Oppia UX Writing: Content Style Guide

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*IMPORTANT: This style guide is out of date. Please view the new one [here](#)

Thanks!

-The UXW team

Overview

👋 Welcome to the Oppia UX Writing team's content style guide, which sets out principles and guidelines for clear and consistent product copy across Oppia. It also includes guidelines for product vocabulary, terminology and nomenclature.

- Last updated: 28 Jun 2023 [Update: "Sections" as a step below "Lessons" in the taxonomy]
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Writing Goals
1. Communicate clearly
2. Convey [brand personality and principles](#)
3. Write simply, avoid jargon (Test your copy's readability using [Readable.com](#) / [Hemingway App](#)), and make the writing easy to skim and scan
4. Help our users achieve their goals and navigate the website confidently
5. Write inclusively and with translation in mind: avoid slang and pronouns

Sections:
- [Brand Identity and Voice](#)
- [Users and Tone](#)
- [Writing Principles](#)
- [Writing about Oppia](#)

Brand Identity and Voice

Brand Principles:
Bringing adventure and curiosity back to learning

- Discovery
- Accessible / Improving accessibility – Oppia is a platform that is free and open to all
- Engagement
- Growth and support through learning

Brand Personality:
If Oppia were a person, what sort of person would they be?

- Fun
- Approachable
- Nuturting

- Growth mindset
- Collaborative
- Trustworthy and credible

Voice: How would they sound?		
We are excited / positive but not pushy Not disinterested	**We are approachable, and focused on our learners** Not aloof	**We are transparent about our goals and the work we do** Not cagey or disingenuous

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Users and Tone

Tone refers to how voice can vary according to contexts – in this case, we need to think about our users and their goals, pain points, or emotional states in distinct use cases. A key thing to note about Oppia users in general is that they may not speak English as a first language or be familiar with technical jargon.

User Groups	Content Type	Emotional State	Content Approach	Tone
Learners (Kids)	Onboarding	Interest, anticipation, curiosity	A guide – providing all information they need	Casual Use simple words and lots of signposting, e.g. "no" when answers are incorrect, "click continue" to progress to the following section. Clear, direct – let there be no doubt about what they're signing up for
	Lessons Explorations	Interest, anticipation, curiosity	A friend, tutor – someone they can trust	Inviting, empathetic, upbeat Casual, conversational (but not colloquial –

				learners might not understand some idiomatic phrases)
	Lessons – Incorrect answers	Confusion, Frustration (when they get an answer wrong)	A partner in their learning, a guide towards the right answer	Encouraging, not dismissive
Donors / Partners	Donor page	Interest, curiosity	Credible, that we do this to help other people – someone they would want to work together with and can trust	Inviting, firm, clear, sincere
	Support materials	Confusion	Guide them, explain our position	Clear, direct
Teachers - Using lessons to teach students / reviewing the lesson to support the class	Lessons (Both the Classroom and Community Library)	Interest, curiosity	Guide them, explain how they can adapt the lessons, or maybe what other resources are available to them (e.g. translations?)	Clear, direct, sincere, approachable
	Educators Onboarding	Interest, curiosity	Guide them and explain how they can achieve their tasks (e.g. creating a group)	
(Volunteers) Lessons Creators	Creator Dashboard	Anticipation	Guide them, explain what they need to do and the guidelines	Clear, direct
Volunteers	Volunteer sign up pages	Interest, curiosity Anticipation	Clear about available roles and responsibilities Show potential volunteers what's	Inviting, firm, clear, sincere

			in it for them	
Translators	Volunteer sign up pages	Interest, curiosity Anticipation	Clear about available roles and responsibilities	Inviting, firm, clear, sincere
Parents / Family	Lessons (Both the Classroom and Community Library)	Interest, curiosity	Guide them, explain how these resources can benefit their kids and how they can support their kids' learning	Clear, direct, sincere, approachable

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Writing Principles

Be concise
- Avoid large blocks of text and long sentences. The Oxford Guide to plain English, GOV.UK and linguists agree that on average, [15 words](#) per sentence is best for readability, and no more than 25 words.
- Front-load important points: include important information at the beginning of every string

Be conversational, but not colloquial
- Avoid contractions (e.g. you'll, don't, I've) as much as possible, as they can reduce readability, particularly for users whose first language is not English.
  - That said, as they make tone more informal and closer to speech, consider using common ones when there is a space constraint.
- For example:

Instead of:	Consider using:
Nope Nah Nay	No
Sorta Kinda	Sort of Kinda of (Or even simply "Quite")
Woohoo! YAAASS Wheeeee	Great!

Yayyy!	

Keep translation in mind when writing
- ❗ This is important at Oppia as we target users in different markets through translation, including Brazilian, Azerbaijani, Yoruba, and Hindi. Many users who come into contact with our English-language material may not speak English as a first language.
- Avoid slang, acronyms, idioms or idiomatic language in UI text, since many of our users may not speak English as their first language. There may also be localisation issues when such text is translated. For example,
    - Consider saying "You're right" or "That's right", instead of "You've hit the nail on the head"
    - Consider saying "Good job!" or "Well done!" or "Great!", instead of "You're on a roll!" or "You've hit it out of the park"
    - Consider saying "As soon as possible", instead of "ASAP"

Be direct
- Write simply. If you need to use technical terms, explain what they are
- Use plain English, avoid buzzwords, jargon and words you wouldn't say out loud

Instead of:	Consider using:
Assistance	Help
Aspects	Part
Commence	Start
Enable	Let
Ensure	Make sure
Further	More
However	But
In order to	To
Obtain	Get
Opined / Chided	Said / Asked / Told
Provide	Give
Query	Question
Request	Ask
Require	Need
Resolve	Fix

Therefore / Thus	So
Utilise	Use
View	See

- Use the active voice as much as possible
    - Active voice: You've completed the lesson.
    - Passive voice: The lesson was completed.
- Use as few nouns as possible
    - Instead of: We have made the decision to …
    - Consider: We have decided to …

Be positive
- Say what happens/needs to be done instead of what didn't happen/should not be done
- When describing feature improvements, focus on the benefit to the user

Don't be afraid to have fun and be clever
- But don't let quirky humour or wit get in the way of clarity

Writing Inclusively
- Use neutral pronouns – use "they/their" when gender is unknown or unimportant, and use "a"/"the"/"you/your" instead of pronouns in generic product copy.
- Don't call your users "users" – instead, refer to them specifically as "learners", "teachers", "donors" etc.
- Since Oppia's users come from a variety of backgrounds and groups, be inclusive in product copy. E.g. "Hi everyone" rather than "Hey guys".
- Write inclusively. E.g. "Block" and "allow" instead of "blacklist" / "whitelist"

Give information just-in-time
- Introduce required conceptual information only when the user is performing the related task

Grammar, syntax and mechanics
- Use short words, active verbs, and common nouns.
- Numbers: Use numerals (don't need to spell it out), and avoid roman numerals
- Headers and subheaders:
    - The best headers are not just descriptions – they are succinct and more importantly indicate to the user what they can expect, or help focus their attention on what the page is about
    - Use subheaders to your advantage as signposts, or to front-load important information
- For readability, use bullet points rather than paragraphs

- For creators: Use **<u>underlined bold text</u>** only to introduce new terms (e.g. "denominator"). For other cases where you want to stress words, use **regular bold** instead. As a rule of thumb, use additional stress only when necessary; do not bold an entire dialogue.

Standardising the Language (in UI text)
- Buttons and CTAs - Capitalise only the first letter (sentence case)
- Headers - Sentence case, unless it's the title of a section
- Standardise UI copy

Consider using:	Instead of:	Location
Approve	OK	Reviewers Dashboard
Continue	Next Forward Let's go! Woohoo!! Let's get started!	Classroom
Create	Generate	Educators Desktop
Decline	Reject	Reviewers Dashboard
Explore	Browse	Classroom
Got it	OK	Learners Dashboard Acknowledgement of notices
Learn Again	Go Back	Classroom
Submit	OK Next	Classroom

- Descriptions on [Community Library cards](#) - To standardise them as "Learn how to …" or "Learn the …" [We could probably add prompt text in the creator view to say "start these descriptions with one of these]

Some Examples

Example: Incorrect answer
Audience and Goal: Encourage learners to try again if they encounter obstacles, or don't know the right answer

	Wrong Answer!	Blunt, direct, bit too negative,

	Wrong! Nope, try again!	doesn't encourage further action / learning Don't belittle our learners
	(Current - Surfacing a concept card recommendation) ● No, that's not right. If you've forgotten how to multiply two numbers, please take a look at this concept card for a refresher, or try the lessons on Multiplication instead. ● No, that's not correct. Try again! If you've forgotten how to simplify ratios, take a look at this concept card for a refresher. **(Current)** No, that's not correct. Continue to see why.	Provides further action for the user, but tone can be a bit more encouraging
	No, that's not right. Try again! No, that's not right. Give it another go! Sorry, that wasn't correct. Try again! + Take a look at this concept card [link] to revise. Have a look at this concept card [link] to find out more. You learnt about this in Chapter X. Click [here] for a quick refresh.	Encouraging, provides further action for the user. At the same time, "no" is clear enough for them to understand the answer is wrong. A note on exclamation points: These can be used when it's appropriate for the tone to be excited or congratulatory. For example: when there are achievements for Learners.

Example: Correct answer
Audience and Goal: Encourage learners forward and reinforce learning

	That is correct	Too formal and stilted – try to be more casual
	Ok	Not clear to the user whether the answer is correct or incorrect
	That's right / That's right, good job! That's right, always start with the parentheses.	Encouraging, provides further action for the user OR reinforces learning

Example: Error messages

Error messages can be frustrating as they stop the user in the midst of completing a task

■	Error 404 [or some other error code]	Doesn't tell the user exactly what is the problem, and creates a roadblock.
■	Oops, too bad!! You didn't get what you were looking for! But no worries, look harder elsewhere ^__^	Too casual, and the inappropriate and not-funny attempt at humour is cavalier, insensitive to the user, and likely to frustrate them.
■	Sorry, we can't find that. Try looking here, or contact us if you need help.	A best practice for error messages is to include: (1) a description of the error and (2) what the user can do to resolve the problem and get on with their tasks. "Sorry" is okay to use, as it acknowledges the error and inconvenience dealt to the user.

Example: Request for feedback

■	Please let us know how we can do better. We're happy to hear any comments you have.	Vague, and too distant – almost corporate. Try to be more specific about what the feedback is about.
■	Please let us know if you have any feedback about X, Y and Z.	More specific, and using the word "feedback" helps the user understand exactly what you want from them.

Example: Support documents or FAQs (anything that provides help)

The key thing here is to be helpful and to be service-oriented
- Too convoluted, and doesn't explain technical jargon and terms.

■	We're here to help but only if you can't find the answers in our FAQs.	Don't be rigid or qualify ("but only if") the help you provide.

	Looking for something? We're here to help.	Being straightforward and direct is the best in this situation. Don't let humorous flourishes get in the way of clear explanation. Be sincere about trying to help, and take an open posture with your language.
	Are you a teacher or a parent? Find out more about how you can use Oppia here.	Consider also addressing the user specifically, e.g. learner, teacher, prospective volunteer etc.

	(Partnerships) What does Oppia require from our organisation ?	Choose simpler words
	What information/support does Oppia need from us?	FAQs can be worded more specifically

Example: Tooltips during onboarding / sign-up flows
Simplify and make it as short as possible, but don't sacrifice grammar just to make things shorter, as it affects readability

	(Tooltip for creating a new learner group) **Current:** Only takes simple three steps to create group for your students [63 characters] **Suggested:** It takes just 3 steps to create a group for your students [58 characters]	

Example: Empty States

	Nothing here You haven't started any lessons	
	You haven't started any lessons. How about starting one [link]?	Offer a call to action. Empty states are a good way to increase feature awareness.

Example: Disclaimers / disclosures / notices
Focus on the actions to let users know what they need to do to complete their tasks - e.g. use active clauses. Cut down on any explanation that isn't needed.

 	This feature is currently in beta. This feature is being deprecated.	
 	This feature is new and only available in English for now.	Help break down technical terms for users. Especially important for translation / users who might not understand jargon.

Writing about Oppia

Hierarchy of Oppia learning units – V2
❗ For a visual representation of this hierarchy, see this Figma file.

Taxonomy of user-facing terms - Oppia-Reviewed Courses

User-Facing Terms [*Use these for all user-facing pages]	Refers to	Corresponding Technical Term / Concept (if different)
Oppia-Reviewed Courses	Refer to Oppia's curation lessons, to signal that they are of *higher quality, and come with practice questions and review cards*.	-
Subject	Denote a subject area, e.g. "Math Foundations"	-
Topic	Describe a specific concept within the subject area	Story [*This term is being deprecated on user-facing pages. Please flag it out if you see it still being used.]
Lesson/Lessons	Sub-sections within a topic area	Chapters [*This term is being deprecated on user-facing pages. Please flag it out if you see it still being used.]
Practice	Practice questions	-

Revision	Review cards	-
Skills		-

Taxonomy of user-facing terms - Community Creations

User-Facing Terms	Used to	Corresponding Technical Term / Concept (if different)
Community Creations	Refer to Oppia's curation lessons, to signal that they are of *higher quality, and come with practice questions and review cards*.	-
Series	Denote a loose collection of lessons	Collections (though this term is being deprecated)
Lesson / Lessons		Explorations

Naming user groups

User-Facing Terms	Used to	Corresponding Technical Term / Concept (if different)
Learners	Refer to users who make use of Oppia's lessons / education resources for their learning. **Use this instead of:** Students, kids	-
Facilitators	Refer to users who make use of Oppia's lessons / education resources for learners, e.g. creating learner groups **Use this instead of:** Educators, Teachers	-

Describing Oppia Classes and Lessons

Term	Instead of	Suggested Usage
Foundations	Basic Easy Fundamental	When naming <u>Subject</u> area "Foundations" focuses on the learners and speaks to the course being the building block for the learning. For Translations: Consider avoiding words that make vague references to level of difficulty, e.g. "basic" or "easy" - Yoruba: "Ipile" – there is only one word for Foundations in Yoruba. - Pidgin: Keep the "foundations"

Verbs

Term	Instead of	Suggested Usage
Browse Explore	-	When referring to users clicking through the Oppia lesson catalog
Play	-	When referring to users clicking through a lesson

Other tips
- Refer to Oppia as "we" rather than "it"

Miscellaneous

References regarding users:
📄 Oppia Web - User Stories and User Journey Checklist
[Oppia onboarding Notion page – users and special considerations](#)