

Calley Gessel

Streamlined UX Writing

A UX Writing Style Guide

This project highlights a comprehensive style guide for a fintech company with 15+ product offerings. It showcases the development of effective, consistent, user-centered content to enhance the overall user experience.

Company & Product Overview

Over the course of two busy months, I created a UX writing style guide for a company in the financial services sector. With over 15 different products in active development, brand consistency was at a minimum. In order to bring products back into alignment, I was tasked with creating guidelines for quality content governance.

Objectives

- Audit existing content, looking for issues in messaging.
- Identify themes in content inconsistencies.
- Outline topics for a style guide.
- Make decisions on key style rules.
- Write articles for each topic and rule.
- Publish the guide on the design system website.

Requirements

- Create style rules that are versatile enough to be used across the product portfolio.
- Provide concise guidance that can be referenced quickly and easily by designers.
- Translate UX writing principles for an audience of non-writers.
- Provide concrete examples of as many rules as possible.

Content Outline

Topics

- Writing Principles
 - Examples: Voice and Tone, Active Voice
- Grammar
 - Examples: Numerics, Punctuation
- Text Styling
 - Examples: Capitalization, Truncation
- UI Elements
 - Examples: Error Messages, Alt Text
- Inclusive Content
 - Examples: Accessibility, Cultural Nuances
- Global Writing
 - Examples: Language Variants, Translatable Text

Table of Contents	
I. Writing Principles	
Guiding Principles	
Voice and Tone	
Active Voice	
Using Generative AI	
II. Grammar	
Acronyms and Abbreviations	
Addresses	
Numerics	
Punctuation	
Units and Symbols	
III. Text Styling	
Capitalization	
Headings and Subheadings	
Lists	
Truncation	

Table of Contents (cont.)	
IV. UI Elements	
Alt Text	
Buttons and CTAs	
Error Messages	
Forms	
Tooltips	
V. Inclusive Content	
Accessibility	
Cultural Nuances	
Cultural Sensitivity	
Pronouns and Gender	
VI. Global Writing	
Language Variants	
Translatable Text	

Deciding Standards

Deciding on style governance standards required 3 steps:

1. Audit existing content
2. Discuss potential rules with principal designers
3. Make final decisions democratically

Capitalization

Consistency

Consistent capitalization is key for clarity and unity across product UIs. We suggest using a mix of title case and sentence case to promote information hierarchy, emphasize the most important information, and reduce pixel count.

How to style title and sentence case

In title case, capitalize the first letter of every word except for articles (a, an, the), conjunctions (and, but, or), and prepositions (in, on, at, for, to, etc.), unless they are the first or last word.

In sentence case, capitalize only the first letter of the first word, proper nouns, and any other words that would typically be capitalized in a sentence.

Headings and titles

Use title case for headings and titles.

Example Image Search with AI

Subheadings and subtitles

Use sentence case for subheadings and subtitles.

Example Nearby schools and districts

Buttons

Use title case for button labels.

Example Sign In

Forms

Use title case for form titles and sentence case for form fields.

Example

- (Form title) User Feedback Survey
- (Form field) Date of birth

Navigation

Use title case for main or global navigation and sentence case for subnavigation.

Example

- (Main navigation) Buy/Rent
- (Subnavigation) New search

Drop-down menus

Use title case for menu names and sentence case for menu items.

Example

- (Menu name) Sort By
- (Menu item) Length of lease

Pills

Use sentence case for pills.

Example

- Selected for you

Writing Content

After style decisions were made, I drafted the text of all 25 articles. This effort took 1.5 months of dedicated time.

Information Model

Because the style guide was primarily intended as a reference for designers, I focused on content scannability.

- **Information Hierarchy:** Articles were composed of a series of sections broken up by appropriate headings.
- **Concise Sections:** Sections were composed of a few 2- to 3-line paragraphs.
- **Relevant Examples:** Sections were further broken up by short tables of examples pulled from real products.

Dates

Dates should be localizable wherever possible. For the US, use the format Month DD, YYYY. When including the day, use the format Day, Month DD, YYYY. Where possible, write out the full names of days and months. Be consistent about abbreviating them.

Example	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• November 15, 2010• Nov 15, 2010• Monday, November 15, 2010
Avoid ordinal numbers for dates.	
Correct	November 15, 2010
Incorrect	November 15th, 2010

Publishing

All 25 articles were published in the company's design system.

For the purposes of this portfolio, I created a PDF version.

[Download Style Guide PDF](#)

Results

- **Increased consistency and efficiency:** The style guide provided a central source of truth, improving cross-team efficiency by streamlining the writing process and reducing back-and-forth clarifications.
- **Enhanced user experience:** By ensuring a unified voice across 15 in-development products, the style guide contributed to a more cohesive user experience, enhancing brand recognition and trust.

Results (cont.)

- **Improved collaboration:** Facilitated clearer communication between product, design, and marketing teams, ensuring a consistent message was delivered to users across all touchpoints.
- **Scalability:** Set a foundation for future writers and designers, allowing for efficient onboarding and ensuring consistency as the team grew.