MICRO FOCUS

Writing Style Guide

Updated July 2020

Contents

About This Guide

Best Practices

Voice and Tone

House Rules

Writing Resources

Acronyms and Initialisms

Active Voice

Ampersands (&)

Apostrophes (')

Bullets (•)

Capitalization

Commas (,)

Company: They or It?

Contractions

Dates

e.g. and i.e.

Ellipses (. . .)

Em Dashes (—)

En Dashes (–)

Exclamation Marks (!)

Hyphens (-), En Dashes (–), and Em Dashes (—)

Italics

Micro Focus

Money

Numbers

Passive Voice

Periods (.)

Product Names

Quotation Marks (" " and ' ')

Ranges

Slash Marks (/)

Spacing at Sentence End

Spelling (American or British English?)

Telephone Numbers

Text Links

That and Which

Time

Trademarks

Webcast vs. Webinar

Which and That

Words and Terms

About This Guide

This is our company style guide. Its goal is to help us write clear, consistent, valuable content that solidifies our brand and builds our corporate credibility. We've included our preferred conventions for grammar, punctuation, and other matters of style. We've also made it searchable, so you can go straight to the information you need.

Best Practices

Some best practices, like these, never change:

Write for different types of readers—

Make your writing work for people who scan and for those who read every single word. Use descriptive headers and bullets whenever possible.

Create a logical hierarchy—

Lead with the main message in sentences, paragraphs, sections, and pages. Then back it up with relevant support points.

Be concise—

Avoid redundancy. Omit unnecessary words. Make every sentence count. But don't sacrifice clarity for brevity.

Be specific—

Shun vague language, marketing fluff, and mind-numbing jargon. Use words that are specific and concrete.

Use active voice—

Avoid passive voice, at least most of the time. More on this under House Rules.

Voice and Tone

Voice and tone are different. You always have the same voice, but your tone changes. You might use one tone with your best friend and another with your boss. The same is true for Micro Focus. Our voice doesn't really change from day to day, but our tone varies depending on who we're writing to and what we're trying to convey.

Our voice is:

- Conversational but not slangy.
- Knowledgeable but not superior.
- Confident but not arrogant.
- Friendly but not presumptuous.
- Direct but not rude.
- Concise but not abrupt.
- Consultative but not pushy.

Our tone is:

Dependent on the target audience and the marketing asset. For a technical white paper, your tone will be educational and content-driven. For a marketing email, it might be more general and informal.

House Rules

Acronyms and Initialisms

Acronyms and initialism are types of abbreviations. Acronyms, such WAN (Wide Area Network), can be pronounced as words. Initialisms, such as ISP (Internet Service Provider), cannot be pronounced as words.

Spell out acronyms and initialisms in the first instance and follow with the acronym or initialism in parentheses. Then use the acronym or initialism for all other references. If the acronym or initialism is well known (for example, API, HTML, IBM), there's no need to spell it out. Choose associated articles (*a* or *an*) based on the pronunciation of the acronym or initialism—for example, *an* HTML email and *a* URL.

Do not use apostrophes to indicate pluralization of an acronym or initialism:

We can no longer play CDs on our laptop.
(Not: CD's)

Active Voice

In general, use active voice and avoid passive voice. In an active sentence, the subject of the sentence does the action (Industry analysts in the example below). The object is the recipient of that action and sits in the object position, after the verb (Micro Focus in the example below):

Industry analysts love Micro Focus.
(Passive: Micro Focus is loved by industry analysts.)

Passive voice can be vague, wordy, or awkward. But sometimes it works—for example, when the object (or receiver of the action) is more important than the subject (or doer of the action), or when the doer is unknown:

Your computer was flagged by our IT team.

Ampersands (&)

Do not use an ampersand in place of *and* except when it is part of a trademarked name, such as *AT&T,* or space is limited.

Exception: Always use an ampersand with *Security, Risk & Management*, one of our four focus areas.

Apostrophes (')

Use an apostrophe to indicate an omission:

It's for *it is*: It's not easy to keep pace with emerging technologies.

(But: *Its* for the possessive pronoun—for example, *Each region has its own customers*.)

Use an apostrophe—or an apostrophe s—to form possessives:

- **For singular nouns that don't end in s, add an apostrophe s:**

  The product's ratings are above average.

- **For singular nouns that end in s, add an apostrophe s:**

  The boss's temper was legendary.

- **For singular nouns that end in s and are followed by a word beginning with s, add an apostrophe only:**

  The boss' sister was even meaner.

- **For a singular proper noun (a name) ending in s, add an apostrophe only:**

  Micro Focus' customers are leaders in their industries.

- **For plural nouns that don't end in s, add an apostrophe s:**

  We were happy with the media's coverage of our product launch.

- **For plural nouns that end in s, add an apostrophe only:**

  Our employees' passwords were stolen.

- **Use an apostrophe to form the plural of single lowercase letters:**

  Mind your p's and q's.

  (**Note:** The apostrophe is especially important when you are writing about *a's*, *i's*, and *u's*, because without it readers could easily think you are writing the words *as*, *is*, and *us*.)

- **Do not use apostrophes to indicate pluralization of an acronym or initialism:**

  We can no longer play CDs on our laptop.
  (Not: CD's)

Bullets (•)

When writing bulleted text:

- **Capitalize the first letter of each bulleted word, phrase, or sentence (unless the first word is case sensitive).**
- **Use periods at the end of sentences, long phrases, or paragraphs:**
  - Reduce operational friction by optimizing value streams from request to business value.
- **Don't use periods after one- to three-word phrases:**
  - Manage identities
  - Secure applications
  - Protect data
- **If some bullets are sentences and some are phrases or single words, rewrite them to be consistent.**

Capitalization

Headings: Titles and First Level

Use title case (initial caps) for titles and first-level headings:

A New Approach to Mainframe Passwords:
Get Rid of Them

Exception: Feel free to use sentence case when titles and first-level headings are complete sentences.

When using title case, capitalize the first letter of:

- **All words except for articles (*a*, *an*, and *the*), coordinate conjunctions (*and, for,* and *or*), and prepositions of four or fewer letters (*at, by, for, from, in, of, on, to,* and *with*).**
- **The first and last words of a heading or title (regardless of part of speech).**
- **Prepositions of five or more letters (*about, above, across, around, beneath, between,* etc.)**
- **Both words in a hyphenated compound:**

  Shift to an Analytics-Driven Approach

Headings: Second Level

Use sentence case for second-level headings:

Mainframe-password problems

Quick View Capitalization Chart for Short Words in Headings

Uppercase		Lowercase	
Are	That	a	of
As	This	an	on
Be	Up	and	or
If	Who	at	the
Is	Whom	but	to
So	Your	by	via
Than		for	vs.
		from	with
		in	

Job Titles

Capitalize job titles when they come before a name and are an official title:

We invited Chief Executive Officer Stephen Murdoch to the meeting.

Use lowercase for job titles when they come after a name or are merely descriptive:

We invited John Delk, our chief marketing officer, to the meeting.

But pick your battles. A lot of people want to see their title capitalized, so go ahead and capitalize when it will offend someone if you don't.

Proper Nouns

Capitalize proper nouns, such as product names and cities. Do not capitalize industry terms, such as *hybrid* and *big data*.

Commas (,)

In Dates

Omit commas in day-month-year and in month-year formats:

1 November 2018
(Not: 1 November, 2018)

November 2018
(Not: November, 2018)

In a Series

Use the serial or Oxford comma before the final conjunction in a series of three or more items:

Our software helps customers build, operate, secure, and analyze their IT operations.

Exception: Omit the serial comma any time that an ampersand is used in place of *and*:

Security, Risk & Goverance

Company: They or It?

Use the singular *it*, not the plural *they*, to refer to a company or an organization. Although company is a collective noun, we lean in the direction of treating it as a singular noun, which means the pronoun that stands in for company should be singular, too.

Contractions

Use contractions to help your writing sound natural and relatable. But don't overdo it. Avoid *would've*, *could've*, and *should've*. When writing for other languages, use contractions with caution because they are difficult to translate.

Dates

For Broad-Based Communications

Use the Month DD YYYY format, omitting the zero in front of single-digit days:

May 9, 2019

May 2019

Thursday, May 9, 2019

For Region-Specific Communications

Switch to the DD Month YYYY format, omitting the zero in front of single-digit days, if the Month DD YYYY format is not appropriate for your region-specific communication:

8 March 2019

Friday, 8 March 2019

For All Communications

Use cardinal numbers (1, 2, 3) in dates that include the month. Use ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd) in dates without the month. For ordinal numbers, use full-size letters, not superscript:

The conference was held on April 12.

The conference was held on the 12th.

(Not: The conference was held on the 12th.)

Note: When space is tight, use these three-letter abbreviations (with periods): *Jan., Feb., Mar., Apr., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov.,* and *Dec.*

e.g. and i.e.

Use *for example* rather than *e.g.* (*exempli gratia*) and that is rather than *i.e.* (*id est*), unless you have space limitations. In either case, these transitional expressions can be used parenthetically or be preceded by a comma, em dash, colon, or semicolon, depending on usage. They should always be followed by a comma:

Employees often resort to risky behavior; for example, writing their passwords on sticky notes.

The majority of our team sits in two offices—i.e., in Sunnyvale and Provo.

Ellipses (. . .)

Use ellipses (three spaced periods with one space before and after each period) to indicate omitted words within a quoted sentence:

"Maintaining and carrying forward our business rules saved . . . at least 85% over an application rewrite."

If one or more words are omitted at the end of a quoted sentence, use three spaced periods followed by the necessary terminal punctuation for the whole sentence:

"Can anyone explain why . . . ?"

If one or more sentences are omitted within a long quotation, use three spaced periods after the terminal punctuation of the preceding sentence:

"Reflection X offered fast access, strong security, and browser-based management tools. . . . Other products didn't have its functionality."

If the quotation is intended to trail off, use only three spaced periods at the end of the sentence:

"If I had only known . . ."

Em Dashes (—)

See Hyphens, En Dashes, and Em Dashes.

En Dashes (–)

See Hyphens, En Dashes, and Em Dashes.

Exclamation Marks (!)

Reserve exclamation marks for use after true exclamations, commands, or graphical elements:

Whoa! Mask Data on Mainframe Screens?

Now Available! Operations Bridge 10.30

(Not: 5 Steps to a Clear Cloud Strategy!)

Hyphens (-), En Dashes (–), and Em Dashes (—)

Hyphens (-)

Use hyphens to:

- **Avoid ambiguity:**

  He re-sent the file last night.
  (Not: He resent the file last night.)

- **Avoid duplicate letters in compound words:**

  anti-intellectual, pre-empt, anti-inflation
  (Not: antiintellectual, preempt, antiinflation)

- **Form a single idea from two or more words—except with adverbs ending in ly:**

  a well-known problem, a quick-fix solution, read-only memory
  (Not: easily-configured software)

- **Connect numerals ending in y to other numerals:**

  twenty-one, one hundred forty-three, one thousand two hundred fifty-six

- **Suspend hyphenation:**

  The cybercriminal received a 10- to 20-year sentence.

En Dashes (–)

Use en dashes—which are longer than hyphens but smaller than em dashes—to represent a span or range of numbers, dates, or times. The en dash can also represent a minus sign. Depending on the context, the en dash is read as *to* or *through*. There is no space on either side of the en dash:

The webcast is scheduled from 10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. on Friday.

If you introduce a span or range with words such as from or between, do not use an en dash:

He was my manager from 2014 to 2017.
(Not: He was my manager from 2014–2017.)

Note: To insert an en dash using Microsoft Word, click *Insert* on the menu bar. Then click *Symbol, More Symbols,* and *Special Characters*. Highlight *En Dash* and click *Insert*.

Em Dashes (—)

Use em dashes to indicate emphasis or explanation, define a complementary element, or denote a sudden break in thought. An em dash is a stronger and more informal mark than a colon, which also introduces extra or defining material. There is no space on either side of the em dash:

With our solutions, you can take a holistic approach to securing what matters most—identities, applications, and data.

Note: To insert an em dash using Microsoft Word, first type two hyphens, then the next word, and then a space. The em dash will be automatically formatted. Alternatively, you can click *Insert* on the menu bar. Then click *Symbol, More Symbols,* and *Special Characters*. Highlight *Em Dash* and click *Insert*.

Italics

Use italics when referring to titles of events, webcasts, articles, and white papers:

Register for our webcast: *Curing Mobile Madness*.

Micro Focus

Spell out our company name every time it's used. It's not *MicroFocus*, *Microfocus*, or *MF*.

Money

Use the symbol-amount format when writing about currencies:

$20 million	¥10,000
$19.99	€20

Spell out indefinite amounts of money:

a few million dollars

Use *K* (for *thousand*), *M* (for *million*), and *B* (for *billion*)—without a space between the number and the letter—in headlines and tables where space is limited:

$10B in revenue

Repeat the word *million* (*billion*, etc.) with each figure to avoid misunderstanding:

$5 million to $10 million
(Not: $5 to $10 million)

Numbers

Basic Rules

Spell out whole numbers one through nine. Exceptions include numbers that are accompanied by a dollar or percent sign, numbers that have technical significance, or numbers that need to stand out (in headlines, tables, banners, images, etc.):

You can revamp your sales processes in just 5 weeks.

Use figures for numbers 10 and higher:

At the trade show, we got more than 80 requests for a demo.

Spell out all numbers that start a sentence, except when that number is a calendar year:

2016 was a year of change for Micro Focus.

Use figures with words when referring to quantities of millions and billions:

The company's annual revenue was $4 billion.

Express related numbers the same way, even when some are above 10 and some below:

We sent out 50 invitations and 9 were undeliverable.

In numbers of more than three digits, use a comma after every third digit from right to left—except for decimal fractions, page numbers, phone numbers, and zip codes:

10,000 attendees
1.06377 units
Page 1055

Fractions

Spell out fractions:

two-thirds
(Not: 2/3)

Use decimal points when a number can't be easily written out:

1.375

Note: In lists or tables, align decimal fractions on the decimal point.

Percentages (%)

In general, express a percentage as a figure (unless it starts a sentence) and spell out *percent.* But use the symbol (%) for readability or to save space in headlines, tables, and on the website. There is no space between the figure and the symbol:

Reduce deployment time by 90%.

Seventy-five percent of our customers are on maintenance.

Passive Voice

In general, use active voice and avoid passive voice. In an active sentence, the subject of the sentence does the action (Industry analysts in the example below). The object is the recipient of that action and sits in the object position, after the verb (Micro Focus in the example below):

Industry analysts love Micro Focus.
(Passive: Micro Focus is loved by industry analysts.)

Passive voice can be awkward, wordy, or vague. But sometimes it works—for example, when the object (or receiver of the action) is more important than the subject (or doer of the action), or when the doer is unknown:

Your computer was flagged by our IT team.

Periods (.)

Put just one space after periods.

Product Names

Use *Micro Focus* before product names in the first instance. You may drop *Micro Focus* in subsequent instances:

Micro Focus Operations Bridge

Quotation Marks (“ ” and ‘ ’)

Place commas and periods inside quotation marks:

“Users aren’t tethered to their desks anymore.”

Place semicolons and colons outside quotation marks:

At the beginning of the focus group, participants described their recall rate as “low to moderate”; at the end, they described it as “moderate to high.”

Place question marks, dashes, and exclamation marks inside quotation marks only if they are part of the quoted material:

Who said, “In order to be irreplaceable one must always be different”?

Use single quotation marks for quotes within quotes:

My father liked to say, “Albert Einstein once said, ‘Try not to become a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value.’”

Ranges

Separate a span or range of numbers with an en dash (not a hyphen) for quick readability in tables, emails, and web pages:

Join us September 9–12 in Orlando.

8:00–11:00 a.m.

If you introduce a span or range with words such as from or between, do not use an en dash:

He was my manager from 2014 to 2017.
(Not: He was my manager from 2014–2017.)

Slash Marks (/)

Using slash marks sparingly (*or* is preferred). There is no space on either side of the slash:

his/her

Spacing at Sentence End

Put just one space after periods and other sentence-ending punctuation.

Spelling (American or British English?)

Broad-Based Communications

Use American English for marketing collateral and broad-based external communications. Driven by our customer base, this usage is consistent with our website, product user interface, and product documentation.

Region-Specific Communications

Switch to British English as appropriate for region-specific communications—for example, a promotional email to an Australian audience.

Note: For internal communications, use the style that reflects the preferences of the author.

Telephone Numbers

Use hyphens without spaces between number groups. Start international numbers with a +, followed by a space, the country code, the city code, and the number:

You can reach Micro Focus by calling
+ 1-888-323-6768.

Text Links

Exclude ending punctuation from text links, unless the entire line is included in the link:

According to Gartner, Micro Focus is a leader in the industry.

That and Which

Use *that* to introduce an essential clause—one that is required for the sentence to make sense. An essential clause often defines the noun or phrase preceding it and is not set off by commas:

Keyboard mapping is a feature that enables PC and Mac users to work more productively.

Use *which* to introduce a nonessential clause—one that could be omitted without affecting the meaning of the sentence. A nonessential clause adds a fact about the noun or phrase preceding it and is set off by commas:

Keyboard mapping, which is used to make PC keys correspond to terminal key functions, boosts user productivity.

Never use *that* or *which* to refer to a person. Always use *who.*

Time

Broad-Based Communications

Use the 12-hour clock with *a.m.* and *p.m.* (lowercase, with periods, preceded by a space):

8:30 p.m.
8:00 p.m.

Use *12:00 noon* or *12:00 midnight* (or just *noon* and *midnight*) because 12:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. are ambiguous:

12:00 noon–1:30 p.m.

Separate time ranges with an en dash:

7:00 a.m.–10:30 p.m..

Include the time zone:

- **For time zones within the continental United States, use the abbreviated form of Standard Time and Daylight Saving Time:**

  Central Time: CST or CDT
  Eastern Time: EST or EDT
  Mountain Time: MST or MDT
  Pacific Time: PST or PDT

  The webinar begins at 8:00 a.m. PST.

  Note: In the continental United States, Daylight Saving Time begins at 2:00 a.m. local time on the second Sunday in March. It ends on the first Sunday in November at 2:00 a.m., when we return to Standard Time.

- **For time zones outside the continental United States, use the abbreviated form—for example, *BST* for *British Summer Time*. If a time zone does not have a set name, use its Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) offset.**

Region-Specific Communications

Switch to the 24-hour clock if the 12-hour clock is not appropriate for your region:

14:00 (for 2:00 p.m.)
12:00 (for noon)
00:00 (for midnight)

Include the time zone (abbreviated form). If a time zone does not have a set name, or you are targeting audiences in multiple time zones, use Coordinated Universal Time (UTC):

The webinar begins at 13:00 IST.

The webinar begins at 10:00 UTC.

Putting It All Together

Communicate first to your primary audience, and then add information for your readers around the globe.

For example, if you are scheduling a webinar for an international audience, most of whom are in the United States and Canada, express the time this way:

The May 2 webinar begins at 2 p.m. PDT (UTC-7).

If you are scheduling the same webinar for an international audience, most of whom are in Australia, express the time this way:

The 2 May webinar begins at 8:00 AET (UTC+10).

Note: Not all countries (or states) shift between standard and daylight time, so it is wise to consult a time conversion website to ensure accuracy.

Trademarks

Micro Focus does not use, or require third parties to use, trademark acknowledgment symbols (® or ™) or trademark acknowledgment statements or legends.

Webcast vs. Webinar

Use *webinar.* Technically, there is a difference between the two words and most of our broadcasts are webinars.

Which and That

See That and Which.

Words and Terms

These words and terms can be slippery. Here's how we write them at Micro Focus:

case study (not *customer story*, success story, or *customer success story*)

cloud (not *Cloud*)

COBOL (not *Cobol*)

cyberattack (not *cyber attack*)

cyber resilience (not *cyberresilience*)

cybersecurity (not *cyber security*)

cyberthreat (not *cyber threat*)

data sheet (not *datasheet*)

ebook (not *e-book* or *eBook*)

elearning (not *e-learning* or *eLearning*)

email (not e-*mail* or *eMail*)

federal (not *Federal*, unless part of a proper noun—for example, the *Federal Reserve Board*)

for example (not *e.g.*, unless space is limited)

healthcare (not *health care*)

hybrid IT (not *Hybrid IT*)

Internet (not *internet*)

mainframe (not *Mainframe*)

Micro Focus (not *MicroFocus*, *Microfocus*, or *MF*)

microservices (not *Micro Services*, *MicroServices*, or *micro services*)

multicloud (not *multi-cloud*)

on premises (not *on premise*. When *on premises* is used as a compound adjective preceding a noun, it should be hyphenated—for example, *on-premises* server. When it is used as a predicate adjective, no hyphen is needed—for example, Our server is located *on premises*.)

that is (not *i.e.*, unless space is limited)

website (not *web site* or *Website*)

white paper (not *whitepaper*)

zero trust (not *Zero Trust* or *Zero trust*)

Writing Resources

For answers to questions not covered here, follow the style rules in these resources:

- *The AP Stylebook*
- *Chicago Manual of Style*
- quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl
- grammarly.com

Exceptions to certain rules in these resources are noted in this guide.

© 2020 Micro Focus