

Creating an Author Guide and Chapter Prototype

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To assist textbooks authors through the writing process, provide them with a set of guidelines and a chapter template to use when writing. Comprehensive guidelines and clear expectations will help ensure that each author composes their chapter in a standardized format, reducing the need for major structural edits and giving the book a unified look and feel.

The following document provides examples of potential information to include followed by a sample chapter template.

Define Chapter Elements

Decide what typical chapter elements you would like each chapter to include. Set out how many of each element should be present and define their desired characteristics (format, length, instructions for readers, etc.). Each of these categories can be mapped to Gagné's "Nine Events of Instruction": **Opening elements** gain the learner's attention, inform the learner of the objectives, and stimulate the recall of prior learning. **Integrated pedagogical devices** and **interior features** help present the content and provide guidance. **Closers** elicit performance, provide feedback, allow for self-assessment, and enhance retention and transfer of learning (see "[Planning Your Open Textbook](#)" in the Open Textbook Authoring Guide for more).

Potential chapter elements include:

Opening Elements

- Chapter Overview
- Introduction
- Outline / Topic List
- Focus Questions
- Learning Goals / Objectives / Outcomes / Competencies / Skills
- Case problem or relevant real-world example

Integrated Pedagogical Devices

- Emphasis on words (**bold** or *italics*) to indicate new vocabulary / important terms / words in glossary
- Marginalia or sidebars
- Lists that highlight main points
- Summary tables and graphics

- Cross-references that link backwards or forwards to important concepts
- Study and review questions
- Illustrations and explanatory graphics
- Tips / Reminders / “Did you know?”

Interior Features

- Case studies / Models / Problems
- Profiles of important figures / historical moments in the field
- Debates / Reflections
- Primary sources and data

Closing Elements

- Conclusion / Summary
- Glossary / List of definitions
- Review Questions
- Self-Assessment (ex. short quiz or exercise)
- Substantial exercises and problem cases
- Fill-in tables (e.g. for “learning-in-action” books)
- Ideas for projects (academic or real world)
- References / Reading Lists / Annotated Links

List adapted from Schneider, D.K. (2008). "[Textbook Writing Tutorial](#)." Edutech Wiki. CC BY-NC-SA.

Define an Audience and Reading Level

Referring to your scoping document, clarify the ideal length for your chapter, the reading level, tone, and intended audience including the regional focus.

Define the **reading level** for the chapter - set a specific grade level (or equivalent reading level) and, if possible, provide an example text written at that level. Provide a link to some form of reading level checker and ask authors to check their text as they write. The [WebFX Readability Test Tool](#) is one example of an online reading level checker. This [LEXILE Framework for Reading Map \[pdf\]](#) provides examples of well-known books at each reading level.

Set a **tone** for your book - Would you like authors to use a more conversational style of writing or a formal style? Should they write the book in second person or third person? Will readers be familiar with the terminology associated with the topic, or should specialized and technical language be either avoided or defined within the text?

What is the **audience** for your book? Does your book have a **regional focus**? For example, are you aiming to produce a global edition, with diverse examples from around the world, or are you aiming to produce a local edition, with examples limited to a particular country or region?

Links

Provide authors with examples of how and when to include links within the text. For example, you can set expectations for how much authors should **link out** to content rather than include the content within the book. When linking out, ensure authors choose links to sites that are accessible, work on multiple browsers, and don't require plugins.

Ask that authors use links that can be opened regardless of **geographic region**—for example, not linking to videos or other media that can only be accessed from a particular country. Wherever possible, ask authors to use **permalinks** to reduce the amount of effort that needs to be spent replacing expired links.

Ask authors to keep links **accessible** to screen readers by using clear and meaningful link text and avoiding links that are plain URLs or that say “Read More” or “Click Here.” For example, to learn more, visit this [chapter on accessible weblinks](#).

Citations

Let authors know how they should handle **in-text citations** as well as **reference lists**. Rebus Community has developed this boilerplate for their [author guidelines](#):

“Citations should follow the [MLA/APA/Chicago etc.] style. References to historical figures should include the dates of birth and death in parentheses, such as: Karl Marx (1813-1883). The text as a whole will be edited in accordance with the [Chicago Manual of Style].”

Visual Resources and Media

Provide authors with any standards you have for **image size** (minimum pixel width or height), **orientation** (landscape or portrait), and **resolution** (DPI or dots per inch). For example, “images must be at least 1000px wide, landscape orientation, and 72 DPI.”

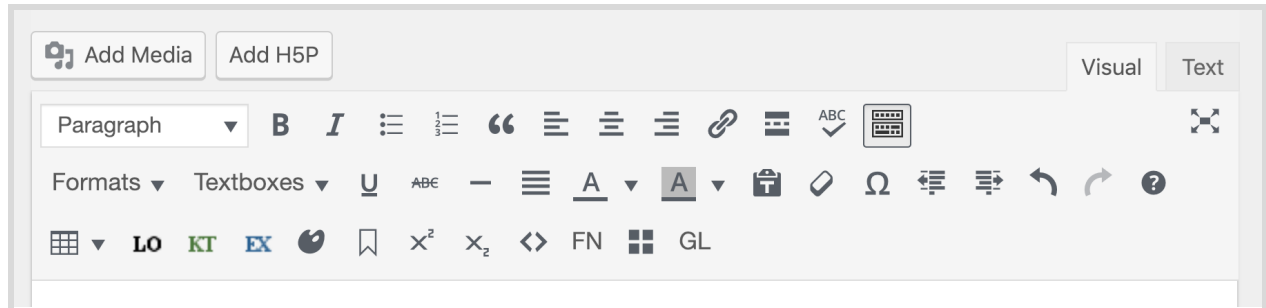
For each image, ask authors to provide a full citation, including licensing information and URL if available, a caption, and [alternate text for the image](#) for accessibility. Let authors know if you expect all media to carry a **specific license**, for example (CC-BY, CC-BY-SA, or CC0).

If using Google Docs to share drafts, make sure to create a file folder for images to be used in each chapter, along with a naming structure for files.

Using Pressbooks

Pressbooks includes a set of features that can be inserted into your chapter. If you would like to use any of them, make note of this in your chapter prototype. This will help authors know what type of content they must include and help editors keep the chapters standardized.

When editing a chapter in Pressbooks, you will see options like these for formatting the text:



Your chapter prototype should set out rules for the use of any of the Pressbooks features that appear in the image above:

1. Headings
2. Bold / Italics / Underline
3. Bullets / Numbers
4. Blockquotes
5. Text alignment and justification
6. Links
7. Textboxes and sidebars
8. Special characters
9. Tables
10. Anchor links
11. Superscripts and Subscripts
12. Footnotes
13. Glossary Terms

Pressbooks provides a set of pre-made textbox features that you can use to structure your chapters:

1. Learning Objectives (LO)
2. Key Takeaways (KT)
3. Exercises (EX)

Your prototype should include a template for how these features should be used (for example, providing formatting guidelines and length expectations) as well as indicate to authors how many of each feature should be included.

[See what this chapter prototype looks like in Pressbooks](#)

Chapter Title (Heading 1)

Chapter Overview (Heading 2)

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Chapter Topics (Heading 3)

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Chapter Learning Objectives (LO Textbox)

[Please include at least four learning objectives for your chapter. Learning objectives should be specific and measurable]. After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Learning objective 1
- Learning objective 2
- Learning objective 3
- Learning objective 4

Chapter Introduction (Heading 2)

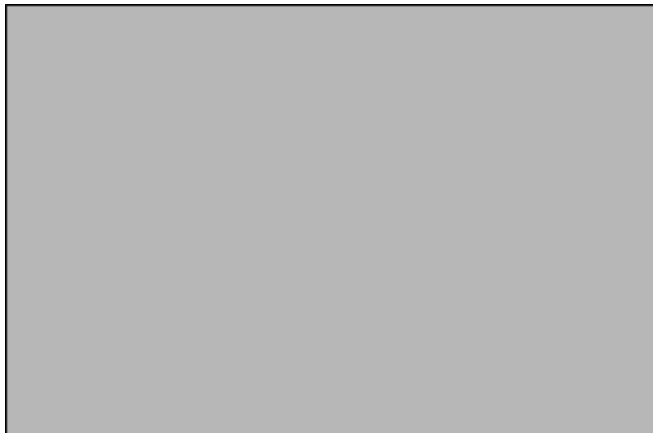
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Activity [#]: [Activity Title] (Pressbooks: EX Textbox)

[Instructions for how to complete activity]

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[Fig #: Caption]

[Image: Please save image files to your chapter's folder with file name Fig#.jpg]

[Alt text for image]

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[Citation information including link where available]

Section (Heading 2)

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[footnote]Insert citation[/footnote]

Did You Know (Pressbooks KT textbox)

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Recommended Reading (Heading 4)

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Subsection (Heading 3)

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Key Point (Heading 4)

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Pause and Reflect (Pressbooks KT textbox)

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Self Test (Heading 2)

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Glossary (Heading 2)

[All glossary terms should appear in the text as bolded words]

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References (Heading 2)

[Citations should follow the [MLA/APA/Chicago etc.] style.]