

Style Guide

When writing ContentLab content, always keep the client’s goals first in mind. Who is the target audience? What is the client trying to achieve? Perhaps they’re trying to sell a new product, or perhaps they want to position themselves as thought leaders in their space. Always aim to create compelling content that helps our clients achieve their goals.

Web content should be engaging and easy to read. Avoid heavy, overwhelming paragraphs. Instead, split them into short, scannable sections. Pay careful attention to the tone instructions noted in each brief.

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Abbreviations

Avoid using abbreviations unless the usage is universally accepted. Although there are a few common uses of abbreviations in technical content, we spell out terms unless directed otherwise by clients.

- Instead of “e.g.” or “ex.,” use “for example” or “for instance.”
- Instead of “i.e.,” use “which is” or “meaning.”
- Instead of “etc.,” use “and so on” or restructure the list to begin with “such as.”
- Instead of “vs.,” use “versus.”

Incorrect: Ex. We use commas, periods, question marks, etc.

Correct: For example, we use commas, periods, question marks, and so on.

Correct: For example, we use punctuation such as commas, periods, and question marks.

Acronyms

In most cases, spell out terms on first use, followed by the acronym in parentheses. Then, you can use the acronym. In series, define acronyms on first use in each article. If the first use of a term is in the title or first sentence of the article, you may choose to define the acronym on the second use.

Incorrect: This CMS includes custom HTML editing. The CMS...

Incorrect: This CMS (content management system) includes custom HTML editing. The CMS...

Correct: This content management system (CMS) includes custom HTML editing. The CMS...

Common technical acronyms you can use without spelling out:

- REST
- HTTP
- CSS
- HTML

Do not use periods in acronyms.

Incorrect: U.S.

Correct: US

Do not capitalize the words in the spelled-out term unless they otherwise require capitalization. Do not bold or italicize the first letters of the spelled-out term.

Incorrect: The **Q**uality **A**ssurance (QA) department

Correct: The quality assurance (QA) department

To make an acronym plural, just add 's'. Do not add an apostrophe.

Incorrect: There are 16 CEO's in the boardroom.

Correct: There are 16 CEOs in the boardroom.

Acronyms for countries

You can choose to use UK for United Kingdom or US for United States when using them as adjectives. When using them as nouns, spell out the full name unless space is limited (for example, in a table).

When using acronyms for countries, do not spell out the full name on first use. If you have any doubts about the reader understanding what the acronym refers to, use the full name instead.

Incorrect: Almost a third of United States (US) gas emissions come from transportation.

Correct: In the United States, almost a third of gas emissions come from transportation.

Correct: Almost a third of US greenhouse gas emissions come from transportation.

Acronyms starting with vowels

Use the pronunciation of an acronym (as opposed to the first letter) to determine whether it requires the indefinite article 'a' or 'an.' For acronyms with multiple pronunciations, choose the pronunciation most popular with the target audience.

Incorrect: The benefits of an SaaS solution

Incorrect: A NGINX server

Correct: The benefits of a SaaS solution

Correct: An NGINX server

Ampersands

Avoid using ampersands (&) in body text, headings, or subheadings. Use “and” instead. You may use an ampersand in charts or tables where space is limited, or when it’s part of a name or title, such as company name or book title.

Capitalization

After a colon

When the phrase following a colon does not form a complete sentence, do not capitalize the first word unless it already requires capitalization (for example, it is a proper noun). When the phrase following the colon stands on its own as a complete sentence, capitalize the first word.

Correct: I’m about to list several things: one, two, and three.

Correct: I’m about to list several things: First, the server should always be backed up. Second, that backup needs to be housed in several locations. Third, if you must always be testing your backups.

Department names

Use lowercase for department names.

Correct: The people in the sales department love to play card games.

Job titles

Only capitalize job titles when they precede the person’s name, even if there is an acronym for the role.

Incorrect: The Chief Security Officer (CSO) oversees compliance.

Correct: The chief security officer (CSO) oversees compliance.

Correct: I think Doctor Jones is the best doctor in town.

Titles and headings

Use title case for titles, headings, and subheadings. Capitalize everything except articles, conjunctions, and prepositions of four or fewer letters.

Incorrect: 10 Things that You Didn’t Know About B2B And B2C Marketing

Correct: 10 Things That You Didn’t Know About B2B and B2C Marketing

Product names

Always check the correct capitalization for product names or other vendor terminology. Refer to product pages or documentation for reference.

Captions

Captions for images are not required unless specifically requested by the client. By default, refer to images in the surrounding text.

When there is a need for captions, this is the preferred style:

Figure X: This is a sample caption.

Code

Paste in your code as plain text and apply the appropriate style:

	Code snippets or references inside body paragraphs	Blocks of code
Microsoft Word	Apply the 'in-line code' character style, found in the Styles gallery	Apply the 'code samples' paragraph style, found in the Styles gallery
Google Docs	Apply the 'Normal text' paragraph style and change the font to Consolas size 11	Apply the 'Normal text' paragraph style and change the font to Consolas size 10

When adding code samples to articles, be mindful of length. Instead of including long files in full, include a link to view the file in a repository (or a placeholder link when the client will be hosting the repository).

- Do not use a web formatting tool to add styles to your code.
- Avoid placing code in table cells or text boxes.
- Do not hyperlink URLs in code. Remove automatically generated hyperlinks.
- Don't include empty parentheses after function names in body paragraphs.

Incorrect: `printf()`

Correct: `printf`

Include parentheses in in-line code only when using them to specify required parameters or indicate intentionally empty parameters.

Correct: Call `Console.WriteLine(String, Object)` to write out the text representation of an object, followed by the current line terminator.

Correct: Call `Console.WriteLine()` with no parameters to write out a blank line.

Comments in code

Short comments in code samples are acceptable when helpful. However, do not use comments to describe lengthy steps. Instead, include this information in the body text and refer to it in comments where relevant. Ensure key information is always included in the body text.

Indentation

Use two or four spaces to indent code where needed. Do not use tabs to indent.

Note: When editing Python or YAML, do not adjust indenting as it may affect functionality. If the indentation creates readability issues, suggest edits and leave a comment for the author of the code to approve.

See [Formatting](#) for more information.

Conjunctions

You can start a sentence with a conjunction, such as “and” or “but.” But do so sparingly.

Content type

We categorize most content as either hands-on or high-level.

Hands-on content

Hands-on content typically teaches the reader something new by walking them through a step-by-step process. The introduction should grab the reader’s attention, let them know what they will learn by reading the article, and inform them of any prerequisite knowledge.

If there are significant prerequisite tools or steps, they can instead be listed in an early section, such as a “Get Started” or “Project Setup.”

Hands-on articles are usually split into sections by steps, with each heading indicating a clear task. For example, “Create an Azure Function.”

Hands-on articles should give readers the resources they need to follow along with each step. This may include code samples, screenshots, links to code repositories, and links to relevant tutorials or documentation.

High-level content

High-level content typically informs the reader about topics, trends, or products. The introduction should capture the reader’s attention, presenting a clear argument or summary. It should give the reader a picture of what’s to come without giving away so much that they no longer want or need to read the content.

A good practice for high-level articles is to conclude the introduction with a list of subjects covered, then include a section for each subject.

Be aware of whether you are writing thought leadership content or product-focused content. Consider how the client wants their products and services included, if at all.

Contractions

Use contractions where appropriate (it's, you're, can't) to make the tone conversational.

Disability-Inclusive Language

Be objective: Avoid describing disability with terms that contain bias or judgment, such as *suffers from*, *afflicted/stricken with*, *confined to/forced to use* [a mobility aid].

Avoid characterizing disability as *abnormal*, *irregular*, or *unhealthy*. Similarly, do not characterize nondisabled people as *normal*, *regular*, or *healthy*.

Only reference a person's disability when relevant. Whenever possible, get direct information from the source about their preferred terms for discussing their disability.

When this is not possible, do your own research about the specific language used to describe the disability. For example, look into the nature of [Person-first vs. Identity-first](#) language. Some disabled communities, such as the Autistic and [Deaf communities](#), have publicized their preferred modes of identification.

Important note: When seeking reliable sources, always favor pages and organizations run *by* members of the disabled community in question. Prioritize the voices of those in the community, instead of those whose knowledge is at best second-hand (parents, caregivers, medical professionals). For example, the Autistic community [widely denounces](#) AutismSpeaks, in favor of organizations such as the [Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#).

Here are some additional sources to jumpstart your research:

- [American Foundation for the Blind](#)
- [Canadian Association for the Deaf/Association des Sourds du Canada](#)
- [People First of Canada](#)

Formatting

When working in Microsoft Word, use the document styles in the Styles gallery to format content. When working in Google Docs, use the default document styles and adjust code as needed.

Always use single spaces between sentences. Add blank lines between each paragraph. Add blank lines before and after code samples, images, and lists. Do not add blank lines before or after headings or titles.

Article body: Arial, size 11. Use this style for body paragraphs. Body paragraphs should be size 11 Arial with no spacing before or after lines. (Instead of paragraph spacing, we separate paragraphs with line breaks.)

Code sample: Consolas, size 10. Use this style for blocks of code.

In-line code: Consolas, size 11. Use this style for snippets of code or code elements inside body paragraphs. Only apply this style to the code itself and not surrounding spaces or punctuation.

Heading 1: Arial, size 20; 12 pt spacing before. Use this style for top-tier headings in your article.

Heading 2: Arial, size 16; 12 pt spacing before. Use this style for subheadings in your article.

Heading 3: Arial, size 14; 12 pt spacing before. Use this style for an added hierarchy level only when necessary.

Title: Arial, size 26. Use this for your article title.

Note: The 'code sample' and 'in-line code' styles are not available in Google Docs, so you will need to format code manually. Apply the 'Normal paragraph' style then change the font accordingly.

Note: Only use Heading 3 and below when necessary. Instead, reconsider the content structure.

Media titles

Italicize titles of books, eBooks, games, movies, and magazines. Use title case unless matching specific casing in the title. Do not italicize punctuation unless it is part of the title.

Correct: Have you read *The Azure Cloud Native Architecture Mapbook?*

Use title case for titles of articles, whitepapers, blog posts, surveys, and reports. Add a hyperlink on first reference if published online.

Correct: For more information, read [Using Merged Styles in TomTom Maps](#).

Correct: According to the 2021 Best Breakfasts Report, eggs are more popular than cereal.

UI elements

When writing instructions:

- Bold UI elements when instructing the user to interact with them.
- Use quotes when instructing readers to name something, such as a file.
- Use the in-line code style for code file names and paths.
- You can use > to indicate file or menu hierarchy. Do not bold the greater-than sign.

Correct: Name your file "example.docx" and click **Save**.

Correct: Add the following code to `index.html`.

Correct: Find your username under **Settings > Profile**.

When writing high-level articles, which typically do not include step-by-step instructions, avoid referencing specific UI elements. Instead, describe actions and functionality in general terms.

Incorrect: In Microsoft Word, you can click **Track Changes** to suggest edits to a document.

Correct: Microsoft Word allows you to track changes to a document.

Variables, functions, and commands

Apply the in-line code character style to variable names, functions, commands, and other snippets of code inside body paragraphs. Do not apply the style to surrounding spaces and punctuation. Do not apply the style to words that describe the code but are not code elements. Do not put variable names in quotes, unless you are instructing the reader to name the variable.

Incorrect: Use the “color” property to set the color of your text.

Correct: Use the color property to set the color of your text.

Idioms and jokes

It's good practice to avoid idioms, and jokes. They are easily misunderstood or misconstrued and translate poorly across language and generational gaps.

Links

Unless necessary for communicating instructions, do not place URLs in body paragraphs. Instead, choose relevant keywords to hyperlink. When possible, work linked text into natural sentences. Avoid adding hyperlinks to the words “here” or “link.”

When choosing keywords, consider what text best describes the outcome of clicking the link. When linking the client's content, also consider what keywords may be beneficial for SEO purposes. Usually, there is no need to add links to both actions and nouns. Avoid hyperlinking full sentences.

When possible, avoid direct download links. Instead, find a page where the reader can choose whether to download a resource.

Incorrect: Please visit <https://contentlab.io/guides/>

Incorrect: Click [here](#).

Incorrect: [Check out the ContentLab guides](#).

Correct: Check out the [ContentLab guides](#) for writing and formatting tips.

Correct: Check out the ContentLab guides for [writing and formatting tips](#).

Do not link spaces outside keywords.

Incorrect: Check out the [ContentLab guides](#) for writing and formatting tips.

Correct: Check out the [ContentLab guides](#) for writing and formatting tips.

When URLs are present in code, do not hyperlink them. Please remove automated hyperlinks. Unlike links in the body text, we are not looking for readers to click these links. As well, the added formatting may create issues for readers attempting to copy and paste the code.

Incorrect: sudo git clone <https://github.com/kubeedge/kubeedge.git>

Correct: sudo git clone `https://github.com/kubeedge/kubeedge.git`

See [Sources](#) for information about what is appropriate to link to.

Lists

Use bullet lists by default. Use numbered lists only for lists that have an explicit numbered order (steps or ranking).

Avoid numbered lists for lengthy processes. If each step is several lines long or steps include images or code, rework them into non-numbered narrative instructions.

Avoid using nested lists whenever possible, particularly for steps. To avoid nested lists, substeps of a numbered list should be reworked into a narrative.

Incorrect:

1. Focus on communication.
 - a. Invest in relationship-building.
 - b. Position communication as part of your core strategy.
 - c. Make a plan.

Correct:

1. Focus on communication. First, invest in relationship-building, then ensure you position communications as part of your core strategy before making the final plan.

Punctuation

Use periods after list items if they form complete sentences. Otherwise, do not use periods. Don't use semicolons or "and" after list items.

Gender

Whenever possible, rewrite to avoid gender specificity.

Unless referring to a specific person, use gender-neutral pronouns. Do not use man to refer to humans.

Incorrect: he, she, he/she, he or she
Incorrect: Man has evolved since...
Correct: they
Correct: Humans have evolved since...

When using example names, favor gender-neutral names such as Alex, Ali, Lee, Sam, Sasha, and Taylor.

Instructions

[Hands-on content](#) typically includes step-by-step instructions. Unless specifically requested in the brief, do not number every step in the article.

Consider the tone instructions in the brief when writing instructions. Make sure instructions are engaging for readers. Unless targeting a formal tone, occasional conversational remarks in instructions are encouraged.

By default, write instructions in present tense, using plural first-person, singular second-person, or a mix of these perspectives, as appropriate. Use past or future tense only when specifically required. For example, past tense can be used to reference steps taken earlier in the process. Use singular first-person perspective only when indicated in the brief.

Incorrect: First, I obtained an API key.
Correct: Let's start by obtaining an API key.
Correct: First, obtain your API key.

Use the imperative mood to instruct the reader.

Incorrect: You will click Save .
--

Incorrect: You click **Save**.

Correct: Click **Save**.

When writing instructions, only use “can” as a modal verb to indicate optional steps. Where relevant, make it clear to the reader when they should or should not take this step.

If adding tags is a mandatory step:

Correct: Add tags.

If adding tags is not a mandatory step:

Correct: You can add tags if...

For formatting instructions, see [UI elements](#) and [Variables, functions, and commands](#).

Refer to the [Microsoft Style Guide](#) for best practices for describing interactions with UI.

Numbers

Write out numbers up to nine, except in dates, percentages, hard data, or numeric inputs.

Correct: Three writers worked together on this series of 15 articles.

Correct: Only 3 percent of editors believe fake statistics.

Correct: The default value for this field is 3.

An exception to this rule is a list that includes numbers both less than and more than ten. In this case, keep the list consistent.

Correct: The table was stocked with 2 cakes, 10 pizzas, and 24 sodas.

Write out numbers at the start of a sentence but try to rewrite to avoid doing so.

Correct: Ninety-nine percent of dogs surveyed expressed interest in walks.

Correct: Of dogs surveyed, 99 percent expressed interest in walks.

Favor numeric characters in article titles, even for numbers under nine. However, you may also spell out numbers when called for in the brief.

Correct: Top 8 Reasons to Edit for ContentLab

Correct: Top Eight Reasons to Edit for ContentLab

For numbers over three digits, use commas.

Incorrect: I want to write 10000 articles for ContentLab.

Correct: I want to write 10,000 articles for ContentLab.

When writing numbers in the millions and billions, you can choose to use numerals (even for numbers under nine) and the word million or billion. This is appropriate for monetary amounts and populations, for example.

Incorrect: 1.2 million

Correct: 1.2 million; 3 billion

Dates

Do not include a comma after a month when it appears with only the year, but always add a comma after the day if the full date appears.

Correct: In September 2014, Microsoft released XYZ.

Correct: On September 1, 2014, Microsoft announced the release of XYZ.

Never abbreviate months or days of the week unless space is limited — for example, in a table. Use three-letter abbreviations, without periods, when necessary: Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr, May, Jun, Jul, Aug, Sep, Oct, Nov, and Dec. Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat, and Sun.

Do not include ordinals (th, st, rd) in dates.

Never write a date in the form mm/dd. In all countries other than the United States, 6/7 will be interpreted as July 6. Always write dates in a non-ambiguous format.

Ordinal numbers

Write out ordinal numbers (adjectives describing the numerical position of something) from first through ninth. After 10th, they should be numerical.

Percentages

Use numeric form for percentages unless they are at the start of a sentence (try to recompose sentences to avoid this). Spell out percent, except when used in a table, infographic, or chart.

Correct: The survey results showed that 70 percent of storage administrators drink Mountain Dew.

Correct: Ninety percent of Unix admins sport ponytails.

Correct: It was reported that 90 percent to 98 percent of Unix admins sport ponytails.

Phone numbers

Use the locally acceptable format:

- (555) 123-4567 for calls within the US and Canada
- +61 412 123 456 for calling an Australian mobile number from outside Australia

Time

Use the following format:

- 9 AM
- 9:30 PM
- 9-10 AM

Punctuation

Use a single space after a period and between words. Always double-check for consistency as errors may creep in during writing and editing.

Use a colon to introduce a sub-concept or example. See [Capitalization > After a colon](#).

Use an em dash or parentheses to inject a parenthetical phrase or aside.

Avoid using semicolons. They are a known problem for ESL readers and translation. In most cases, a period or colon can be used.

Apostrophes

Only use an apostrophe when you need to form the possessive of the word, not the plural. The exception to this is the possessive of it, which is its.

Use curly apostrophes, also called smart apostrophes, in body text. Use straight apostrophes in code.

Note: When using Grammarly, be careful not to automatically update all apostrophes to curly in articles that include code, as you may inadvertently convert apostrophes in code.

If a word ends in 's,' just add an apostrophe to form the possessive.

Correct: The CEOs' speech was inspiring.

Correct: The witness' answer was spoken in a whisper.

Commas

Use the serial (Oxford) comma before the "and" or "or" in lists.

Correct: Idea generation, content creation, distribution, and ROI optimization.

Dashes

Use em dashes with spaces for setting off text or emphasizing a point in a sentence. In long sentences and sentences that already include commas, favor setting off text with em dashes over commas. Otherwise, use your judgment.

Spaces around em dashes are preferred in online publishing for readability.

Do not use an en dash (–) or two hyphens (--) to replace an em dash.

Incorrect: Some of the pain points – compliance, customer trust, and the proliferation of digital information -- are so pressing that financial services marketers hold off on launching innovative campaigns and stick to the basics.

Correct: Some of the pain points — compliance, customer trust, and the proliferation of digital information — are so pressing that financial services marketers hold off on launching innovative campaigns and stick to the basics.

Ellipses

Use non-spaced ellipses.

Incorrect: . . .

Correct: ... or ...

Note: In code, you may need to override a word processor default changing ... to an ellipsis character. In code, always use three periods to show elided code.

Hyphens

Use hyphens in numeric ranges but use “to” (instead of a hyphen) when including a numeric range in a sentence.

Correct: Numbers 11 to 25 are from the second experiment.

Correct: 9-10 AM

Slashes

Avoid using a slash to indicate “and” or “or” as this introduces ambiguity.

Incorrect: Use SoftwareA/SoftwareB to set up your application.

Correct: Use SoftwareA or SoftwareB to set up your application.

Quotation marks

Use curly quotation marks, also called quotation marks, in body text. Use straight quotation marks in code.

Note: If using Grammarly, be careful not to automatically update all quotation marks to curly in articles that include code, as you may inadvertently convert quotation marks in code.

Quotes

Quotes fall into two buckets in our work:

Quoted text/scare quotes — text quoted from another source, either spoken or written. In this case, punctuation goes inside the quotes, except colons, semicolons, and dashes. Always use double quotation marks with single quotation marks inside. There aren’t many instances of this in technical content. Examples may include quoting an expert or quoting a client’s customer. See [Quoting sources](#) for more information.

Correct: SoftwareCo CISO Taylor Lee said, “Switching to CompanyZ boosted my team’s productivity.”

Literal strings — characters that are either typed in or returned by a program. In this case, the only text that should be within the quotes is the actual characters of the input or output.

Correct: Type “yes” or “no”.

Tense

By default, write in the present tense. Only use other tenses when specifically required.

When writing marketing text, such as summary sections or calls to action, favor the present tense. Use modal verbs as needed, but where it strengthens or simplifies your message, assume the reader will take action. If a modal verb is required, favor “can,” but use your judgment to maintain accuracy.

Incorrect: SoftwareCo will help you take your automation to the next level. You could sign up for a free trial if you would like to learn more. With a trial account, you will be able to set up new workflows or import existing ones.

Correct: SoftwareCo helps you take your automation to the next level. Sign up for a free trial to learn more. With a trial account, you can set up new workflows or import existing ones.

Titles and headings

Do not include an introductory heading immediately after the title unless the brief specifically requests it.

Ensure consistent headings whenever possible. For action headings, favor present tense and imperative mood.

Incorrect: Obtain an API Key; Your Application; Exporting Your Project

Correct: Obtain an API Key; Build Your Application; Export Your Project

Use title case. See [Capitalization > Titles and headings](#) for details.

Conclusions can have the following headings or other headings unique to the content:

- Next steps
- Summary
- Conclusion

Topics to avoid

Please avoid politics and religion unless it is specifically required.

Sources

When making claims or stating statistics, always link out to a reputable source.

Choosing appropriate sources

Use vendor-neutral sources whenever possible. Research companies, such as Gartner, or tech news websites are typically vendor-neutral sources. Or, use the client's own studies, reports, or articles.

Never link to the client's competitors' content. Avoid linking to other companies' content (even if they are not direct competitors) unless specifically relevant. For example, it is relevant to link to a CompanyX documentation page in a CompanyY article about a CompanyX-CompanyY integration.

Avoid linking to gated content. However, a link to gated content by a vendor-neutral source is fine if it's the best source available. (Gated content is any content that can only be accessed in exchange for information. Companies often use gated content as a lead generation tactic, so if we link to another company's gated content, we are indirectly asking our clients to further another company's marketing strategy.)

Determining source reliability

Be mindful of quoting or referencing sources that are hard to verify or have specific agendas. While it is generally quite acceptable to source programming strategies from tech companies with well-known platforms, approach lesser-known sources and more abstract topics with healthy skepticism.

In order to be viable, a source needs to have a strong degree of authority in its subject matter. Consider the following:

- Is the site reputable? A personal blog may include useful information or well-tested strategies, but since the author is not held to any publishing standards, it's important to fact-check and test strategies for yourself.
- If the source speaks to a human experience, is the author or publisher in a position to make reliable claims or statements about this experience? Avoid sources that speak on someone else's behalf. For example, a parent of a disabled child is not in a position to make reliable claims or statements about their child's experiences with disability.

You will rarely need to include direct quotations, but if you do, be cautious. Carefully examine the context of the original quotation in addition to the context of your own writing.

Images

Capturing screenshots of software UI is acceptable and often encouraged. Do not include other images in your article unless:

- You, the author, created the image yourself, and it does not include any copyrighted content.
 - For example, a chart or diagram you mocked up in Lucidchart or PowerPoint
- The image is in the [public domain](#).
- The image is licensed for [commercial redistribution](#).
- The image belongs to the client.

Always add comments to images to cite sources.

Open-source code

Always attribute open-source code, providing a link to the original.

Plagiarism

Clients trust ContentLab to produce original articles, so we have a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. Copying content from the client's website or other sources is not acceptable.

Providing a link to the source does not make it okay to plagiarize content. For example, this is taken word-for-word from a Wikipedia page.

Incorrect: DevOps is a philosophy of [cross-team empathy and business alignment](#). It's also been associated with a practice that encompasses automation of manual tasks, continuous integration and continuous delivery. SRE and DevOps share the same foundational principles.

Making minor adjustments to copied sentences still counts as plagiarism. For example, this version of the text has been rephrased, and an additional sentence (taken from another Wikipedia page) has been used to break up the stolen text. Tweaking sentences and mixing varied sources does not result in original work. This is still plagiarism — often known as mosaic or patchwork plagiarism — and is unacceptable.

Incorrect: DevOps is a framework of business alignment and cross-team empathy. It is associated with the practice of automating manual tasks and CI/CD. DevOps is complementary with Agile software development; several DevOps aspects came from the Agile methodology. SRE and DevOps share the same fundamental elements.

Note: In most cases, authors are welcome to (and even encouraged) pull content directly from the outline. This is acceptable because the ContentLab team typically produces outlines, so they are original work.

Quoting sources

Unless there is a reason to quote a source (such as providing an official statement from an organization or a specific definition for a niche term), do not quote sources directly.

Incorrect: The SoftwareCo website says their product “automates workflows, boosts productivity, and streamlines collaboration.”

Correct: During the event, SoftwareCo CEO Sam Young said, “Our goal is to become the leading XYZ platform in North America.”

Correct: CEO Sam Young aims to make SoftwareCo the leading XYZ platform in North America.

There is no need to quote a statistic from a cited source.

Incorrect: According to the Fictional Report, “of all DevOps teams surveyed, 88 percent reported enjoying reading fake statistics.”

Correct: According to the Fictional Report, 88 percent of DevOps teams enjoy fake statistics.

Spelling

Unless otherwise directed in the brief, use American spelling.

Word choice

Always use clear, inclusive language. Define technical terms where appropriate.

At the edge

Use at the edge, not on the edge.

Incorrect: The data is stored on the edge of the network.

Correct: The data is stored at the edge of the network.

Between versus among

Use between when there are two things and among when there are three or more things. Never use amongst.

Data

Data can be treated as a singular or plural noun, to suit conventional use.

Effect versus affect

To affect means to produce a change or influence something. An effect is a change that has occurred. Affect is a verb 99 percent of the time; effect is a noun 99 percent of the time.

Correct: How will the new invoicing structure affect the payroll department?

Correct: The effect of the new invoicing structure will be negligible.

Fewer versus less

Use fewer when the number of things can be counted. Use less when the number of things cannot be counted.

Correct: There are fewer lakes.

Correct: There is less water.

Insure, ensure, and assure

To insure means to protect against financial loss. To ensure means to make certain or confirm. To assure means to promise. (We assure a person.)

Correct: You are insured against theft.

Correct: Track your ROI to ensure your success.

Correct: I can assure you that your valuables are safely locked away.

Which versus that

Which, when used correctly, is part of a nonrestrictive clause, which is preceded or set off by commas.

This clause is not essential to the meaning of the sentence and can be removed without changing the meaning:

Correct: The dog sled race, which was grueling, took place two weeks ago.

That is part of a restrictive clause, which is not set off by commas. This clause is essential to sentence meaning, and can't be removed:

Correct: The dog sled races that take place in Anchorage are especially intense.

If the "which" in the sentence sounds funny with a comma in front of it or around the entire phrase, the sentence probably needs to be using "that."

Words to avoid

Avoid infrequently used words and outdated language. Avoid terminology that readers may find confusing, offensive, or harmful.

Avoid this	Use this instead
Abled; able-bodied	Nondisabled
Amongst	Among
Birth defect, disorder	Born with [specific condition]
Blacklist/whitelist	Blocklist/safelist
Deformity, deformed, disfigured	Experienced [objective event description]
Differently-abled, special needs, handi-capable	Disabled, has a disability
Firstly/lastly	First/last or finally

Guys	People, team members, and so on
Hearing impaired	Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing
Handicapped, crip/crippled, invalid	Disabled, has a disability
Hence or thus	Meaning that, leading to, or therefore
Hereinafter	From now on
Inbuilt or in-built (adj.)	Built-in (adj.)
Internets, interweb(s)	Internet
Master*	Main, primary, commander, or leader
Nowadays	Today, now, or currently
Sane/insane	Reasonable/unreasonable
Slave	Replica, follower, builder, worker
The Disabled	Disabled people, people with disabilities
Visually impaired	Blind, legally blind, low vision, limited vision

*Master may be used in reference to a particular product or service that requires this specific term — for example, when it is part of a code element that cannot be changed. Note that GitHub is [phasing out master in favor of main](#), so please use main when referring to the default branch of a repository.

Wordiness

Strive to shorten complex sentences and reduce word count. Eliminate words or phrases that:

- May sound patronizing
- Are redundant
- Add nothing to the meaning
- Are easily replaced with shorter words or phrases

Consider the following substitutes to avoid wordiness, but be sure not to lose clarity or introduce repetition:

- “to” instead of “in order to”
- “now” instead of “at this point in time”
- “all” instead of “all of”
- “use” instead of “make use of”
- “ensure” instead of “make sure that”
- “broken into” instead of “broken up into” or “broken down into”
- “speeds” instead of “speeds up”

Eliminate excess words from lists. If all items in a list correspond to the same adjective or verb, the adjective or verb does not need to be repeated.

Incorrect: This software can improve productivity, improve collaboration, and improve communication.

Correct: This software can improve productivity, collaboration, and communication.

Word List

Agile
back end (n.)
back-end (adj.)
bare metal
built-in (adj.)
CEO/CFO/CTO/CIO/CISO
cheat sheet
cloud-based (adj.)
cloud native (n.)
cloud-native (adj.)
cloud computing (never hyphenated)
comma-separated values (CSV)
company-wide (adj.)
co-founder
cutthroat (adj.)
cybersecurity (no hyphen)
data center
data source
datasheet
deep learning (two words)
decision maker
double check (n.)
double-check (v.)
downtime
drag-and-drop (adj.)
e-commerce
end user (n.)
end-user (adj.)
firsthand
front end (n.)
front-end (adj.)
follow up (v.)
follow-up (adj.)
GB (no space: 5GB)
high-level
how to (followed by v.)
how-to (n.)

hybrid cloud
hyperconvergence (no hyphen)
I/O (no need to spell out)
IOPS (no need to spell out)
Infrastructure as code (IAC)
Internet
kickstart (v.)
lifecycle (n.)
login (n.)
log in (v.)
long-term (adj.)
MB (no space: 5MB)
machine learning
microservices (don't hyphenate)
multi-cloud (hyphenate)
multifactor (don't hyphenate)
near real time (n.)
near real-time (adj.)
offset (v.)
okay (not o.k. or OK)
on-premises (sometimes "on-premise," but never "on prem," "on-prem," or "on premises")
ongoing (one word)
onboarding
onsite (adj., adv.)
open-source (before n.)
open source (after n.)
out of the box (after n.)
out-of-the-box (before n.)
pain point
platform as a service (PaaS)
plugin
postmortem
pop-up (n.)
pop up (v.)
real time (n.)

real-time (adj.)
repurpose
reuse
rightsized
runtime
Scrum (the methodology)
scrum (the meeting)
setup (n. and adj.)
set up (v.)
skillset
software as a service (SaaS)
software-defined
standalone (adj.)
startup (n. and adj.)
subject-matter experts (SMEs)
team member
third party (n.)
third-party (adj.)
time sink (n.)
touchpoint
top of mind (after n.)
top-of-mind (before n.)
underperforming
up-to-date (before n.)
up to date (after n.)
username
user-base (n.)
user flows (two words)
walk-through (n.)
webpage
website
whitepaper(s)
webcast
webhooks
webinar

When in doubt about a word that's not listed, refer to the [Merriam-Webster's Dictionary](#).

Final Note

This document aims to guide clear and simple writing and formatting. We welcome all suggestions from our writers and editors. See something missing or have a recommendation for an update? Email Sarah Mae Conrad, Managing Editor at sarah.conrad@contentlab.io.

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