



WritersDomain

House Style Guide

1 | WRITING GUIDELINES

1.1 Keywords

Keywords are not a topic and do not need to be included a certain number of times in an article. However, they do represent search terms potential customers are using, so the topic should closely relate to the assigned keyword phrase.

1.1.2 Additional Keywords

Some orders also come with additional keywords that writers are not required to use but that may help clarify the primary keyword better. Writers can focus their topic around the primary assigned keyword or use the additional keywords as their guide.

1.2 Special Considerations

Keywords may also have special considerations that offer insight or specific direction a client requires. These special considerations trump any writing guidelines outlined on WritersDomain. Special considerations shouldn't include the client's name and articles shouldn't highlight the client. If the client's name is in the special considerations, please contact Support or your manager.

1.3 Citations

Including citations can increase the credibility and value of an article to the reader. Citations are required for any numbers, stats, or hard-to-find information. At least one in-line citation is required for premium articles.

1.3.1 Source Regulations

1. Links to sites that give supplemental information are acceptable. But readers should not be required to click on links in order to understand the article.

2. Citations should not be used to get around plagiarism. Rather, use citations as references to validate your content.

3. Direct quotes longer than one sentence are not allowed, even when cited.

4. Do not link to lengthy PDFs because they can be difficult to scan. However, sources with hard-to-understand jargon are perfectly acceptable.

5. Websites like YouTube, Wikipedia, eHow, or About.com are not restricted. The only types of sources that aren't accepted are image searches, product pages, and informal forums like Yahoo! Answers (but forums such as WebMD that are monitored by professionals are acceptable).

6. Citations to print resources are allowed.

7. If the information is credible, helpful, and representative of industry standards, linking to a competitor is okay—as long as it's not to a services, product, or home page.

1.4 Ideation

Once you have selected a keyword, research the industry and decide on a topic and direction for your article. Discern your audience and decide on the appropriate tone. Remember, the people who will be reading your article are people who have searched for the keyword you have been given.

For instance, if the keyword is a highly-technical term in the construction industry, your audience is probably people who are very familiar with construction and contracting. They will be seeking more in-depth, technical information. If the keyword is more general, such as dentistry, your audience could be looking for a dentist or a specific procedure in the field of dentistry.

Before you start, answer the questions "Who is searching for this keyword?" and "Why are they searching for this keyword?" This will help you write an article appropriately suited for our client.

For more ideas and helps on how to come up with a topic, title, and direction, see our posts on ideation on the WritersDomain blog.

1.5 Dos and Don'ts

Dos

- Be creative. Think outside the box. Figure out what's hot, what's trending, and what will attract readers' attentions.
- Do your research, but do not overwhelm the reader.
- Use day-to-day language appropriate for internet reading.
- Proofread. At this level, submissions should contain no grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.
- Include inline citations as needed and as appropriate. Use your judgment in using anchor text or URLs to link to your source. Premium articles require at least one inline citation.
- We encourage gender-neutral language. However, we also recognize that in some situations, the use of gender-specific pronouns is acceptable.
- Provide readers with useful, pertinent information. If an idea is common knowledge, leave it out.

Don'ts

- Do not write every article in a formulaic or similar manner. Your submissions need to be unique in content and form. Spend the time to research a keyword and then write about it in a unique way.
- Do not use anecdotes and do not write in the first-person point of view.

- Do not write about the keyword in a negative way. The keyword usually represents a product or service provided by our client, so the overall tone of your article should be positive or, at the very least, neutral.
- Refrain from highlighting a particular company or referencing competitor brands in the given industry. It's okay to cite information from most websites, but do not focus on and talk about any competing company specifically.
- Do not write a review of or advertisement for any product or service, even if you are given the company name in the special considerations. Articles should be helpful and unbiased, and they should present industry-related knowledge.
- Do not include any contact information (company phone number, address, etc.).

1.6 Concision

Short, concise writing is faster and easier for readers to digest. Wordiness and redundancies clog up writing and distract the reader. Examples include:

due to the fact that vs. because
 in the event that vs. if or when
 basic fundamentals vs. fundamentals (fundamentals, by definition, are basic)

Nominalizations, or turning verbs into nouns, can also clog up a text. Writing with verbs, rather than noun forms, will make content more active and actionable. See the following example:

the professors reached a conclusion vs. the professors concluded

When in doubt, think about why you are using a particular word or phrase. If you can say it in fewer words, do it. If it makes sense without it, take it out.

1.7 Plagiarism Definition

We take plagiarism very seriously at WritersDomain. Plagiarism is copying or rewording any material, including articles you wrote previously. Submission of non-original work, whether plagiarized or reused from your own writings, will result in account deactivation.

1.8 Intuition

We strive to continually offer resources and writing helps, including feedback from the editors. That said, writing is an art and requires a certain level of intuition. Trying to enumerate all the dos and don'ts and to explain exactly how to write a 5-star article is simply not possible. The intricacies of writing are too varied to capture in a single document or website. Therefore, you must rely on your own creative and critical thinking and intuition to produce 5-star articles.

2 | ORGANIZATION & FORMATTING

Clear, straightforward organization helps readers more easily understand information you provide. Each point in a piece should be organized in a sequence that is logical and smooth.

Formatting style is up to the writer's discretion; however, the formatting should be clear and consistent. This applies to the following:

- Titles and Headings (i.e., length, structure, and capitalization)
 - Note: All types of title cases are acceptable, e.g., title case, sentence case, all caps, etc.
- Paragraphs (i.e., length and structure)
- Lists (i.e., capitalization and structure)
 - Note: With the exception of ingredients and supplies lists, bulleted lists should be no longer than eight items, and each item should be no longer than one sentence.
- Character features (bold, italics, underline)

3 | WORD CHOICE & GRAMMAR

Listed below are some of the most common mistakes found in writing. Follow these guidelines to avoid errors and to produce professional, polished blogs and articles.

3.1 Commonly Confused Words

If you don't know the exact definition of a word, look it up in each country's proper language dictionary (See Section 3.2 for preferred dictionaries).

Here is a list of commonly confused words. Consult the country's respective dictionary for definitions:

accept, except
advice, advise
adverse, averse
affect, effect
all ready, already
allude, elude
allusion, illusion
apart, a part
brake, break
capital, capitol
cite, sight, site
compliment, complement
compose, comprise
continuous, continual
council, counsel
desert, dessert
elicit, illicit

eminent, immanent, imminent
ensure, insure
every day, everyday
farther, further
fewer, less
flaunt, flout
imply, infer
it's, its
lay, lie
lead, led
metal, medal, mettle
our, are
passed, past
peak, peek, pique
precede, proceed
principal, principle
reign, rein, rain

rite, right, write
then, than
they're, their, there
through, threw, thorough, thru
to, too, two
weather, whether
who, which, that
who, whom

3.2 Frequently Misspelled Words

When in doubt of the spelling of a word, consult a dictionary. For words with multiple accepted spellings in the target country (e.g., grey/gray), either is appropriate, but the spellings should be consistent throughout the piece. Be sure to verify the spelling for North American, Australian, and British clients. We recommend the following sources:

- American - Merriam-Webster's free online version
- Australian (including slang) - Australian National Dictionary
- British - Oxford Dictionary or the Macmillan Dictionary British Edition
- Canadian - Canadian English Dictionary and SearchEnginePeople

3.3 Common Grammatical Mistakes

WritersDomain strives to publish professional and grammatically perfect content to ensure that readers comprehend the information presented to them. The following common grammar mistakes distract from a piece's intended meaning.

3.3.1 Misplaced/Dangling Modifiers

Misplaced modifiers are descriptive phrases that appear to modify the wrong noun because of their placement in the sentence. Sentence structure indicates that a prepositional or descriptive phrase applies to the closest part of speech in the sentence.

Incorrect: He nearly drove the car for 100 miles a day.

Correct: He drove the car for nearly 100 miles a day.

Dangling modifiers create confusion because they modify a noun that is not in the sentence.

Incorrect: After reading the new book, the movie is sure to be great.

Since the movie is an inanimate object and cannot read, a subject is needed to clarify the meaning of this sentence.

Correct: After reading the new book, I was sure that the film adaptation would be great.

3.3.2 Parallelism

Parallel structure helps readers better understand and follow your ideas. To create parallel structure, use words that have the same grammatical function to indicate two or more ideas of equal importance. Parallelism can happen at the word, phrase, or clause level.

Pay special attention to maintaining parallelism in headings and bulleted lists. For example, if one item in a bulleted list is a complete sentence, the rest should be as well. Or, if a heading contains a command, the others should also.

For example, the two heading examples below maintain parallel structure:

Develop the Skills You Need to Pass a Driving Test

Practice in Our Classroom and on Our Driving Course

Note the strong action verbs in the same tense, full sentences, and title case.

Here's another example of parallelism, this time in a list:

- Challenging turns
- Freeway driving
- Defensive driving habits
- Parking skills
- Difficult maneuvers

Note: All items in the list are all noun phrases, sentence case, and have no ending punctuation. See Section 2 for more information about lists.

3.3.3 Vague Pronouns

Pronouns stand in for and refer to other nouns (called antecedents). If a sentence uses a pronoun without clearly referring to an antecedent, we call this a vague pronoun. Vague pronouns confuse readers because they do not refer to a specific noun. "It," "this," and "that" are common offenders.

Incorrect: We take the engine out of the car and fix it.

Correct: We take out your engine and fix it in a timely manner.

The incorrect example is unclear because the reader can't be certain whether the engine or the car is being fixed. The correct example fixes this vagueness by removing an additional subject.

Incorrect: When you prepare your yard for an in-ground pool, you must first dig a large hole. This allows your contractors to properly lay a foundation for the water feature.

Correct: When you prepare your yard for an in-ground pool, you must first dig a large hole. This step allows your contractors to properly lay a foundation for the water feature.

In the incorrect examples, "this" refers vaguely to the idea listed in the previous sentence. In this scenario, it is unclear to the readers what "this" means. The correct example eliminates vagueness by adding an additional subject ("this step"). This extra information allows readers to clearly understand the intended meaning.

3.3.4 Pronoun Agreement

Pronouns include words like "he," "she," "it," "they," and "we." Possessive pronouns like "his," "hers," "its," "theirs," and "ours" can be used to indicate possession. Regardless of case, pronouns must agree with the number and gender of the original noun.

Correct: One should always brush one's teeth.

Correct: People should always brush their teeth.

Incorrect: Payday loans should only be used as a last resort. It can ruin your credit score.

Correct: Payday loans should only be used as a last resort. They can ruin your credit score.

Note: The exception to this rule is that you may use "they" as a singular pronoun.

3.4 Jargon

Many industries use specialized or technical language. Sometimes jargon terms are understood differently by those outside the industry.

Consider the audience and their familiarity with technical terms. If it's clear that readers will understand the specialized terms, then technical jargon is acceptable. However, if the piece is addressing a general audience, be sure each term is defined the first time it's used. Or replace the term with simpler words or phrases.

4 | PUNCTUATION

Use these guidelines to aid you in proper punctuation conventions for the web.

4.1 Apostrophes

4.1.1 Indicating Missing Numerals or Letters

Apostrophes can be used to replace omitted numerals and omitted letters. For example:

Incorrect: In the 70's, KISS sang "I want to rock-n-roll all night and party every day."

Correct: In the '70s, KISS sang "I want to rock 'n' roll all night and party every day."

Apostrophes are also used to form contractions, such as "don't" or "I'm." Contractions make text sound more conversational, which is appropriate for online content.

4.1.2 Forming Possessives

Use the guidelines listed in this section to properly form possessives in writing.

Singular nouns

Add an apostrophe and an "s" to the end of the word, even if the word ends in "s."

the cat's meow, the university's student center, Degas's paintings

Plural nouns that do not end in "s"

Add an apostrophe and an "s" to the end of the word.

the children's toys, alumni's contributions

Plural nouns that end in "s"

Add an apostrophe to the end of the word.

the players' scores, the witnesses' statements, the boxes' contents

Singular proper nouns formed by a plural word

Add an apostrophe to the end of the term.

The Rolling Stones' new album, the United Nations' decision

4.1.3 Apostrophes and Plurals

Don't use an apostrophe to form a plural except when the plural would be confusing without an apostrophe, like with single letters.

I got straight A's on my last report card.

4.2 Colons

Use colons to introduce the following:

- An illustration, table, or bulleted list (like this one)
- The second part of a title or heading

You Snooze, You Lose: 3 Reasons to Work Out in the Morning

- A clause that illustrates or amplifies its preceding clause

Only two things are certain in life: death and taxes.

Do not use a colon after a verb when introducing a list in running text.

Incorrect: I want to thank: my mom, my dad, and my grandparents.

Correct: I want to thank my mom, my dad, and my grandparents.

4.3 Semicolons

Use a semicolon to separate two thematically related independent clauses.

We have no food left in the kitchen; Dave is running to the store.

Semicolons also separate list items with internal punctuation.

The band will go on tour to Las Vegas, Nevada; Denver, Colorado; and Los Angeles, California.

Use semicolons sparingly, usually just once per piece. Or ditch them altogether and use an em dash. (See Section 4.5.2 for more about em dashes.)

4.4 Hyphens

Use a hyphen to make compound terms. When in doubt of whether a compound term contains a hyphen, consult a dictionary or section 7.85 of Chicago. (See Section 3.2 for preferred dictionaries.)

Some general principles:

- Use a hyphen for compound modifiers that precede a noun. This principle does not apply for compound modifiers with the words "more," "less," "most," or "least."

Take advantage of the 30-day free trial.

Her debut single was the most downloaded song of 2009.

- Don't use a hyphen if the compound modifier follows the noun it's modifying.

This easy-to-use product will completely change your life.

Our product is easy to use.

- Don't use a hyphen following the adverb "very" and adverbs ending in "-ly," as these adverbs clearly modify the following adjective.

Apple introduced a very exciting product during their September keynote address.

- Add a hyphen if the phrase would be unclear without it.

We attended a violent-weather conference. (The conference was about violent weather.)

We attended a violent weather conference. (The weather conference got violent.)

4.5 Dashes

Dashes create visual contrast in a sentence and can indicate a range of numbers or an abrupt break in thought. They are not interchangeable with hyphens.

4.5.1 En Dashes

An en dash is shorter than an em dash, but longer than a hyphen. Our style guide, however, does not include restrictions on en dash use.

4.5.2 Em Dashes

An em dash works much like a semicolon, but an em dash can set apart a sentence fragment, not just an independent clause. Use an em dash to:

- Set off a parenthetical element.

We celebrated Dad's birthday—just as we do every year—at Red Lobster.

- Indicate a dramatic break in a sentence.

Harry Potter learned who he truly was—a wizard.

4.6 Question Marks

Use a question mark to ask a direct question or a rhetorical question. Note: Use a period for indirect questions.

What would you like to eat? (direct question)

Can you believe it? (rhetorical question)

She wondered what would become of her life. (indirect question)

4.7 Quotation Marks

Use quotation marks to:

- Identify direct quotations.

He said, "The job will be difficult."

- Define words, especially technical words.

We use the "electric arc furnace" method of steelmaking.

- Refer to colloquial words, nicknames, slang, or ironic emphasis.

That "policy" was never approved by our executives.

- Set off titles of some works. (See Section 6.1 for more information about titles of works.)

We mentioned a little about ordering from a menu in our past blog, "How to Eat Like a Millionaire."

Do not use quotation marks with:

- Indirect quotations.

He said the job would be too difficult.

- Familiar expressions that audiences don't need defined.

He knocked the ball out of the park.

4.7.1 Formatting Quotation Marks for North American English

Americans and Canadians prefer double quotation marks. For North American clients, use this handy table to help you determine where quotation marks go relative to punctuation marks:

Closing Punctuation Mark	Quotation Marks (double or single)	Parentheses and Brackets
Comma	Inside	Outside
Period	Inside	Inside or outside. When an independent sentence is enclosed in parentheses or brackets, the period should appear inside the parentheses or brackets. When content in parentheses, even a complete sentence, is within another sentence, a period should appear outside the parentheses.
Semicolon	Outside	Outside
Colon	Outside	Outside
Exclamation Points	Inside or outside. Exclamation points appear after closing parentheses unless they are part of the parenthetical content.	Inside or outside. Exclamation points appear after closing quotation marks unless they are part of the quoted material.
Question Mark	Inside or outside. Question marks appear after closing quotation marks unless they are part of the quoted material.	Inside or outside. Question marks appear after closing parentheses unless they are part of the parenthetical content.

Em Dash	Inside or outside. If the sudden break indicated by an em dash applies to the quoted material, place the em dash within the quotation marks. If it applies to the surrounding material, place it outside the quotation marks.	Outside
Quotation Mark		Inside or outside. Quotation marks appear after closing parentheses unless they are part of the parenthetical content.
Parentheses	Inside or outside. Parentheses appear after closing quotation marks unless they are part of the quoted material.	

When a sentence requires quotation marks within quotation marks, the inner set of quotation marks should be single quotes.

She said, "I love 'The Lottery.' It's my favorite short story."

4.7.2 Formatting Quotation Marks for Australian English

Australians prefer to use single quotation marks. Use single quotation marks for the same situations you would use double quotation marks.

Australian rules of placement differ slightly from North American standards. If punctuation is part of the quotation, it should be placed within the quotation marks:

'Have you finished eating breakfast?' asked Mr. Smith.

If punctuation is not part of the quotation, it should be placed outside the quotation marks:

The director said, 'Our employees follow the strictest standards'.

The king salmon is also called 'Chinook'; the name comes from a Native American language.

She said, 'I love "The Lottery". It's my favourite short story'.

Refer to the table in Section 4.7.1 for rules about parentheses and brackets.

4.8 Ellipsis

Ellipses should be used sparingly. Use them to show that words have been omitted in quoted or cited text. Note that if the omitted text comes at the end of the sentence, the ellipsis follows the period.

Shakespeare wrote, "Some are born great . . . and some have greatness thrust upon them."

Mark Twain wrote, "Don't go around saying the world owes you a living. . . . It was here first."

4.9 Commas

Commas are the most used, but possibly the trickiest, punctuation mark. The main purpose of a comma is to separate elements, such as phrases or items in a list. Use commas to do the following:

4.9.1 Separating Items in a Series

For North American content, use the Oxford or serial comma, or the final comma that comes before "and" in a list. This final comma removes ambiguity.

Incorrect: To my parents, Ayn Rand and God.

Correct: To my parents, Ayn Rand, and God.

Correct: We perform teeth cleanings, you give us your insurance information, and your insurance pays the bill.

4.9.2 Setting off Quotations

Use commas to set off quotations, unless the quotation is indirect or preceded by “that.”

Incorrect: We've often heard our customers say that, “you should expect quality, not quantity.”

Correct: As our customers say, “Expect quality, not quantity.”

Correct: Our customers say that you should expect quality, not quantity.

4.9.3 Separating a Series of Coordinate Adjectives

Two or more coordinate adjectives that precede a noun should be separated by a comma. Note: If you can add “and” between the adjectives or switch the order without creating confusion, then add a comma.

Davy had a happy, carefree childhood.

She has many young friends.

4.9.4 Joining Two Independent Clauses Connected by a Conjunction

Incorrect: We want you to feel comfortable in our office, and get to know our dentists personally.

Correct: We want you to feel comfortable in our office, and we want you to get to know our dentists personally.

Correct: We want you to feel comfortable in our office and to get to know our dentists personally.

4.9.5 Introducing Words and Phrases

Commas generally follow introductory phrases that are four or more words long.

Unlike small animal bones, large animal bones can cause damage to the garbage disposal.

4.9.6 Setting off Nonrestrictive Clauses

Phrases inserted into a sentence that add information but don't alter the meaning of the first clause are enclosed in commas.

My sister, who lives in Boston, called me last weekend. (In this case, I only have one sister.)

My sister who lives in Texas has a new baby. (In this case, I have multiple sisters, but the one who lives in Texas has a new baby.)

4.9.7 Setting off Interjected and Linking Phrases

Doctors have also found links between vitamin D and decreased risk of breast and colon cancer, a fact that has surprised skeptics.

Similarly, our customers appreciate our attention to detail.

4.9.8 Setting off Dates, Titles, and Addresses

July 5, 1776, was a day never to be forgotten.

We planned a trip to Seattle, Washington for next week.

4.9.9 Setting off a Direct Address or a Tag Question

Look into your hearts, members of the jury, and find compassion there.

Detaching the blue wire disarms the bomb, doesn't it?

5 | ABBREVIATIONS

No matter how familiar some abbreviations seem to you, some web visitors—particularly those from countries other than your own—may be unfamiliar with these terms. If the shortened form of a word is unfamiliar to your readers, spell it out the first time it's used or include the abbreviation in parentheses following the spelled-out form. For example: Associated Press (AP).

If the shortened form is better known than its spelled-out form (ATM or USB), use the shortened form.

To form a plural of an abbreviation or acronym, add a lowercase “s” (ATMs). Don't include an apostrophe unless it is necessary for clarity.

6 | PROPER NOUNS

Proper nouns include personal titles, company or brand names, and the names of countries, cities, and specific buildings.

6.1 Titles of Works

When citing the title of a book, magazine, CD, or other composition, consider the following.

6.1.1 Capitalization of Titles of Works

Most titles of works can be set in either title case (capitalizing all words except for articles and prepositions) or sentence case (capitalizing only the first word of a title) as long as the formatting is consistent throughout a piece.

6.1.2 Formatting of Titles of Works

Quotation Marks

The following titles should be set off in quotation marks.

- Magazines articles (However, magazine titles should be italicized.)

The article "Is Your Liberal Arts Degree Useless?" from *Forbes Magazine* garnered one million page views this month.

- Newspaper articles (However, newspaper titles should be italicized.)

The New York Times disagrees with Fox News's decision to host the debate in Ohio, according to their article "New Poll Data: Why Ohio?"

- Blogs posts (However, blog names should be italicized.)

Style Me Pretty touts the benefits of vintage bridesmaid dresses in "Vintage Victory," posted last week.

Style Me Pretty demonstrates innovative uses of twine in a 7/31/2015 post.

Italics

The following titles should be set off in italics.

- Website Names

Jane Smith writes copy for websites like *BuzzFeed* and *Amazon*.

- Movies

My favorite movie is *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days*.

- Books

The Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring is an iconic fantasy novel.

6.2 Titles of People

Capitalize a person's title only when it's used directly before his or her name. This rule includes titles pertaining to government positions (like "president," "senator," and "mayor"), religious positions (like "pope," "cardinal," and "rabbi"), and other organizational positions (like "chair," "treasurer," and "general manager").

The president fired his chief of staff yesterday.

Yesterday, President Obama fired Chief of Staff Jones.

6.3 Geographical Locations

Use the nationally preferred capitalization and punctuation for cities, states, and regions.

6.3.1 Compass Directions

For simple compass directions, use lowercase text (examples: north, south, east, west, northeast, northwest, southeast, southwest, northern, southern, eastern, western). However, if compass directions are used in the name of a specific region (e.g., the South), use capital letters.

6.4 Company Names

When writing the names of companies, brand names, and other similar titles, follow the capitalization conventions established by these entities.

Incorrect: iPod, iTunes, iPhone

Correct: iPod, iTunes, iPhone

Incorrect: EBay

Correct: eBay

Note: Do not use an ampersand (&) unless it is part of a brand name or keyword. No space is necessary on either side of the ampersand when used within an acronym.

"Proctor & Gamble," "Arm & Hammer"

"AT&T"

7 | DATES

Be sure to follow the rules in this section if you include dates in your writing.

7.1 Ordering and Punctuating Dates

When writing a specific date, it's clearer to use the name of the month and the ordinal number for the date (January 31st) rather than a numeral (1/31), because the order of the month and day varies from country to country.

When a date consists of only a month and a year, don't separate the two with a comma (January 2010).

When stating the month, day, and year in a sentence, include a comma after the day and after the year.

On January 31, 2010, Davy started his new job.

7.1.2 Formatting Australian Dates

For Australian copy, use the common long date formula. List the day, month, and year, with no comma separations.

On 31 January 2010, Davy started his new job.

7.2 Decades and Centuries

To state a decade, add an "s" without an apostrophe (1990s). To abbreviate the decade, replace the first two digits with an apostrophe (1990s becomes '90s).

When writing the name of a century, use numerals for the ordinal, even if the ordinal is a single digit (the 6th century).