

iFixit's Official Technical Writing Style Guide

A comprehensive guide to formatting and stylizing text in repair guides, as well as good practices for punctuation, grammar, and general wordiness.

Millions of people around the world rely on our repair guides to fix their stuff. A good percentage of these people are fixing something for the first time, which means it's imperative that our guides are easy to understand and follow.

To make sure of that, we have to pay very close attention to the instructions we write and how we write them. That's where this style guide comes into play. It can—and will—change as our repair guides evolve, so you're not expected to know it by heart at all times. Simply use it as a reference whenever needed. (Ctrl/Cmd+F is your friend!)

General Wordiness

Avoid Passive Voice

You're telling someone what to do in your guides, so tell them what to do! Simply stating that a component can be removed is passive and weak.

Bad: "Heating the lower edge of the iPhone will help soften the adhesive securing the display."

Good: "Heat the lower edge of the iPhone to soften the adhesive securing the display."

Bad: "If you're having trouble slicing the adhesive, you can apply more heat."

Good: "If you're having trouble slicing the adhesive, apply more heat."

Avoid Unnecessary Adverbs

A.k.a. "weasel words" or qualifiers. Words like "quite", "mostly", "slightly", "seems", "sort of", "pretty", and "somewhat" make you sound unconfident or unsure. Is the screw "pretty hard to tighten" or is it just hard to tighten? Say what you mean without wishy-washy words.

Bad: "You may possibly damage the connector."

Good: "You may damage the connector."

Bad: "Lift the display up slightly."

Good: "Lift the display by a few millimeters."

That last example demonstrates the importance of quantifying your instructions, because “slightly” means different things to different people.

Exceptions: Phrases like “carefully remove the speaker” are okay, since the adverb is being used as a warning.

Explaining Actions

Tell your audience not only what to do, but how to do it. In most cases, you can phrase the sentence like so: “Use a [tool] to [action].”

Bad: “Remove the battery.”

Good: “Use a plastic card to slowly pry the battery up and out of the case.”

Bad: “Disconnect the battery connector.”

Good: “Use a spudger to pry the battery connector straight up out of its socket.”

Emphasize the Action

Place more focus on the action, rather than the tool. While grammatically correct either way, we want the action to be the main part of a step or bullet.

Bad: “Using a Phillips screwdriver, remove the four screws.”

Good: “Use a Phillips screwdriver to remove the four screws.”

Use Plain Language

If there’s a simpler word or phrase that explains an action equally well, use it! Avoid technical jargon and unnecessarily elaborate phrasing whenever possible.

Bad: “Disengage the engine before you begin.”

Good: “Turn off the engine before you begin.”

It’s All About the Fixer

Use “you” whenever you can. Make the repair about the fixer and give them ownership and power over their device. It’s a small thing, but it makes a big difference! And it’s one aspect of making our guides more personable and approachable.

Bad: “Turn off the device before beginning this repair.”

Good: “Turn off your device before you begin this repair.”

Exception: Don't go overboard with it, though! Try to stick to big, overarching things, like the device itself. Stick with "the" when referring to individual parts and components (Ex: "Remove the battery" instead of "Remove your battery.")

Use Contractions

They shorten your sentences and sound more natural.

Avoid Using Short, Little Words After Verbs

"Start up" vs "start", "click on" vs "click", "tap on" vs "tap", "off of" vs "off", etc. When in doubt, if it's grammatically correct with fewer words, go with fewer words.

Use Articles

Otherwise, you'll sound like a robot. Just write like you'd speak conversationally to the person sitting next to you.

Bad: "Unplug cord from wall."

Good: "Unplug the cord from the wall."

Keep It Concise

As a general rule of thumb, just keep it concise. Lengthy instructions are intimidating and harder to process for the reader. Write your instructions, and then think about how to convey the same information with fewer and simpler words. Don't try to make your text overly technical or formal. Our guides should be friendly, accessible, and easy to read.

Punctuation, Capitalization, and Grammar

Formatting Common Words

- Never capitalize "internet" or "ethernet". (Auto-correct tends to capitalize these words. Be better than auto-correct!)
- Use "email", not "e-mail".
- Use "Wi-Fi", not "wifi", "WiFi", "Wifi", or "Wi-fi".
- Use "spacebar", not "space bar".
- Use "keycap", not "key cap".
- Use "smartphone", not "smart phone".

- Use “trackpad”, not “track pad” or “track-pad”.
- Use the % symbol, not the word “percent”.
- Use “website”, not “web site”. But use “web page”, not “webpage”.
- Always use a single space after a period.
- Always use the Oxford comma.

Tip: Use a text expansion tool to automatically change these words to the correct format. So if you typed “track pad”, it can automatically change it to “trackpad”.

Less vs. Fewer

Use “fewer” if you’re referring to things in the plural. E.g. screws, adhesive strips, etc.

Ex: “This model has fewer screws than its predecessor.”

Use “less” when you’re referring to something that can’t be counted or doesn’t have a plural. E.g. glass, glue, battery life.

Ex: “This model has less glue than its predecessor.”

General Markup/Bullet/Visual Things

Bullets

Make the action the first bullet in a step whenever possible. Sometimes you need to provide a warning or a note before an action, and that’s fine. But if that warning or note can go after the action, that’s preferable.

Use a Note bullet to provide any supplemental and helpful information that is NOT instruction. E.g. background information, context, etc.

Use a Reminder bullet for actions that are important for reassembly, as well as anything that differs from simply reversing the existing steps.

Use a Caution bullet for warnings about things that could potentially damage the device or harm the user. Prepend the word “Caution:” when you’re describing a hazardous situation which

could result in minor or moderate injury. Prepend the word “WARNING:” when you’re describing a hazardous situation which could result in death or serious injury.

Indent bullets that are directly related to the bullet above them. If the bullet is relevant to the entire step, leave it unindented.

Markup

Avoid using arrows when marking up images, even though it’s an option. We let the community and Dozuki clients use them, but if you're shooting thoughtful and action-oriented photos, arrows are unnecessary.

When marking screws, make the circle ever-so-slightly larger than the screw head.

Use markup in ROYGBIV color order (a.k.a. rainbow color order).

Exception: If you’d normally use red markup on a photo, but the device is red, use a different color that’s easier to distinguish.

Mark bullet colors the same as the markup you’re referring to in the photo.

Overall, don’t overuse markup. Only add it where necessary to show something that is not otherwise obvious in the image. In many cases, a well-composed photograph that's centered on the action needs no markup at all.

Tools and Devices

Use the most current and correctly branded tools in your photos. Make sure they're in photogenic condition (no scratches, marks, dents, etc.).

When adding a screwdriver to the Tools section of a guide, make sure you're adding the actual driver and not just the bit (Phillips #0 screwdriver vs. Phillips #0 bit). This mitigates the awkward situation where the fixer buys the bit, only to realize they don't have a handle to drive it with.

Whenever possible, use devices that look factory fresh or close to it.

General Formatting

Guide Titles

Format all guide titles with title case capitalization.

Bad: "How to replenish the lost air in your MacBook Air"

Good: "How to Replace the Depleted Gnomes in Your Nintendo Switch"

Step Titles

Add custom step titles to the first four steps of a guide, then to major actions after that (i.e. wherever else it makes sense). This helps Google format our guides better when they appear in search results.

Use verbs in the present simple form and use sentence case capitalization.

Bad: "Removing the Driveshaft"

Good: "Remove the driveshaft"

Numbers

For ordinal numbers, spell out first through ninth, and use figures for 10th and above.

For cardinal numbers, spell out numbers below 10 (six, seven, eight, etc.) and use figures for numbers 10 and above.

Exception: When you're using the number in a measurement, always leave it as a figure.

Exception: Don't use figures for quantities if immediately followed by a measurement, even if the quantity is greater than 10. (Ex: "Remove twenty 2.1 mm screws," not "Remove 20 2.1 mm screws." If you're not reading carefully, it's very easy to mistake the "20" for the length and just see "202.1 mm," for instance.)

Measurements

Always put a space between the number and the measurement.

Bad: 10mm

Good: 10 mm

Tip: Use Option+Space (or Alt+0160 on Windows) to add a non-breaking space between the number and the measurement. This will prevent the two from separating in line breaks.

When displaying imperial measurements, use "inches" and "feet," not quotes and apostrophes.

Bad: 2"

Good: 2 inches (or 2-inch, if using it as an adjective)

Only abbreviate metric measurements, never imperial measurements.

Bad: 10 millimeters

Good: 10 mm

Bad: 3 in.

Good: 3 inches

List torque values in "ft-lb," and add "N-m" values if you can.

Screw Shots

Always call them "screws," not "fasteners."

Exception: Use “fasteners” only if you're listing items that are not just screws, like bolts, nuts, etc.

Always include the name and size of the drive bit, number of screws, and screw length, in that order. And remember to put the tool first, then the action.

Ex: “Use a T5 Torx screwdriver to remove the three 4.5 mm screws.”

If there is only one screw to remove, there’s no need to include “one.”

Ex: “Use a T5 Torx screwdriver to remove the 4.5 mm screw.”

Exception: For Phillips screws, we’ve stopped specifying the driver size except in the Tools list. We just say "Use a Phillips screwdriver" in the instructions and don't specify the size, since Phillips sizes aren't standardized.

Note: In some cases, it's okay to get away with the shorthand "Remove the five T3 Torx screws" without mentioning the tool used, if it’s a common drive bit and the description is clear. But try to stick with the “tool, then action” format whenever possible.

If a group of screws contains different lengths or driver types, separate them into a bulleted list, making sure to adhere to the ROYGBIV markup order. If all the screws use the same driver type, list that in the initial bullet.

Note: While there’s no need to include “one” if there’s only one screw to remove, this is not the case in a bulleted screw list.

When mentioning a screw’s length, include the word “long” and format it as a compound adjective.

Ex: “Remove the 3.5 mm-long screw.”

Note: It obviously needs to be clear that the measurement refers to the length (or else people quickly get confused), but adding the word “long” to every screw step (or bullet!) can get very

repetitive. You can compromise by making it clear you're talking about the length in the first screw step or two, then carry on without including "long." (Ex: "Remove the 3.5 mm screw.")

Branding

Apple drops definitive articles when referring to their products, and it's dumb. Always refer to it as "the iPhone" or "an iPhone," not just "iPhone."

Never use "Android" as a noun for a device. Always follow it up with "device," "smartphone," "tablet," etc.

Bad: "Turn off your Android before you begin."

Good: "Turn off your Android device before you begin."

For Plus models, spell out the word instead of using the + symbol. Ex: "iPhone 6 Plus," not "iPhone 6+."

Exception: Some non-Apple devices annoyingly do use the plus symbol in their official name, in which case you actually need to use the + symbol.

Even if a product is branded as all caps by the manufacturer, always use title case.

Bad: Motorola DROID MAXX

Good: Motorola Droid Maxx

Product names that use camel case (iPhone, AirPods, etc.) are to be formatted as such.

Take a look at our Device Nomenclature page for more info about formatting and naming devices.

Linking

Links in a sentence should point to where the reader would assume they're pointing to. If you showed someone the link with little or no context, they should be able to guess where they would end up. Avoid linking words like "this" or "here."

This is not only good reader service, but it feeds good SEO practices—relevant link text was the core of Google's initial search engine scheme.

Avoid linking word by word for effect. People reading on mobile devices may not enjoy targeting your little links with their thumb. People on all kinds of devices may not enjoy the redundancy or belaboring of the point.