

Noumena content design guidelines

Intro

📌 This content design system provides guidance for content strategists and designers, UX writers, copywriters, marketers, and anyone else writing content for Noumena.

It's a super exciting opportunity to write content for Noumena. Content design plays a huge part in the success of Noumena's products. After all, much of it is the written word. Our approach is rooted in empathy for the people who use our products, we are champions of the Noumena customers - the freelancers, solopreneurs, and business owners.

We aim to create a master experience that will allow us to work faster and more efficiently. This system will provide you with the info you need to create content.

🧠 Something to remember: **Content doesn't have to be complicated.** Yes, we want to make the best experiences for our users. But generally, their needs are the same across all instances - to use tools to grow their business and access support 🥳

Voice and tone

Voice is who we are. It defines our relationship with our customers. Our brand character and voice attributes define our voice, and we can adapt it to meet customer needs.

Our voice is made up of characteristics and stays consistent across all touchpoints and all situations.

Outline of characteristics:

- **We inspire:** we're experts who share accurate, up to date knowledge. We help customers to succeed.
- **We educate:** we make complicated ideas and technical terms easy for everyone to understand.
- **We inform:** we're consistent and trustworthy. We don't make promises we can't keep.
- **We're approachable:** we're human too! We use natural language and empathise with customers.

Tone is based on the mood of our customers and can help us understand their emotions to connect with them more. Context is key when exploring mood.

Our tone is also made of characteristics, but they sit on a spectrum and can be dialled up or down according to the situation.

How we apply voice and tone

We should always be conscious of our voice and tone when we talk to our customers.

Because we talk to our customers in a number of different settings and for a number of different reasons, we need to adapt the way we speak to them – just like you'd change the way you spoke when telling a joke versus delivering difficult news.

When writing, think about what the customer's state of mind is likely to be in that situation – as well as how we'd like them to feel. Could they be anxious, frustrated or angry? Provide calm and reassurance by offering clear, practical information. Have they accomplished something long and tedious? Take a moment to celebrate with them!

Some general pointers:

- **Most serious, matter of fact, and respectful:** finance related, error messages, security related comms, legal documents. → Fewer conversational devices like contractions and emoji. Fewer adjectives and adverbs: language should be clear, concise, and objective.
- **Neutral formality, distance, and warmth:** most in-product content, other customer service comms (i.e. transactional emails). → Clear, conversational, and concise, but look out for moments where we may want to inject some more personality.
- **Most emotional, irreverent, and funny:** social media, marketing comms. → Go wild! But not, like, three exclamation marks wild.

The below table outlines some general guidelines on applying our voice, and should be followed where possible to create brand consistency.

	Inform	Educate	inspire	Approachable
Characteristics	We're experts who share accurate, up to date knowledge, market trends, and new products and services	We're consistent and trustworthy. We don't make promises we can't keep	We make complicated ideas and technical terms easy for everyone to understand	We're human too! We use natural language and emphasise with others
Vocabulary	Our experts will help you make the best decisions for your business	Your data and or business is safe with us	We help you grow your business	Coaching and mentorship available from our experts

Writing small	Avoid adjectives and adverbs - be concise and objective If sentence contains more than 3 items, consider turning it into a list Lists - first word to be capitalized. Don't use full stops for lists	Enough words to have accurate information Be brief when explaining concepts but understand the user and situation first	Be celebratory when the situation fits	Write how you speak.
Grammar	When talking about the Noumena experts, use 'our experts'	Use complete sentences 'There is an update on your Rise Application'	We use the active voice 'our expert received your info', rather than 'your info was received by our expert' We don't use abbreviations or acronyms (they can be confusing for international markets)	Use simple sentences or phrases - 'share your info'

Punctuation	Don't hedge! Use periods and commas. Avoid dashes, semi-colons, and colons (unless the copy is leading to a list). Use celebratory emoji's sparingly. When using in a sentence, emoji goes after punctuation Don't use periods in headlines, headers, subheadings, or email subject lines unless it's a question Date - use Month, Date, Year e.g., March 7, 2023 or 03/07/2023.	Use exclamation marks sparingly. Sometimes they can add excitement, for example when a user has completed all the steps in a noun. Overuse can look menacing! Don't use exclamation marks in email subject lines - it causes delivery issues	Use Oxford commas when writing a list	Use contractions as a general rule Numbers - spell out words one to nine and use numerals for 10 +. If space is limited, it's OK to use numerals for 0-9. If one item needs to use numerals, use numerals for any other numbers.
Capitalization	Sentence case is used for titles, headings and buttons. Use capitals for names of services or features, e.g. Capital Quotient			Relationship roles are not capitalised (co-worker, client)

How to write in the active voice

This section is loosely based on Monzo's [tone of voice](#) guidelines.

Occasionally we have to give our users bad news. And when we do that, sometimes it feels easier to slip into the passive voice. What does that look like? Here are some examples:

- A decision has been made to cancel your subscription
- The event you signed up to has been cancelled

But this isn't a great experience. For one, it looks like we are avoiding responsibility, and two, we haven't said who made this decision or why. Trust is a big deal for our users, so we should always aim to be as transparent as possible. So how do we change it to the active voice? Like this...

- We've decided to cancel your subscription or we've cancelled your subscription or your subscription has been cancelled.

Then follow with why, and give customers a chance to remedy the situation.

Accessibility

We want everyone to enjoy using our products, and that means making them accessible and inclusive. All our users need to be able to understand and process what's on the screen, so we look at it from all perspectives. When writing we should consider how someone who uses a screen reader will navigate the page. Is there anything that deaf, blind, low-vision, or color-blind users might not be able to distinguish?

Some general pointers:

Don't refer to colour, or where elements are on a screen 'Click the button below' / 'Click the yellow button'

Don't put text in an image if it's meant to be read.

Do caption videos (where applicable).

Do provide alt text for images, icons, and controls (where applicable).

Do keep content clear and easy to read - and listen to.

Do present only the info users need and when they need it.

Do keep sentences simple. A great way to do this is to count the commas. In general, stick to one comma per sentence. If you have more than one comma, consider starting a new sentence.

Some notes:

- Writing guru Ann Wylie describes research showing that when the average sentence length is 14 words, readers understand more than 90% of what they are reading. At 43 words, comprehension drops to less than 10% 🤖
- Studies also show that sentences of 11 words are considered easy to read, while those of 21 words are fairly difficult. At 25 words, sentences become very difficult. So let's keep those sentences short 📝
- Take into account that localisation and translation to other languages can mean an increase or reduction in words

Localization

At Noumena we write using American English. It's easy to get muddled up when writing, so if you usually write in British English we recommend changing the spell checker on whichever program you are using to detect American spellings. Not sure which words are spelt differently? We've included a handy glossary at the end of this guide 🙌

As we expand we may move into other countries, and require content to be localized to that market.

Gender-neutral writing

The purpose of gender-neutral language is to avoid word choices which may be interpreted as biased, discriminatory or demeaning by implying that one sex or social gender is the norm.

When referring to someone, don't use he, his, him, she, her, or hers. Instead, use second person (*you*) or *person* or *individual*.

Word list

The word list isn't a glossary or a dictionary. It contains usage guidelines for terms specific to Noumena solutions.

This word list isn't a glossary as such, but it details the words used by Noumena to describe our products and services.

A

above/ below - when writing on user interfaces avoid using *above* or *below* to explain where something is. Instead try to refer to the exact area or use some of these alternatives: *following*, *preceding*, *previous*, *next*, *continue*.

add - research shows that people prefer add over create because it sounds less labor-intensive. In Noumena, we say “add ...to...”

AM - use this when writing the time, i.e., 6 AM. Don't use a.m, am, or other variations. Be specific about which US time zone you are referring to e.g., EST, PST, CST...

and more - more conversational than *etc*

B

business - is more conversational than *company* or *organization*

business brief - never hyphenated, used to describe what the business does

business name - write business name if you're referring to the customer's business or to the legal business name.

button - don't use. When you need to direct a customer to a specific CTA, just tell them what the button says, without calling it a button.

C

can - can is more conversational than allowed to or enabled. We use can when we can.

Capital Quotient - Numerical value depicting a users' experience and business. Used when considering whether users will be accepted for financing or programs within the Noumena ecosystem. Note capitalization. We do not draw comparison to a credit score, though others may.

cash flow - *Cash flow* is always two words. When you use it as an adjective, don't hyphenate it.

chameleon - personal financing option

client - use client when talking to our users about their own customers or Noumena customers they're working with.

comment - more conversational than *remark* or *feedback*

community - capitalized when referring to the Community section on the app. Use lowercase when using it as noun in text

connect(ed) - lowercase. Joining together to share, collaborate, and work on projects. Also denotes Nouns that users have joined.

connections - lowercase. Members you are connected with

create(d) - don't use *build* as research shows it's assumed to indicate intensive work

custom capital - financing option

D

data - data and information are the best terms when discussing privacy issues or other sensitive topics with customers, as they convey the importance of the message and align with legal standards. It is OK to use info as an alternative in less formal, more conversational contexts.

discovery - capitalized when referring to the Community section on the app

draft - use lowercase. A saved (unpublished) copy of the profile

E

edit - to make changes to something. Edit is preferred over *change*

Equinox Home Financing - Noumena mortgage product partner.

expert - an expert in the Noumena ecosystem is someone with an advanced knowledge of certain subjects.

In most cases, it's best to use a specific term rather than expert to make it clear for customers who they're interacting with. If we overuse expert, it loses its meaning. If you use expert, don't be vague. Include profession-specific terminology to indicate the type of expertise—for example, finance expert, business strategy expert. Whenever possible, qualify at first mention on a page or within a flow. You can use expert on its own if the surrounding content provides enough context for the customer to know what kind of expert you mean.

If we're meeting customers' expectations about the type of expert involved, you can use expert as an adjective to modify a product, service, or feature. For example, "expert setup" implies that someone with knowledge about how to set up a product will be helping the customer.

Use specialist or product expert to refer to a member of our sales team whose role it is to help customers with purchasing our products.

F

finance-ability - used to describe a users' chance of being accepted for finance. **Consider changing**

followers - lowercase. Specific to Noums

G

get... - button label. Used to depict an action, *get prequalified*

H

Home - use Home by itself if you want the customer to select a Home icon. Note capitalization.

I

invite - use lowercase as a verb. Sending a notification to a member to connect/access
Noun

invoice - use invoice as a noun, referring to the document. Use verbs like send or create when you need to describe providing an invoice to a customer. You can use invoicing as a noun if the context includes other gerunds like reporting and billing, but try to avoid that.

J

Juice - type of financing. Note capitalization.

K

knowledge base - two words. Refers to help, support, or advice articles.

L

learn more - learn more as link copy doesn't test well with customers. More casual phrases work better, like *Find out more* or *Get more info*. To make a link more accessible, include some additional context, like *Review your options* or *Get project details*.

M

member(s) - never refer to as '*users*'

message(s) - capitalize when referring to the Messages section in Profile, use lowercase when using as a noun in text e.g., Through Noumena you can message with members...

N

Next, Previous, Continue - Ok to use in the product, as in step flow. Capitalize.

networks - specific to the Profile section and relates to external sites where online connections are built. Don't use *channels* or *platforms*

Noumena announcements - always capitalize Noumena

Nouns - always capitalized. Specific type of Noun will be lowercase e.g., project Noun.

Nouns are central to Noumena. They're digital tools that help members to manage and grow their businesses.

Different Nouns can be created for different things; to create a portfolio, work on projects, connect with experts and other members, share insights, and more.

P

post(s) - referring to a message posted onto an online forum. Never use *'posting'*

profile - capitalize when referring to it as a feature. E.g. Go to your Profile to update your skills...

pre-qualified - used to describe a users' status when applying for financing.

projects - capitalize when referring to the Projects section in Profile, use lowercase when using as a noun in text

publish - use lowercase, this adds the content to the Noun and it will be visible to members who are connected

Q

qualify -

R

requests - use lowercase as a noun. A notification from a member that they want to connect

Rise Program - Noumena mentoring and business growth program. Note capitalization.

S

screen - In general, try to avoid describing the user interface whenever possible. When it is necessary: For native mobile apps, use screen instead of page or window. However, when talking about a page or window on web, use those terms instead of screen, since web pages and browser windows don't necessarily take up the entire screen.

scroll - it's OK to say scroll down, but in general, stay away from device-specific terms. Try to find a solution with the designer where the customer flow is clear. The flow shouldn't rely on written instructions alone.

search - use instead of *look* or *look up* as it's more accessible to users who may be using screen readers and inclusive to people with vision disabilities or issues

skills - capitalized when referring to Skills section on the Profile, lowercase when using it as a noun in text

T

Tokens - sometimes also called Noumena Reward Tokens. Note capitalization. **Used to...**

toolbox - elements that help a member create their profile. Elements in the toolbox include text, image, video, my network (socials), posts, business brief, social interests, and more. Capitalize when referring to the Toolbox function on the Profile

training - capitalize when referring to the Training section, use lowercase when using as a noun in text e.g., Mention a training course you have completed

U

unlock - button copy. Denotes an action, *unlock my cash flow*

V

verify - Use verify sparingly to convey accuracy of data. Use *be sure* or *check* when suggesting to investigate a condition.

W

work experience - not *work history*

Content patterns

Content patterns are those things that we keep writing again and again. By developing and testing patterns for these things, we establish reusable approaches to getting our work done.

Celebrations

Celebrations create emotive experiences for our members, and it's an opportunity for us to connect with them. But, used too often, celebrations can become meaningless and even annoying!

We use celebrations to acknowledge when members achieve major milestones. Here are some instances that deserve a celebration message:

- A proposal has been accepted
- They've won a new client

- An invoice has been paid
- They've been accepted for financing

When writing celebratory messages, acknowledge what the celebration is, be positive, but don't overdo it as we don't want to come across patronizing. Celebratory messages can be sent via in-app messages, email, or both.

Example of a celebration message:

Client X has paid your invoice. Nice!

Bad news

Sometimes we have to deliver news that members don't want to hear or may disappoint them. Here are some tips on how to do this successfully:

- Be sympathetic, warm, and positive
- Explain why it's happened (if possible)
- Offer a solution (where possible) - we don't want members to figure out what to do on their own
- Get to the point, be direct, and clear
- Be reassuring and positive (avoid using words like don't, can't, won't, and no)

When delivering bad news, consider what channel to use. Email is often the best as you have the opportunity to explain the reasoning and the next steps in detail.

Example of a bad news message:

Unfortunately the client rejected your proposal but you can always send another proposal with new terms.

Emails

At Noumena, we use email to relay product and marketing messages and share insights. Here is guidance on how to write an email that will be read and acted on.

Subject

Relate it to the email body and focus on the member benefit.

Length: 50 characters (5-7 words) is the general rule, but subject lines with 65 characters have the highest open rates.

Preview

Length: 40-70 characters.

Opening

Address the person receiving the email by their first name (if possible). e.g., Hello, David

If we don't know the person's first name, use, Hi (no comma needed)

Body

- Continue with the topic you mentioned in the subject and headline
- Be clear and direct. We need to maintain people's focus
- Use the analogy; '*less is more*'. Ask yourself if I delete this, will it make the email harder or easier to understand?
- If paragraphs are longer than three sentences, consider using lists or headlines to separate the information

CTA

Focus on a single, clear action.

Length: Two or three words

Example of a CTA:

Create a Noum

Aim to have only one CTA per email. Secondary CTAs distract from the primary CTA.

Sign-off

Avoid referring to a specific department. Instead, address it from Noumena.

Example of an email sign-off:

The Noumena team

Errors

Sometimes things go wrong, and we need to communicate this with an error message.

Examples of instances where error messages are used:

- Wrong password entered
- Mandatory information not entered

- Incorrect credit card details entered

A good error message contains three parts:

1. Problem identification: clear and simple language explains what the issue is
2. Cause (if possible): avoid technical jargon when explaining why the issue occurred
3. Solution (if possible): Short explanation on how to fix the issue

Fields

Text fields enable someone to enter information to answer the questions that we're asking; they are mostly used in forms.

A text field may consist of the following elements:

1. Label: tells users what information they need to provide in the field
2. Input box: allows users to enter the information
3. Hint text: located inside an input box, providing guidance about how the information should be entered
4. Asterisk icon: a visual indicator when a field is mandatory
5. Clear button: lets users empty the entire input box, only appearing when characters are entered in the field
6. Help text: provides context that the label itself may not provide. It can be used to address the concerns that users may have, such as how the data will be used and who will see the data

Security and consent

Consent content should be:

- Clear and transparent, but not alarming
- Persuasive, but not forceful or pushy
- Reassuring and warm, but not overly familiar or too casual

When to ask for consent

We use consent content when we need customers to agree to something, such as:

- Before we process a payment
- To make sure they accept Noumena's terms and policies
- Before we pass their personal, small business, or tax info to a third party

In all cases, we want people to know their data is safe and will only be used in ways they agreed to. Consent content should help customers:

- Understand what they're agreeing to
- Know how their info will be shared and who it will be shared with
- Know what they need to do or provide to move forward
- Understand the benefits of sharing their info
- Feel confident about their decision to give consent

Consent and permission

Use *agree* or *I agree* and *I don't agree* in most cases.

If the customer is agreeing to something that will be done by an Noumena brand, you can also use "allow [brand] to" or "agree to let [brand]."

- I agree
- I don't agree
- By selecting Continue, you agree to our Terms and Conditions.
- I read and agree to Noumena's privacy policy.

3 levels of consent

We use 3 levels of consent to guide consent content design.

The specific level depends on:

- What type of customer info is being collected or shared
- How the info will be used
- What we need the customer to do to show consent

If you have multiple types of consent happening on the same screen, follow guidelines for the most stringent use case (highest level). For specific style guidelines for each level, see the links that follow.

Level 1: Informed consent

Informed consent content raises quick, simple awareness to let customers know what they're agreeing to by clicking a specific button. Use it when there are no harmful or irreversible consequences for customers, and you don't want to slow them down or raise a red flag.

Use it for:

- Accepting terms and conditions or privacy policies
- Disclaimers (with no serious consequences)

Level 2: Mindful consent

Mindful consent makes customers aware of a specific action that has consequences. For example, clicking a button that allows us to process their credit card payment. Use it when you want customers to pause and take clear, conscious action to ensure they know what they're agreeing to.

Use it for:

- Monetary transactions (processing a payment, moving money, etc.)
- Helping members to opt into a service

Level 3: Data as consent

Data as consent raises the highest level of awareness to make sure customers understand exactly how their data will be used, especially when there are legal implications.

Use it for:

- Transactions where we're legally required to collect an electronic signature or other personal data to confirm consent

Tooltips

Tooltips can be attached to several elements; icons, text, buttons, and more. They provide useful descriptions or explanations of its paired element.

Guidance for writing tooltips:

- Keep the copy brief
- Make sure the copy is self-explanatory
- Only use a tooltip to provide additional information (it shouldn't repeat the main element)

Notifications

Notifications let someone know whether an action they/we have carried out was successful or if they need to take an action. They are typically delivered as an in-app message, email, or both.

Notifications differ from celebrations, in that they notify members about an operational task, whereas celebrations acknowledge important milestones. Here are some instances when an acknowledgement can be used:

- Member has updated their credit card details

- A payment has been made to a Noum Wallet
- A Noum has been archived

For notifications to be effective, they must be:

- Timely, ideally delivered immediately following an action being taken
- Informative - provide enough information on the action that has been/needs to be taken, but not distracting

New terms

Even though we aim to use clear language, there will be times when we have to use technical terms, particularly in financing.

As we introduce these into the Noumena ecosystem, we want our members to feel empowered through knowledge and not confused!

Here are our two approaches to defining new terms.

State the term first and then define it in simple words

This approach works best for financing and money, as customers may have already heard these words.

Describe the term in a simple way first, then give it a name.

After that, use the term and maybe include a reminder.

Help articles

The types of help articles we create are concept and feature overviews, setup guides, how-tos, troubleshooting, and FAQs. We also produce support videos and have a community forum where Noumena members can ask questions.

Here is guidance on writing a help article:

- Be as specific as possible, and don't generalize a process so much that it leaves the reader guessing
- Focus on telling people what they can do and not what they can't
- Focus on explaining what a feature does and how to use it
- Keep it action-oriented: create sections that are organized around specific actions
- Make it scannable: avoid large chunks of text, use headers and lists where appropriate, and get to the point quickly!

How to format a help article:

Every article should have a title, summary, intro, and body (with organized headers). Here are some formatting tips:

Title

- 8 words max, ideally less for Google search relevance
- Don't use jargon
- Don't punctuate, unless it's a question

Summary

- 1 or 2 sentences max, explaining what the article covers

Example: By reading this article you'll know how to set up your Noum Wallet.

Intro

- Explain why the article matters and what to expect
- Make it a short paragraph (2-4 sentences)
- Keep it positive even if it's describing an issue

Example: Client is late in paying your invoice. Don't worry, here are some tips on how to get paid.

Body

- Use headers to organize your content into actionable sections
- Each heading should relate to one thing only
- Include links to related help content that the member will find useful

Supporting info

Here are some common words in American English:

- Words like “favorite,” “color,” “honor,” and “labor” are spelled without the “u” (the –or suffix replacing the British –our)
- Words like “center” and “theater” are spelled –er, not the British –re
- For past tense verbs, use the –ed ending (e.g., learned instead of learnt)

When using the –ize/–yze suffix (or its derivations), it is with a “z”, not an “s” (e.g., strategize, realize, collectivized, standardizing)

- Verbs ending in –el do not double the “l”: “traveling” (not “travelling”) or “canceled” (not “cancelled”)
- Use –e/–o/–eu (not –ae/–oe/–oeu) for words like archeology, estrogen, or medieval
- Use “defense” and “license” (the –ense suffix replacing the British –ence)
- Use “catalog” (the –og suffix replacing the British –ogue)
- Use “program” (the –gram suffix replacing the British –gramme)
- Use “check” (the –k or –ck suffix replacing the British –que)
- Use “judgment” or “argument” (the –dg or –gu replacing the British –dge or –gue)