Every post should end with a clear instruction to readers. Tell them how to take action on the information in the post. |
| **caption** | Differing from **alt text**, each image needs a caption explaining its relevance to the content around it. |
| **code** | In order to display sample code, use a monospaced font. Unless otherwise noted, use [monospaced font]. |
| **double negatives** | Avoid double negatives. |
| **fonts** | Unless otherwise noted, [body copy font] is to be used for body copy. [Title font] is used commonly for title text and other purposes. |
| **gendered terms** | Avoid gendered terms, such as ‘fireman’ or ‘mankind,’ in favor of inclusive terms, like ‘firefighter’ or ‘humanity.’ |
| **idiom** | Avoiding using terms that have meanings beyond those of the individual words written. For instance, use “raining heavily” rather than “raining cats and dogs.” Idioms increase the difficulty of reading content. |
| **image** | The ideal image is usually a horizontally-oriented image, no more than 300 pixels wide. Align images on center. |
| **image attribution** | Credit all images with a live link to their creator. Unless otherwise noted, use Creative Commons images only, preferably from Flickr. The following format should be used for images from Flickr: **Image by Flickr user <a href=""></a>** |
| **jargon** | Relevant jargon or technical language can be used, provided core audience members can be expected to understand these terms. Include or link to definitions when using jargon. |
| **link attribution** | When including links in external content such as blog posts and ebooks, use anchor text when possible. Linking to other articles and websites is a best practice. Rather than linking to an individual’s name or a website’s name, use anchor text that describes the service or individual in question. |
| **lists** | Include a minimum of three separate points in every list. |
| **metaphor** | Not all metaphors are accessible to all audiences. Use a variety of metaphors, drawing on diverse comparisons. |
| **microaggression** | Microaggressions are small, commonplace interactions that intentionally or unintentionally slight people from a variety of backgrounds. Avoid microaggressions.  Personal Description: Don’t refer to a person using terms that have racial connotations, like ‘ghetto’ or ‘urban.’  Discussing Experiences: Don’t minimize another person’s experiences, emotions, or reactions. Don’t suggest that someone is just ‘overreacting.’  Othering: Avoid referring to individuals with language that removes them from the situation, like referring to a person of color as ‘exotic.’ Also avoid any phrase that implies that an individual is an outlier, such as asking how a person from a marginalized background got into a prestigious school. |
| **names (companies and products)** | Follow an organization’s conventions as to how it capitalizes and punctuates its names. Many organizations (for example, *FedEx*) incorporate intercaps, or capital letters in the middle of the name. Other organizations, such as *Yahoo!*, incorporate punctuation characters in their names. |
| **numbers** | Use numerals for cardinal and ordinal numbers in headlines, email subject lines, and HTML page titles.  Cardinal Numbers: Spell out cardinal numbers (one, two, and so on) and ordinal numbers (first, second, and so on) below 10, but use numerals for numbers 10 and above.  Percentages: When expressing percentages, always use numerals and the percentage sign. Do not spell out percentages.  Time: Always use a.m. and p.m. for indicating time. Use Pacific Standard Time (PST) when observing standard time (winter), and Pacific Daylight Time (PDT) when observing daylight saving time (summer).  Numerals as Coordinates: Use numerals when referring to numbers that a person must type, such as for coordinates in tables and worksheets, and for parts of a document, such as page numbers or line references.  Numerals in Categories: If a passage contains two or more numbers that refer to the same category of information and one is 10 or higher, use numerals for all numbers referring to that category. When numbers are treated consistently, readers can recognize the relationship between them more easily.  Large Numbers: Express large and very large numbers in numerals followed by million, billion, and so forth. If expressing a number greater than 999 in numerals, use a comma.  Millions and Billions: When stating million or billion with a numeral, don’t hyphenate, even before a noun. But do use a hyphen between the numeral and million or billion if the expression is part of a compound adjective that takes a hyphen elsewhere. If space is tight (for example, in headlines, tables, diagrams, or text messages), some abbreviations are acceptable. mil (million).  At the Beginning of a Sentence: Avoid starting a sentence with a numeral. If you can’t avoid it, spell out the number. A year may be written in numerals at the beginning of a sentence. It’s okay to start a headline with a numeral if space is tight or if the numeral makes the headline more eye-catching or easier to scan or understand.  Ordinals and Suffixes: Avoid expressing ordinals with superscript letters (such as 10th, 11th, and so on). Ordinals with superscript formatted in a word processor may not display correctly in some places, such as email, and the use in writing of these suffixes is becoming increasingly archaic. Do not use “th” endings or their equivalent when stating dates (i.e., do not write *Join us on June 10th*).  Age: Offset ages with commas. |
| **Oxford comma** | See **serial comma**. |
| **passive voice** | Avoid the passive voice. Use the zombie test to check if a sentence is passive: Add ‘by zombies’ after the verb in a sentence. If the sentence structure still makes sense, it’s passive. |
| **people-first** | When writing about a person with a disability or another characteristic necessary to acknowledge, refer to the person first: for example, use ‘person with a disability,’ rather than ‘disabled person.’ |
| **pronouns (companies and organizations)** | When referring to your own or to another company, use the third-person singular pronouns *it* and *its*. A company is treated as a collective noun and requires a singular verb and a singular pronoun. |
| **pronouns (individuals)** | When referring to an individual person, use their pronouns. When in doubt, ask. If you are referring to a hypothetical individual, use use the third-person pronouns *they* and *their*. |
| **reading level** | Avoid writing above a high school reading level. Even when dealing with technical topics, spend the extra time to make material accessible. Assume readers are in a hurry and will only scan a document, so keep things simple.  Sentence Structure: Minimize compound sentences and other complex sentence structures.  Clarity, Not Cleverness: Focus on writing clearly. Save clever word games for poetry. |
| **serial comma** | Use a comma after the second-to-last word in a list. Also referred to as an **Oxford comma**. |
| **social media links** | Use the name of the social media site with the word ‘account’ as anchor text for links to individual social media accounts. |
| **subheadlines** | Use Headline3 (**<h3></h3>**) for subheadlines. |
| **titles (for individuals)** | Capitalize a person’s title only when it’s used directly before a name. This rule includes titles pertaining to government positions (like *president, senator, mayor, ambassador, chief justice*), religious positions (like *pope, cardinal, rabbi*), and other organizational positions (like *chair, treasurer, general manager*). |
| **titles (for published works)** | Always use title case:   * Capitalize the first and last words, regardless of the length of the word or the part of speech. * Capitalize all nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and pronouns, regardless of the length of the word. * Capitalize prepositions of four or more letters (like *over, from,* and *with*). * Capitalize conjunctions of four or more letters (like *unless* and *than*), as well as if and how and why.   Do not capitalize:   * Articles (*a, an,* and *the*) * Prepositions of three or fewer letters (such as *of, in,* and *for*) * Most conjunctions of three or fewer letters (like *as, and, or,* and *but*) * The “to” in the infinitive form (e.g. *to Write*)   Branded Lowercase Proper Nouns: If the first word in a title is a proper noun that begins with a lowercase letter (like *iPhone* or *danah boyd*), try to reorder the title so that you can capitalize the name as the company or person usually does. If such a noun falls elsewhere in the title, use the company’s capitalization style (*iPhone*). For instance, *“Sales of iPod Soar.”*  Hyphenated Compounds in Titles: If a hyphenated compound appears in title-style capitalization, capitalize the first word, and capitalize all subsequent words in the compound except for articles (*a, an,* and *the*), prepositions of three or fewer letters (like *to* and *of*), and coordinating conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so*). Ask yourself: If this word weren’t in a hyphenated compound, would I capitalize it? If the answer is yes, capitalize it as part of the hyphenated compound, too. |

***Specific Style Guidelines***

*Add the following information to this list:*

* *Your organization’s name (including capitalization and spacing)*
* *The names, titles, and pronouns of leaders and experts at your organization*
* *Names of the products and programs offered by your organization*

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| **accept** | Commonly confused with **except**. A verb meaning ‘to receive.’ |
| **age** | Avoid referencing age unless it’s relevant to the content. |
| **anyway** | Commonly incorrectly written as ‘anyways.’ Do not add an ‘s’ to the end. |
| **affect** | Commonly confused with **effect**. A verb meaning ‘to influence.’ |
| **automagical** | Not a word. Avoid using this term. |
| **blind** | Use ‘blind’ as an adjective to describe a person who is unable to see. Use ‘low vision’ to describe a person with limited vision. |
| **climactic** | Commonly confused with **climatic**. An adjective meaning ‘the point of greatest intensity in a series of events.’ |
| **climatic** | Commonly confused with **climactic**. An adjective meaning ‘the weather or climate conditions.’ |
| **crazy** | Avoid using words like ‘crazy’ or ‘insane’ to describe people or situations. |
| **deaf** | Use ‘deaf’ as an adjective to describe a person with significant hearing loss only. |
| **disability** | Avoid referring to a person’s disability unless it’s relevant to the content. See **people-first**. |
| **ebook** | A book available digitally. Preferred over ‘e-book’ or ‘eBook.’ |
| **effect** | Commonly confused with **affect**. A noun meaning ‘result’ or a verb meaning ‘to bring about.’ |
| **emigrate** | Commonly confused with **immigrate**. A verb meaning ‘to exit one country or region.’ |
| **except** | Commonly confused with **accept**. A preposition meaning ‘excluding’ or a verb meaning ‘to exclude.’ |
| **immigrate** | Commonly confused with **emigrate**. A verb meaning ‘to enter and settle in one country or region.’ |
| **internet** | Don’t capitalize unless the word starts a sentence. Preferred over ‘interweb,’ ‘internets,’ and other casual variations. |
| **login** | When used as a noun or an adjective, has no space. When used as a verb, write as ‘log in.’ |
| **New Age** | A noun or adjective meaning ‘spiritual, holistic.’ Do not use to refer to something as futuristic. |
| **ninja** | Avoid using terms like ninja, rock star, unicorn, or wizard to convey expertise (unless referring to an actual ninja, rock star, unicorn, or wizard.) |
| **no offense, but** | Always proceeds something offensive. Do not use. |
| **okay** | Preferred over ‘OK.’ |
| **politically correct** | An adjective that originally meant ‘inoffensive’ but has become an insult meaning ‘dogmatically left.’ Avoid using. |
| **principal** | Commonly confused with **principle**. A noun meaning ‘a leader of a school or organization’ or ‘a sum of money.’ |
| **principle** | Commonly confused with **principal**. A noun meaning ‘a core belief, fact, or law.’ |
| **rock star** | See **ninja.** |
| **supposed to** | Commonly incorrectly written as ‘suppose to.’ Do not omit the ‘d.’ |
| **unicorn** | See **ninja.** |
| **used to** | Commonly incorrectly written as ‘use to.’ Do not omit the ‘d.’ |
| **victim** | Avoid describing someone as a victim of a medical condition. |
| **wizard** | See **ninja.** |

***Further Resources***

*For questions not answered by this document, please refer to the AP Stylebook 2016.*

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| **aging** | <http://www.ilc-alliance.org/images/uploads/publication-pdfs/Media_Takes_On_Aging.pdf> |
| **commonly misused words** | <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_commonly_misused_English_words> |
| **disability** | <http://ncdj.org/style-guide/> |
| **mental health** | <http://www.eiconline.org/teamup/wp-content/files/mental-health-reporting-style-guide.pdf> |
| **race** | <https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/Race%20Reporting%20Guide%20by%20Race%20Forward_V1.1.pdf> |
| **religion** | <http://religionstylebook.com/> |
| **sexuality** | <http://www.nlgja.org/stylebook/> |