

HTH GSE Style Guide

The HTH GSE Communications Style Guide provides guidance for designing content, writing copy, marketing and promoting HTH GSE to our audience.

It is important to note that this style guide is a living document. As our organization evolves and as technology evolves, we will make adjustments as needed. This document helps us to think through and agree on the ways that we present ourselves as an organization and align our content and design to our institutional values.

WHY Accessibility & inclusion

Our organization focuses on supporting teachers, educational leaders, and school founders in reimagining schools with a focus on equity. Our programs and experiences are open to everyone, and we take care to use language and design practices that actively promote our values.

- Abolish racist language

We believe that the words we use matter and have a tangible impact on people and communities. Our decisions about how to use language and words are grounded in empathy for historically marginalized communities. We acknowledge the way that words have been used to diminish, oppress, and harm different groups, and we strive to use the most inclusive language.

We have assembled a word list to begin to rethink historically harmful language and metaphors, and we know this is a work in progress which will evolve as we learn together. Each person in our community must strive to use language to uplift, and unlearning racist language is a process that requires each of our commitment.

The Intuit Style Guide acknowledges that using anti-racist language is a larger process than simply avoiding certain words or phrases. It requires that each person use their own judgment to begin to transform their language practice. They offer the following questions that can help an individual determine if a word is racist or harmful.

- Is the language working metaphorically?
- If so, what are the implications behind the metaphor? Does it place a positive connotation on whiteness and a negative one on something else (usually blackness)?
- Does the language imply “otherness” and exclusivity?
- Can it be substituted for something clearer or more literal? (The answer is often yes.) Think about what the term actually means and describe that.

- Are there any groups of people who could be harmed by this? Who and how so? Thinking about who is affected deepens your understanding of antiracism.
- Does the language make you uncomfortable, even if you can't quite articulate the reason?

We also provide the following list of terms with racist roots. This list is not comprehensive, but it hopefully provides an important starting point to rethinking some common words and phrases that may unintentionally cause harm through their usage. We can evolve this list to reflect more words as we learn in community.

No: Blacklist/Whitelist

Yes: block or deny (verbs); blacklist or denylist (nouns)

We avoid using metaphors referring to black/white or light/dark, particularly when black refers to something nefarious or negative and white refers to something pure or positive (Burgess, 1973). We strive to use language that more precisely conveys the meaning that we intend and avoids reifying racist stereotypes.

No: Black box

Yes: confusing, unclear, mysterious

We avoid using metaphors referring to black/white or light/dark, particularly when black refers to something nefarious or negative and white refers to something pure or positive.

No: Brown bag

Yes: lunch-and-learn, lunch meeting

This expression calls up the historical practice of using a brown bag to determine if someone's skin color was light enough to attend or be admitted to an event during a period of intraracial segregation.

No: Cakewalk

Yes: easy, simple

This term originally referred to a dancing contest that was held for enslaved African Americans in which a cake was awarded as a prize. The cakewalk later became popularized in racist minstrel shows.

No: Conquer

Yes: Win, defeat

The term has a connection with colonization.

No: Long Time, No See

Yes: I haven't seen you in a long time, it's been a while

The first usage of this phrase was in the Boston Sunday Globe in the late 19th century and was attributed to a Native American speaker who did not speak standard English, however, the Oxford English Dictionary notes that this type of sentence construction would have been unusual for Indigenous languages in North America. The phrasing was designed to stereotype Indigenous peoples as unintelligent.

No: No Can Do

Yes: I cannot do that, Not possible, No

This type of sentence construction first originated in print in the late 19th century and was meant to stereotype indigenous peoples as unintelligent.

No: Low Hanging Fruit

Yes: Easy rewards, high reward, low risk items, quick win

While this phrase does not have racist origins, a poem called "Strange Fruit" which describes the legacy of lynching, may be associated with this phrase for people whose life has been affected by lynching.

No: Grandfathered

Yes: Legacy, exempt

This clause originated in the 19th century as a way to prevent recently emancipated African Americans from voting based on literacy rules, constitution quizzes, or poll taxes while exempting white people from these rules if they had previously or if they were the lineal descendants of voters.

No: Master

Yes: main, primary, source

This word connotes a hierarchical relationship of control and ownership, which is connected to the idea of dominance and is a term that carries a harmful connection to enslaving and oppressing humans.

No: Nitty gritty

Yes: details, basics, crux

The etymology of this phrase is unknown, however some people have theorized that it originated during the Atlantic slave trade and referred to the detrious found at the bottom of the ships.

No: Peanut gallery

Yes: Crowd

This phrase originates from the U.S. during the vaudeville era in the segregated South and referred to the least expensive seats in an auditorium or theater, which were mostly reserved for Black people.

No: Powwow

Yes: Meeting, chat, brainstorm

A powwow is a sacred social gathering for many Indigenous groups in North America.

No: Spirit animal

Yes: Kindred spirit

Spirit guides or helpers are sacred and are part of a larger spiritual culture for Indigenous and other cultural groups.

No: Tribe

Yes: Friends, team, community

This word has cultural and spiritual significance for Indigenous and other cultural groups, and it does not just refer to a group of people with common interests or affiliations.

No: Urban

Yes: Metropolitan area, city, large city

Ibram X. Kendi describes space racism as a collection of racist policies that led to resource inequality between racialized spaces, and one of those racialized spaces is called “urban.” We can use language that has more descriptive and neutral language to describe these environments.

No: White hat

Yes: Ethical, upstanding

This term reifies the “white is good” and “black is bad” paradigm.

No: Denigrate

Yes: Disparage, belittle, put down

This word means “to blacken” and reinforces the “white is good/black is bad” paradigm.

- Accessibility principles

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines provide clear directions for how to make web content more accessible. We refer to WCAG 2.0, which are the most widely-accepted set of recommendations and focus more on principles of accessibility versus technique. These four guiding principles are known by the acronym POUR. Many of the obstacles that people with disabilities face regarding accessibility pertain to one or more of the POUR principles.

- Perceivable
 - Users can use their senses to identify content and design elements. Content needs to be designed to be perceivable by all users and makes accommodations for users who may rely more heavily on one sense, such as vision or hearing.
- Operable
 - Users can effectively use interactive elements of a website, including buttons, navigation, and forms. Pages are not overly dense so that any interactive elements are easy to hit. Users can utilize interactive elements with assistive technology, and operation does not require users to utilize a standard mouse or keyboard.
- Understandable
 - Users can understand the content and the design of the interface. Content and navigation should be predictable and consistent.
- Robust

- Content and design needs to be adaptable enough to be accessed on the user's preferred technological device or software. Design should not assume that users access the content on a particular device.
- Accessible content guidelines
 - Screen readers: Some people in our audience cannot see. We design for users who may be accessing our content with screen readers. Screen readers read the text available and cannot perceive images, headings, or other design elements.
 - Always use descriptive alt text for images, icons, and controls.
 - Create text alternatives for charts and graphs.
 - Do not refer to where things physically appear on the screen (e.g. above or below)
 - Color and contrast: Some people in our audience are color blind or have low vision. People who have difficulty seeing color or have low vision require high contrast between the background and text and may be using a screen magnifier.
 - Avoid images of text
 - Include icons with text to make things more clear
 - Captions for audio content
 - Some people in our audience cannot hear. All of our videos or audio recordings need to have captions and/or transcripts.
 - Captions need to be accurately synchronized with videos.
 - Captions and transcripts should indicate who is speaking.
 - Keep it simple
 - Some people in our audience have learning disabilities or do not speak English as a first or primary language. Design and content should be kept simple and clear.
 - Keep sentences simple. Aim for 5th-8th grade readability.
 - Use images to appropriately illustrate content.
 - Keep design interfaces (menu, navigation, etc.) consistent.
- Aim for 5th to 8th grade readability
 - Supports users to understand quickly and easily
 - Simpler language also makes translation easier and benefits those users whose primary language is not English
 - Test your readability by examining the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and Gunning Fog Index. You can use readable.com or app.writer.com. Microsoft Word also has an option to check the readability score of your writing.
- Use gender-neutral language and inclusive gender-neutral terms
 - Don't assume gender
 - If gender is unknown, write around it. Do not use she/he or s/he.
 - Write with the pronouns they go by
 - When not possible to avoid, use they/them/their
 - Avoid gendered terms
 - "Ladies and gentlemen"
 - "Guys"
 - "Brothers and sisters"
 - "Moms and dads"

Style

- Formatting
 - Do not use all caps to emphasize a word or create a stylistic difference. It may create difficulty for our audience members who have dyslexia, reading challenges, or vision impairments. All

caps should only be used for words that are acronyms and only after you have spelled out the entire name at least once before.

- Numbers
- Punctuation
- Principles

HOW

Content patterns

Rationale that connects the accessibility / inclusion piece to the specific content and channel patterns

- Blog posts
 - Intuit recommends blog entries that use short paragraphs (1-2 sentences) and are between 4-6 minutes in length (800-1,500 words). These are “deeper dives” on topics that cannot be easily explored on Google, written informally and personally, and provide value that readers can’t get elsewhere; benefit from having a strong POV and a “hook”. They do not overly promote events/products and they do not simply recap an event.
- Emails
 - Intuit includes some tips about writing emails, reminding that the goal of an email is to be opened and at least skimmed. These emails help to inform audience members about what is developing, and champion the voice of the brand.
 - Some specifics to email guidelines include
 - Who: Audience is a relevant user (not overly “mass”)
 - What: Email is simple, direct
 - Trim content where possible
 - Why: Focus on benefit to audience
 - Subject lines are around 50 characters (5-7 words)
 - Use personalization (generic messages do not need to use names)
 - Use delight (sparingly)
 - Avoid content that can trigger spam labels (excessive punctuation, all caps, and the words “free” or “buy”)
 - Layout should include bullets, dividers, white space
 - Focus readers on a single clear action. Avoid secondary calls to action.
- Website / pages
 - Site bios
 - Profile pictures
 - One CTA per section on website
- Events
 - Workshop / conference / meeting

Channels

- Mobile
 - Part of our style framework is recognizing and supporting users who are accessing content on their mobile devices. It is important to design with the smallest screen in mind to avoid overloading content with text and design elements by keeping writing direct, concise, and simple.
 - Thinking from the mobile point of view:
 - On smaller screens, text looks longer and feels more overwhelming.

- Mobile users are likely to be multitasking when accessing content and may be more distracted than a user on a larger device or sitting at a computer screen.
 - Smaller screens are more prone to touchscreen errors.
 - Small devices in portrait mode have little horizontal space and elements will stack vertically instead of showing side by side.
 - You can see less content at once. A lot of scrolling can be annoying or overwhelming.
- Designing for mobile:
 - Keep it short
 - Pair words with icons
 - Make sure text is readable on all screens
 - Use bullets and other visual breaks
 - Avoid filler words (very, really, basically, etc)
 - Use short words and phrases
 - Start with a verb
 - Use strong verbs
- Communications framework
 - Intuit articulates a communication framework into buckets of what customers need to do. They break down their four audience goals as Discover, Understand, Get things done, and Grow and succeed.
 - It would be interesting for HTH GSE to consider what our audience members' needs are and determine how this could be categorized to support an overall communication strategy.
- Marketing
 - Intuit expresses a marketing strategy that focuses on inspiring people to use their products and balances customer expectations, brand-building, and conversion. The way they do this is through creating messaging with a cohesive voice and tone, through telling stories, by being trustworthy with clear, inclusive, and accurate information. They are aware of the end-to-end user experience and design to make sure it is consistent. What is the HTH GSE's overall marketing strategy?
- Content promotion
 - Intuit creates promotable content by inspiring other content creators to share content in a way that has intrinsic value. Their content promotion strategy is never about promoting a product, but is about sharing information in a way that others might be interested. For example, they curate big data, publish new data, share product data, interview experts to share their analysis, invite experts with opposing ideas, and harness other brands. Their promotable content is authoritative, unique, objective, topical, and inspiring.
 - They introduce some additional design guidance for designing promotable content such as using bylines, datelines, and headlines. The actual content includes a "so what" in the first paragraph, subheadings, comprehensive and authentic stories, avoiding calls to action, and linking to internal resources or external resources. Linking to other content creators can help the SEO. They also recommend enlisting support from graphic and web designers at the beginning of developing the content so that a wireframe can be agreed upon.

Word list

- Anti-racist education
- Anti-bias education
- Center for Love and Justice
 - This is how we present the Center for Love and Justice. This sub-brand does not use an acronym.
- Center for Research on Equity and Innovation, CREI

- This is how we present the Center for Research on Equity and Innovation. If you have already spelled it out in full, upon second mention, you can abbreviate the name to CREI.
- CARPE College Access Network, CARPE
 - This is how we present the CARPE College Access Network. Upon second mention, you can abbreviate it to CARPE.
- Care Network
 -
- Collegial conversations
- Deeper learning
- Deeper Learning Conference (DL Conference)
- Design thinking
- Digital Portfolios
- M.Ed. in Educational Leadership (EdL)
- High Tech High Graduate School of Education
- Marketing, Sales, and Communications Team (MSC Team)
- New School Creation Fellowship (NSCF)
- PBL Design Camp
- PBL Leadership Academy
- San Diego Teacher Residency (SDTR)
- HTH GSE Unboxed (Unboxed)

Resources

- Content checklist
 - Spell and capitalize program and event names correctly. We refer to High Tech High Graduate School of Education as HTH GSE or the GSE.
- Content design and strategy tools
 - Content Design
 - Writer.com
 - InclusivityBot
 - Readable.com
 - Design tools
 - Adobe Creative etc
 - Box for file storage and sharing
- Content strategy 101
 - Topic 1: Content strategy overview
 - Topic 2: Inventory and audit
 - Topic 3: Closing the gap (Content gap analysis)
 - Topic 4: Making a test plan
 - Topic 5: Strategic partnering
 - Topic 6: Content and systems
 - Topic 7: Architecture
 - Outro: Doing content strategy

Kay doesn't think we should over explain why things need to be why they are
 The accessibility options go over the reasons for everything in this packet
 Make a copy and reorganize it into our report format

Have everyone on our team done and then it goes out to the staff for a month and then disseminates
May want to inquire to try and make this a part of the new employee onboarding
We're going to need our own content checklist before something goes on the site