

This document has been [moved to Notion](#).

Welcome to the User Interviews Style Guide for Copy. This document will evolve over time. If you have questions on anything below or ideas for additions, contact erin@userinterviews.com.

Key Concepts

Connect emotionally, but avoid cliché or being too precious

Always, always ask: why does the reader care about this? Speak to that.

Economy of words - get to the point. What can you cut?

Hook the reader - do not ever bury the lede.

If you don't love it, don't ship it.

Tone & Audiences

Think straight talk. I describe our audience of PMs, UXers, researchers as: seriously curious, playfully deliberate, humbly confident, collaboratively independent, pragmatically empathetic. Honest content that reflects these complexities resonates well.

Our tone is not extreme (think Chubbies) nor is it vanilla-least-common-denominator-offend-and-inspire-no-one-corporate-crap.

Instead it is:

- Smart - research is pretty brainy. No need to play dumb.
- Meta - (get up in there with self-referential content and break that 4th wall).
- Humbly confident - we know what we know and what we don't.
- User focused - this is how we build advocates, community, and trust—it's all for the user.
- Aspirational - people should feel like our content, our words, can actually help them be better versions of themselves.
- Approachable - This is how we bring aspirational down to earth. We are NOT pretentious. More, smart weirdos.
- Quirky/real/human - We are all kinds of humans (UI) talking to all kinds of humans (clients) who talk to all kinds of humans (participants). Let's get real with it all. These are challenging times for connection. Authenticity and shared empathy is the name of the game. Here's a great list of examples on [writing like a human](#).

Emoji level: sprinkle. 🥂

Principles to live by

A bit more in-depth than key concepts, keep these principles in mind to write effective copy.

Each piece of content—email, blog post, line of ux copy, doesn't matter—should have a clear purpose and a clear audience in mind.

Most of the feedback I give is along the lines of “what is the point?” meaning, what do we want the audience to learn or do? What do THEY want to learn or do? Are those in alignment? Very hard to write effective copy with an unclear purpose. When the purpose, the point, the learning objectives are clear, it can sort of write itself.

Deliver on your promise

Tell people what you're going to tell them, then make sure you've done what you promised. Follow the UX through a few steps. In-app, if we say you can do x, can they actually do it from the place/state they're in? Find ways to make this clear without paragraphs of copy.

Since we're really humans, we're down with the first person and the singular they

You are allowed to exist in copy you write. In-app, this could be super weird since there are no bylines, but we can say things like “Hey, we think it'd be a great idea for you to do x right now.” The progressive grammatical and societal norm for singular pronouns is now they/them/their. No need to choose a lane or awkwardly go back and forth. [More here](#).

Data is your friend

Over time, as you build a reputation for having trustworthy and compelling opinions, people may care about them because they're yours. But data is your best friend when it comes to making a point (qual counts too). Don't shy away from making your argument with data.

Grammar, spelling & punctuation - Basics you should know

1. Use one space after a period, not two. [Here's why](#).
2. Many words end in s and are plural, not possessive. Make sure to use apostrophes with possessive words, not plural ones.
3. There is much confusion over where to place punctuation when quotation marks are involved. A great rule to remember is that periods and commas ALWAYS go inside quotation marks. Here are more [punctuation and quotation mark rules](#) to reference when in doubt.
4. We favor the Oxford comma. [This illustration](#) is a good example of why to use an Oxford comma. Also, not a big deal.
5. Not sure if that word is hyphenated or not? [Merriam-Webster](#) will show you the way. If more than one way is acceptable, don't stress about getting the most perfect one. [Hyphens are slowly fading out of style](#) if you're on the edge.
6. [Punctuation and parentheses](#).
7. Use the exclamation point sparingly.
8. Use the active voice, as opposed to the passive voice, whenever possible. Bob.
9. When in doubt, follow [AP style](#).
10. When in doubt, [Merriam-Webster](#) has the correct spelling for you. The first spelling is the preferred spelling, and it will list alternates. If it says "variant of x" or "less common

spelling of x” you are looking at the less-preferred spelling. Example, grey and gray, [gray is preferred](#).

11. Everyday is an adjective. ex: everyday great savings. If you are doing something every day, like all of the days, that is two words. ex: Take this class every day for 3 weeks.
12. Layout is a noun. ex: the page layout was stellar. For the verb you want lay out ex: please lay out the best options. Setup, followup, and compound words like that work the same way as layout.

Blog/Long-form specific

[\(Guide to cropping blog hero and thumbnail images\)](#)

Short-ish paragraphs

Keep paragraphs to three to five sentences (no more than 100 words). If an article has more than three paragraphs, add at least one bolded subhead to break up the text, make it scannable for the web, and add SEO value with relevant keywords. Use sentence case for these.

Links

Include 3+ links to relevant content within the body of each article, 5 or more for articles over 750 words. Go back to older related content and add links from that content to newer content also.

Mix up formats

Images, videos, bullets, numbered lists, graphics, charts, quotes, etc all important for scanning long posts.

Title vs Sentence Case on Headers

Use title case for titles and page titles. [Title case](#) can be confusing. Use the AP version. If you include a dek or subhead, use [sentence case](#). Use sentence case of any subheaders as well. Feels less aggressive. Put subheaders in bold or h2.

SEO

1. Most articles will have a clear keyword phrase target. (Even if it isn't meant to be an "SEO post" there is no reason not to find the most relevant keyword for what you're writing).
2. Once you have a keyword phrase, make sure to use it in different permutations in your meta title (first words in the title if possible), headline, meta description, and first paragraph of your copy. Don't overdo it and stuff it throughout your copy too many times, but if it works in a natural way... having it in a bolded subhead is great too. It's more important to have an engaging and descriptive headline that people will click on than one

that feels super seo optimized—google is onto this stuff so it's more likely you'll neither win clicks or ranking by trying too hard to stuff keywords.

3. Use words with meaning as [anchor text](#), not "click here."
4. Name your image something that describes the image; good-ux.jpg, not img23295lrg.jpg. Fill out the alt text field with something similar and end with "image," e.g. good ux image. This is important for accessibility as well.
5. Get some links! As always, tell the people you're asking for links why in the world they'd want to do what you're asking.

UX Copy Specific

1. Use [sentence case](#) on buttons.

More to come here.

Practical Examples

To come! I'll be adding to this section as examples come up!

Example 1 - Team members page

Before

"Still honor" do people even know about this? Is this what drives them to invite their own teammates to join team, or those teammates to sign up? Our hypothesis on the growth team was, no.

The screenshot shows a form titled "Invite Team Members" with the subtext "Don't worry, we'll still honor our 'Give 3, Get 3' referral benefit for any new users." The form contains three input fields for email addresses: "note-taker@email.com", "other-interviewer@email.com", and "project-mgr@email.com". Below the fields is a green button labeled "Send Invites".

Below the form is a table titled "Team Members" with two columns: "Name" and "Email". The table contains one row with the name "Erin May" and the email "erinhmay+111419b@gmail.com".

After

This gets to the real motivation of adding folks to your team, and specifically what it will allow them to do. We saw a 331% lift in conversion to invite team members when changing this copy.

Invite team members

Research is better together 🧑🏻‍🤝‍🧑🏻. Invite as many team members as you'd like so they can view and copy any project.

Email addresses

Send Invites

Invite via link

 