Pulsar Documentation Writing Style Guide

Summary

- This guide contains a set of standards for writing and designing content for Pulsar documentation. It helps maintain a consistent style, voice, and tone across Pulsar documentation with lots of examples.
- This guide is **WIP and continuously updated**.
- For more documentation guides, see [Pulsar Documentation Contribution Guide](#).

Follow these guidelines to ensure a consistent experience across Pulsar documentation.

TOC

Language and grammar

Abbreviations

General guidelines

- Avoid abbreviations when the following conditions are true:
- Their meanings are unclear.
- They make the information more difficult to understand.
- They occur infrequently in the information, for example, only two or three times in a large amount of content.
- They are derived from Latin.
- They abbreviate names or entities that are owned by other companies, and the owning company does not use those abbreviations.
- They might be a registered trademark for a different product or entity.

Latin abbreviations

Do not use Latin abbreviations; use their English equivalents instead. Latin abbreviations are sometimes misunderstood.

Latin abbreviation	English equivalent
e.g.	for example

etc.	Use **and so on** when you list a clear sequence of elements, such as "1, 2, 3, and so on" or "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and so on." Otherwise, rewrite the sentence to replace etc. with something more descriptive, such as "and other output."
i.e.	that is

Active Voice

Whenever possible, use active voice instead of passive voice.

- In active voice, the subject of the sentence is the doer of the action. This is especially important when describing an action that should specify who or what is doing the action.
- In passive voice, it's easy to neglect to indicate who or what is performing a particular action. In this kind of construction, it's often hard for readers to figure out who's supposed to do something (such as the reader, the computer, the server, an end user, or a visitor to a web page).

Example

- ☐ Send a query to the service. The server sends an acknowledgment. ✅
- ☐ The service is queried, and an acknowledgment is sent. ❌

Tense

- Write in the <mark>simple present tense</mark> as much as possible if you are covering facts that were, are, and forever shall be true.

  Example
  - ☐ When you open the latch, the panel **slides** forward. ✅
  - ☐ When you open the latch, the panel **will slide** forward. ❌

- Use past or future tense **only when you cannot use present tense** or it does not make sense to use the present tense.

  Example
  - ☐ If you select New in the previous window, the current window **displays** the recommended default values. ✅
  - ☐ If you select New in the previous window, the current window **will display** the recommended default values. ❌

Pronouns

Personal pronouns

In technical information, follow these general guidelines for personal pronouns:

- Use **the second-person** pronoun (**you, your, yours,** or **yourself)** as much as possible. The subject of an imperative sentence is understood to be you.
- Avoid **the first-person** pronouns **I** and **we**, except in these situations:
    - In the question portion of frequently asked questions (FAQs)
    - In articles, white papers, or documents that have listed authors and in which the authors describe their own actions or opinions
- Avoid **third-person** pronouns that are gender-specific.
  Example
    - ☐ **You** can now move your cursor in four directions. ✅
    - ☐ **We** can now move his cursor in four directions. ❌
    - ☐ **The user** can now move his cursor in four directions. ❌

Gender-neutral pronouns

Many terms and titles, such as customer engineer, programmer, teacher, or administrative assistant, do not apply exclusively to one gender. Therefore, to make your writing inclusive, avoid using gender-specific pronouns. Do not use *he, him, himself,* or *his* unless the person you refer to is male, and do not use *she, her, herself*, or h*ers* unless the person you refer to is female.

For more information, see [Microsoft bias-free writing guidelines](#) and [Google inclusive doc writing guide](#).

Contractions

- Use simple and common contractions to keep sentences from feeling out-of-touch, robotic, or overly formal.✅

  Example

  What's✅
  We'll✅
  You'll✅
  You're✅
  You've✅
  We're✅
  They're✅
  Doesn't✅
  Didn't✅
  Don't✅
  Isn't✅
  Aren't✅
  Can't✅

- Avoid contractions **formed from nouns and verbs**.

  Example

  The browser is fast, simple, and secure.✅

The browser's fast, simple, and secure.❌

- Avoid **double contractions** (contain not just one but two contracted words). ❌

Example

mightn't've❌
might not have✅

mustn't've❌
must not have✅

wouldn't've❌
would not have✅

shouldn't've❌
should not have✅

- Avoid **unusual contractions.**

Example

there'd❌
It'll❌
they'd❌

- Do not use contractions in technical information.
  - Contractions can cause difficulty for translation and for users whose primary language is not English. For example, **it's** can be interpreted as **it is** or **it has**.
  - Contractions can also contribute to an overly informal tone.
  - The contraction **what's** in the phrase **what's new** is acceptable in content that presents new and changed items between versions of products or information.

Capitalization

In general, use a lowercase style in text and use sentence-style capitalization for headings.

Capitalization styles

Items such as headings, captions, labels, or interface elements generally follow sentence-style capitalization.

Sentence-style capitalization: This style is predominantly lowercase; capitalize only the initial letter of the first word in the text and other words that require capitalization, such as proper nouns.

Examples of sentence-style capitalization ✅

- Business models
- Creating Boolean expressions
- Planning network architectures
- Properties and settings for printing
- Requirements for Linux and UNIX operating systems

Capitalization in general text

- Capitalize proper nouns correctly.

  Examples of proper nouns include the names of specific people, places, companies, languages, protocols, and products.

  Example

✅	❌
Pulsar	pulsar
BookKeeper	Bookkeeper
HTTP	http
API	api
NAR	nar
URI	uri
TTL	ttl
ID	Id

  More info see <u>Nouns and pronouns</u>.

Miscellaneous

a/an

- Use **a** before a word that begins with a consonant sound.

   Example

Use **a** with	Consonant sound
.mbtest file	D, as in dot
one	W, as in won
ROM	R, as in romp
unit	Y, as in you
x4	B, as in **by four**

- Use **an** before a word that begins with a <u>vowel sound</u>.

   Example

Use **an** with	Vowel sound
HTTP	A, as in ache
LU	E, as in elf
MVS	E, as in empty

RPQ	A, as in are
SOA SQL	E, as in estimate

that/which (restrictive clause)

In American English, "that" is used to start a restrictive clause. "which" is used to start a non-restrictive clause (put a comma before which). When the information is essential to the meaning (a restrictive clause), use "that".

Example:

- Set the "service_url" to the value which is obtained through Step 1. ❌
- Set the "service_url" to the value that is obtained through Step 1. ✅

Punctuation

Commas

Commas between items in a series

Use commas to separate items in a series of three or more. Use a comma before the conjunction that precedes the final item.

Examples ✅
- A message window describes an error, explains how to correct it, and provides the controls to correct it.
- Present the items in a meaningful order, such as alphabetically, numerically, or chronologically

Exclamation points

Do not punctuate sentences with exclamation points because their tone can be interpreted negatively, for example, as aggressive, condescending, or overly informal.

Convey urgency or emphasis with the appropriate words, not with exclamation points. To call attention to important hints, tips,

guidance, restrictions, or advice that might be overlooked, consider using a note that has a meaningful label.

Example

✅	❌
You must complete this step first.	Complete this step first!
Important: You must change the default settings.	You must change the default settings!
You completed the first lesson in the tutorial.	You completed the first lesson in the tutorial!

Period

Use a period (rather than colon) at the end of a sentence.

Formatting and organization

Lists

Ordered lists

Use an ordered (numbered) list when the sequence is significant, for example, when writing procedures or ranking items. If the items in a list represent rules or other types of information that you want to refer to, you can refer to them by **number**. For example, in a list of rules, the item numbered 1 is implied to be Rule 1.

Example

Write comment statements according to the following rules:
1. Use an asterisk in the first column.
2. Do not exceed 80 characters.
3. Do not place a comment statement between an instruction and its continuation line.

Tables

To keep tables accessible and scannable, tables **should not have any empty cells**. If there is no otherwise meaningful value for a

cell, consider entering **N/A** (for "not applicable" or "not available) or **None**.

Numbers and measurements

Use a space between a number and the abbreviation of a unit of measurement, regardless of whether the value is used as a noun or as an adjective.

Examples ✅

The unit weighs 48.2 kg (106.3 lb).

a 12 m (39 ft) cable

an 8 ft clearance

a 1 GB memory module

Multiplier prefixes

- In combination with a prefix, use **B** (uppercase) to mean **bytes**, and use **b** (lowercase) to mean **bits**.
- Prefixes are never used alone or with units that you spell out.

Examples (incorrect) ❌	Examples (correct) ✅
16 K 16 K bytes	16 KB

- Use the abbreviation **KB** or **Kb**, not the spelled-out form. If your audience needs to be told the spelled-out form of other

abbreviations, include the spelled-out form parenthetically **on first use only**, and use only the abbreviation in all other occurrences.

Examples (incorrect) ❌	Examples (correct) ✅
64 kilobytes 4 gigabits	64 KB 4 Gb (gigabits) 24 kbps (kilobits per second)
bytes/s	byte per second, or B/s https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bit_rate

Dates

Be consistent in the way that you write dates and express them in a way that is understandable internationally.

To avoid confusion about the meaning of a date, do not use an all-numeric representation in text. In the United States, 12/1/07 means 1 December 2007; in many other countries, it means 12 January 2007.

- Use one or two digits for the day first, then spell out the name of the month, followed by the year using all four digits.

Use one space between the day and the month and between the month and the year.

- Do not use a forward slash (/) or hyphen (-) in dates, ==nor the abbreviations st, nd, rd, and th.==
- If you want to include the day of the week before a date, use a comma between the day of the week and the date.

Examples (incorrect) ❌	Examples (correct) ✅
10/1/12 1-10-12 The 1st of August, 2010 August 1st, 2010 December 2 December 2nd 2nd December Monday May 24th	1 October 2012 1 August 2010 2 December Monday, 24 May

Computer interface

Graphical user interface elements

Location of interface elements

When you refer to the location of an element in an interface, use the following terms:

- For nouns, use the terms *upper left, upper right, lower left*, and *lower right*. Do not use *left hand* or *right hand*.
- For adjectives, use the hyphenated terms *upper-left, upper-right, lower-left*, and *lower-right*. Do not use *left-hand* or *right-hand*.

Menu instructions and navigation

- Use bold for menus, menu items, separator symbols, items in the navigation tree, and the greater than symbol. If a menu contains variable menu items, use lowercase bold italic.

Example

Click **File > Tools > User preferences > *required preference***. ✅

Expand **Performance > Advisor types > *usertype* > Diagnostics**. ✅

Miscellaneous

Placeholder text

You might want to provide a command or configuration that uses specific values.

In these cases, use < and > to call out where a reader must replace text with their own value.

For example:

cp <your_source_directory> <your_destination_directory>

Writing for diverse audiences

Style

- Do not use **please** and **thank you** in technical information. Technical information requires an authoritative tone. Terms of politeness are superfluous, convey the wrong tone for technical material, and are not regarded the same way in all cultures. In marketing information, terms of politeness might be appropriate. Use the imperative mood in the first sentence of each step.

  Example

  Click **Install** program. ✅

  Please click **Install** program. ❌

Accessibility

- Don't convey information with color alone. For example, use both color and underlined text for links, and use pattern and color to differentiate information in charts and graphs.
- Don't hard-code colors. They can become illegible in high-contrast themes.
- Provide clear descriptions that don't require pictures, or provide both. Make sure the reader can get the whole story from either the picture or the written description.

- Spell out words like and, plus, and about. Screen readers can misread text that uses special characters like the plus sign (+) and tilde (~).
- Don't force line breaks (also known as hard returns) within sentences and paragraphs. They may not work well in resized windows or with enlarged text.
- **Use SVG instead of PNG** if available. SVGs stay sharp when you zoom in on the image. For more benefits of using SVG rather than PNG, refer to <u>here</u>.
- Use ALT text (less than 100 characters) to describe an image as concisely as possible. Images alternatives add valuable information for low vision or blind screen reader users.

Glossaries

A

Admonition

You can use Tip, Note, Caution, and [more admonitions](#).

- Tip: provides helpful hints for completing a task. Do not use a tip to give essential information.
- Note: contains additional information to emphasize or supplement important points of the main text.
- Caution: indicates deprecated features or provides a warning about procedures that have the potential for data loss.

Usage rules

- Use admonitions to call attention to information.
- Use them sparingly, and never have an alert box immediately follow another alert box.
- Too many notes can make topics difficult to scan. Instead of adding a note:
  - Re-write the sentence as part of a paragraph.
  - Put the information into its own paragraph.
  - Put the content under a new subheading.

L

Later

When referring to a range of version numbers:

- Do not use above / up version ❌

  Reason: version numbers should be essentially viewed as timeline markers rather than quantity markers.

- Use <mark>earlier</mark> / <mark>later</mark> version ✅

- "higher" version is not wrong and it is used in some product manuals, however, <mark>it is recommended to use "later" in Pulsar</mark> documentation to standardize on one expression for greater consistency in presenting the information to users. ❗

R

recommend

Avoid if possible. A phrase such as "We recommend that you take the following action" could create a potential marketing or legal problem

Grammar

[Use prepositions with relative pronouns](#)

- The name of the topic that the message is published to. ✅
- The name of the topic to which the message is published. 🤔⛔

Suggestions from Julia Unis :

Sentence 1 is correct. It's a very long explanation, but the structure of sentence 2 is based on an old grammar "rule" that is no longer taught in modern English courses. This incorrect grammar "rule" said, "never end a sentence with a preposition". However, the structure of the English language DOES ALLOW for a preposition to be at the end of a sentence. But, this incorrect "rule" became VERY popular in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was in style guides, grammar books, etc. But, using this old, incorrect "rule" causes very awkward sentence structures like sentence 2. It is not how we speak at all. No one would actually say sentence 2. But in writing, this just became super popular because people thought it made them sound "smart" and "fancy". But really, it sounds weird and twisted and does not reflect how we speak because it is not the natural structure of the language. Over the 20th (and now into the 21st), this grammar rule is being "phased out". Unfortunately, you'll still find examples of this sentence in some writing and there

are people who insist on following it (usually people who are older and who learned the rule as children and they are VERY passionate about using it even if they know it doesn't make sense). For technical writing, it is best to follow the natural structure of the English language and **put the preposition at the end of the sentence where it belongs for clarity and ease of reading**. Sorry for the long explanation.

About this guide

This guide references *IBM Style Guide, Microsoft Style Guide, Google Developer Documentation Style, Apple Style Guide, Adobe Style,* and so on for more exhaustive guidance.