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#

# RULE NO. 1: WRITE POSITIVELY

We want to support people in the pursuit of something new; the best way to do this is to express ourselves in a supportive manner. Before we get started, let’s make sure to take stock of the way we phrase things. It’s the most important thing we can do! Look for words such as “can’t,” “don’t,” “you shouldn’t” or “make sure not to…”

* Negative: You shouldn’t send your application in unless you’ve read all the requirements.
* Positive: Make sure to read all of the requirements before submitting your application.

#

# FORMATTING

## General rules

* Leave one space between sentences.
* Do not indent paragraphs; instead, double space between them.
* Use italics when mentioning referencing buttons and navigation labels in step-by-step instructions:
	+ When you're all done, click Submit Application.
* When including a screenshot, there is no need to include a picture of the entire screen.
	+ Include only enough of the screen to provide context for the user, and then crop to display the action necessary for the instructions.

## Knowledge Base formatting

TITLE CASE capitalises the first letter of every word except articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. (We use title case for the Article Headlines of the Knowledge Base and Blog Headlines.)

SENTENCE CASE capitalises the first letter of the first word. (We use sentence case for all Comm communications and Article Subheadings in the Knowledge Base.)

### Article Headlines

Article headlines should be in TITLE CASE, with all words capitalized except for articles. They should always be complete sentences and in the form of questions whenever possible and/or appropriate.

Headlines should also be compelling but brief. Think of the purpose that the Knowledge Base serves: a resource for our customers at every step of their experience. Let’s make sure we make their trip through the Knowledge Base pleasant and seamless—the way we hope their time as a whole will be!

### Article Subheading

Article subheadings should be in SENTENCE CASE, with only the first word of the subheading capitalized. They should not be a complete sentence but, rather, a snippet of what someone will find when clicking on the article headline; they should not repeat the wording of the article headline. Subheadings should also not be identical to content found in the Knowledge Base article but, rather, summarize and tease the content in a way that encourages clicking on the headline.

# GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, AND TRICKY WORD CHOICES

## Abbreviations and acronyms

For unfamiliar abbreviations, spell it out the first time and then use the short version. If the two are not clearly related, specify the short version in parenthesis before the second reference.

* First use: Network Operations Center; Second use: NOC
* First use: Coordinated Universal Time (UTC); Second use: UTC

If the abbreviation or acronym is well known, such as NATO or ISIS, don’t worry about this rule.

## Active voice

Be direct. *A hit B* (active voice) is acceptable. *B was hit by A* (passive voice) is not.

## Ampersands

We don’t use ampersands unless they are part of a company’s name (e.g., Ben & Jerry’s).

## Apostrophes

Please be careful with apostrophes. Please. Use them to make a word possessive. If a word ends in an “s” and it’s singular and you want to make it possessive, you can go ahead and add an “s”, but if it’s already plural, then please don’t and just add an apostrophe.

* I like Joe’s apartment.
* I don’t like Chris’s new coat.
* The girls’ dressing room is being renovated.

Please, for the love of all that is holy, *learn the difference between “it’s” and “its.”* (The former is a contraction that fills in for “it is”; the latter is a possessive.)

## Capitalisation

**Title case** capitalises the first letter of every word except articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. (We use title case for the Article Headlines of the Knowledge Base and Blog Headlines.) **Sentence case** capitalises the first letter of the first word. (We use sentence case for all Comm communications and Article Subheadings in the Knowledge Base.)

Email addresses and website URLs are lowercase, except when the *website address* is branded otherwise. Email addresses are always all lowercase regardless of the domain.

Do not capitalise words in the middle of sentences unless they are proper nouns or titles. We also do not capitalise the following words:

* website
* dotcom
* internet
* e-mail

## Commas

We use the Oxford comma.

* **The right way to write a list**: I love my two children, Patton Oswalt, and Gary Shteyngart. (You can tell I love three things here.)
* **The wrong way to write a list**: I love my children, Patton Oswalt and Gary Shteyngart. (This sounds like my children *are* Patton Oswalt and Gary Shteyngart. Which would be very odd.)

There are lots of other rules. Many people don’t know them. Some people say to use them whenever you’d take a breath. That’s somewhat helpful. When separating two clauses in a sentence, only use a comma if each clause could stand on its own. Otherwise: a grammar checker can help. Or ask.

## Contractions

Use them. They’re fine.

## Dashes and hyphens

We use hyphens (not en- or em-dashes) to link words into phrases or for spans.

* nine-to-five
* Monday-Friday

We use an em dash—not an en dash—to set off words (like we did earlier in this sentence). Check your computer’s manual to figure out how to make an em dash. On a Mac it’s option-shift-hyphen.

## Dates

We use the UK order (day/month/year). Spell out the month unless there are space issues. When abbreviating the month, do not use a period.

* 24 January 2017
* 24 Jan 2017

## E-expressions

Except at the start of a sentence, e-expressions are lower-case and hyphenated.

* e-commerce
* e-mail

## Exclamation points

Don’t ever use more than one at a time. Please try not to use them at all. Especially don’t use them if there is a message sent out that is alarming in any way. We want to calm people down in such an instance, not tell them something is even more troublesome!

## File extensions

File extension types are all uppercase without periods; add a lowercase “s” to make plural.

* GIF/GIFs
* PDF/PDFs
* HTML

Specific files should have lowercase extensions:

* project.pdf
* case.study.262.htm

## Initials

Initials in people’s and companies’ names take points (with a space between initials and name, but not between initials). In general, follow the practice preferred by people, companies and organisations in writing their own names.

* V.P. Singh
* F.W. Woolwoorth

## Money

No matter what the currency, use the symbol-amount format (e.g, £500, ¥500, ₩500, $500).

## Names and titles

When you mention people, refer to them by their last names. The second time you refer to them, it should be by their last names.

* John Smith is the head of the IT Department at New York University. Smith has increased revenue by 21% while decreasing expenses by 14% since he began working there in 2015.

The names of departments and teams within a company should be capitalised, but you should not capitalise the words “team” or “department” (e.g., Sales team, Marketing department). Individual job titles should be capitalised when talking about that role (e.g., Susan Jones is the Business Development Director at Widget Wickett Inc.).

Do not use periods for titles (e.g., Mr, Dr—it is Mr Bob Smith or Dr Jones).

*Do not refer to someone as a wizard, rock star, or slayer unless they are actually one of those things.*

## Numbers

If you begin a sentence with a number, spell it out. Otherwise… if the number is ≤10, spell it out; if it’s >10, use the number:

* Three slots are still available for this project./There are three slots available for this project.
* Thirty people applied for your project!/There are 30 applications for your project!

Ordinal numbers follow the same rules:

* First-place contestants go on to the nationals./She won first place.
* Thirteenth place worldwide isn’t bad./She ranked 13th in the world.

Numbers with three or more digits get commas—lucky for them (e.g., 999; 1,000; 150,000; 1,000,000). Large numbers are written out in full, but if they are round numbers abbreviations are preferred: thousands are k (£150k), millions are m (£100m), billions are bn (£2.5bn).

## Percentages

Use the % symbol; do not spell out “per cent”.

## Periods (full stops)

Periods go inside quotation marks… except when there is a phrase involved.

* Fred said, “I’m going to the beach.”
* The word of the day was “bizarre”.

## Pronouns

*When writing about people*… In today’s gender landscape, pronouns can get complicated. Sometimes it can be appropriate to ask subjects what their pronouns are. In these cases, we should respect what people ask us to do.

*In general*… If your subject’s gender is unknown or irrelevant, use “they,” “them,” and “their” as a singular pronoun. Use “he/him/his” and “she/her/her” pronouns as appropriate. Don’t use “one” as a pronoun, but do try to avoid the singular “they” as much as possible.

## Quotation marks and quotes

Use single quotation marks for quotes within quotes.

* My brother said, “Thoreau famously said, ‘Live the life you have imagined.’”

Use the present tense when quoting a person. But always use the form “X says” and not “says X”:

* Yes: “I love it,” Mr Smith says.
* No: “I love it,” says Mr Smith.

## Schools

Universities are referred to by their full name on the first mention and by their common abbreviation on the second and all subsequent mentions.

* First mention: University of New South Wales
* Second and subsequent mentions: UNSW

## Semicolons

Avoid unless you know what you are doing. (These are for people who are comfortable with writing and language; if you are one of them, go right ahead!) Start a new sentence, as it’s likely easier.

## Slang and jargon

Avoid technical terms if at all possible. If you do have to use a term that someone may not understand, define it—e.g, Startups often experience one or more pivots—shifts in a new direction—before they find a niche in the marketplace.

## States, cities, and countries

Spell out all city and state names. Don’t abbreviate city names. All cities should be accompanied by their country. On first mention, write out the name of countries or federations that have common abbreviations (United States/US; European Union/EU; United Kingdom/UK; etc.)

## Telephone numbers

Use country codes before telephone numbers (e.g., +01-404-123-4567).

## Temperature

Use the degree symbol and the capital C abbreviation for Celsius. If the copy is for an American audience, use Fahrenheit (e.g., 38ºC, 78ºF).

## Time

Use whole numbers and am/pm (no periods and lower case) with no space between the number and the abbreviation. Do not use minutes for an on-the-hour time.

* 10am (not 10:00am)
* 5:30pm

If there is a span across a time period, use a hyphen, not an en- or em-dash. If you are describing the time period in a sentence, do not say “from X time to Y time” but say “from X-Y”.

* from 7am-9pm
* 7am-9pm

Given the nature of remote business, it is *extremely* important to specify time zones. Use [Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) offset](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_UTC_time_offsets): UTC-5, UTC+8, etc.

We abbreviate decades, but we do not use an apostrophe (e.g., the 70s, the 90s).

## URLs and websites

Capitalize the names of websites and web publications. Do not spell out URLs. Omit the “http://www” at the beginning of URLs (e.g., google.com, not http://www.google.com).

## Writing about other companies

Call other companies and their products by what they call themselves and their products. Refer to companies and their products as “it” and not “they.” We do not know these people personally.

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# WORD LIST

The following words may cause trouble. By no means is it exhaustive. If you have doubts, consult the *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*. Always use British spellings.

## A-F

**adviser** not advisor

**agree** things are agreed *on*, *to*, or *about*, not just agreed

**aka** AKA is acceptable when starting a sentence

**biannual, biennial** can mean twice a year or once every two years; avoid due to this ambiguity

**brokerage** what a stockbroking firm does, not what it is

**centre** also fibre, litre, metre, theatre, etc.

**colour** also flavour, honour, neighbour, etc.

**comprise** means “is composed of”

**demography** not *demographics*

**different from** not *different to* or *different than*

**environment** avoid unless about *the* *environment* (avoid “business environment,” i.e.)

**factoid**  something that *sounds* like a fact but *is not* a fact

## G-K

**grey** not *gray*

**healthcare** not *health care*

**jobcentre** not *job centre*

**judgment**  not *judgement*

## L-S

**licence** as a *noun*

**maths** not *math*

**Millennial** yes, it’s capitalised

**no one** not *no-one*

**normality** not *normalcy*

**on to** never *onto*

**presently** soon (not *at present*)

**programme** but *program* for software

**skilful** not *skillful*

## T-Z

**think tank** not *think-tank*

**travelling** also fuelling, modelling, etc.

**while** not *whilst*

**year 7, year 11, etc.**  for UK school years

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