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**Content Writing Guidelines
Sample Content**

The following are sample sections from a Content Writing Guidelines deliverable.

[COMPANY] *New Voice and Tone Pillars*

The following voice and tone pillars will assist [COMPANY] copywriters during the rewrite process and beyond as the standard for writing content. The following recommendations show the ways [COMPANY] should use each voice and tone pillar to create and maintain successful content.

Trusted/Reliable/Consistent

- Ensure the site itself is reliable (doesn't go down, few 404 errors or timeouts)
- Make content consistent site-wide, including terminology, URL/title/headline naming
- Eliminate duplicate content
- Be predictable in content maintenance: update timely content and removed expired content
- Validate instructional content to ensure it's still valid (users may have become more familiar with procedure or site mechanics may have changed)

Advisor/Informative/Educated/Expert

- Use active language, simple words and concise language
- Concentrate on the value and practical use of information
- Provide complete information that answers customer's questions as they read
- When describing tasks, provide complete instructions, appropriate forms and links to help
- Provide links between sections of related information
- If using unfamiliar terminology, provide a short explanation

Simple to use/Easy to do business with/Approachable

- Keep the website shallow – information should be available within a few clicks
- Direct the customer down the desired path, whether it's finding more information or completing a task
- Ensure quality and focused search results
- Write content so it's easy for customers to find information on a page
- Keep it simple, don't overwhelm a user with choices

Understanding/Caring/Friendly/Empathetic/Listens

- Use the first person voice in a conversational tone, and use the familiar "you" and "we"
- Talk about products and services in terms of the needs they fulfill for the customer
- Ask for and include customer feedback where possible, including FAQs
- Promote and clarify content in which customers have expressed confusion (e.g. topics from the help desk)
- Provide easy access to help
- Ensure content is speaking to the appropriate audience

Community Member/Neighbor

- Provide up-to-date information on current [COMPANY] power installation projects
- Ask for and include customer feedback
- Provide information on how [COMPANY] contributes to the surrounding community

Page Content Best Practices

The following table displays a list of best practices that [COMPANY] copywriters should follow in order to maintain consistency throughout the site and to avoid unwieldy content.

Site area	Best Practices
Paragraphs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than three paragraphs without a subhead • With subheads, no more than 9 paragraphs per page
Link text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than ten words • Should remain on one line (do not wrap to next line) • Links should be blue and underlined for maximum findability
Link volume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For scannability and to maintain a clear call to action, limit links in content to no more than ten per page (does not include footer/header links).
Bullets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than six bullets per topic • No more than three lines per bullet
Numbered list (steps)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than eight steps in a list • One specific action per step (results of a step should be part of the related step).
Page Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than 80 characters • Use the main keyword for the page in the page title, preferably towards the front
Page Headline/Subheads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 40-60 characters • Use the main keyword for the page in the headline/subhead, preferably towards the front • Never put a period at the end of a headline/subhead
Images	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image should either span the entire column, or be less than half a column width • ALT tags should be applied to all images

Voice and Tone – Friendly Writing

[COMPANY] should refer to the Voice and Tone Pillars covered above during any writing process, whether it's creating new content or updating older content. The tone should be friendly, which doesn't mean casual. Friendly writing uses:

- Active language
- First person voice
- Contractions
- Simple words
- Concise and to the point language

Friendly Writing Recommendations

Use active language

Active language is more concise, friendlier and faster to read than passive language.

Passive language	Active language
The form for applying for business service can be accessed from this link.	Click here to apply for business service.
This form is intended to be filled out online, printed, then signed.	Fill out the following form online. Then print, sign and mail or fax it to the address below.
More information and the Business Service Application Form are available.	Fill out the Business Service Application Form.

Use first person voice

Third person voice	First person voice
[COMPANY] will help the customer quickly sign up for paperless billing.	We'll help you quickly sign up for paperless billing.

Use contractions

No contractions	Contractions
[COMPANY] personnel cannot perform service requests on weekends.	Sorry, [COMPANY] personnel can't perform service requests on weekends.

Use simple words

Using complicated words slows down the reader and makes content seem more formal.

Complicated words	Simple words
This form can be utilized to facilitate applying for business service.	Use this form to apply for business service.

Use concise language

Using concise language sounds friendlier, and gets the user through the content faster.

Verbose	Concise
It is important for a landlord to properly read the Landlord Service Agreement papers, as well as making sure they collect the papers required to fill out the documents properly.	Before filling out the Landlord Service Agreement form, have the following documents on hand:

Language in headlines & subheads

Descriptive headlines and subheads do several jobs:

- Describe page content
- Draw in the reader
- Provide SEO value

Headlines and subheads should:

- Be descriptive
- Be concise
- Use active verbs
- Be front-loaded with SEO terms

Write descriptive headlines

A descriptive headline should tell you instantly what the page is about.

Vague Headline	Descriptive Headline
A Few Steps to Get Started	Getting Started With Solar Technology
What You Need To Know	Installing Geothermal Heating: Costs vs. Benefits
Energy Tips	Solar Energy Tips To Heat You and Your Pool in Winter

Use direct language in headlines & subheads

Don't use imprecise "getting ready to" language, just use the action verb.

Imprecise Language	Direct Language
Getting Started Learning to Apply for Incentive Funding	Applying for Incentive Funding
Procedures to Obtain an Energy Rebate	Obtaining an Energy Rebate
Methods to Save Energy With Solar Water Heaters	Saving Energy With Solar Water Heaters

Front-load the headline with SEO terms

Front-loading a headline means putting the most important and most SEO-friendly terms in the first few words of the headline. This accomplishes two things:

- Shows the reader at a glance the page topic
- Can potentially increase the search engine ranking of the page

Vague Headline	Ok Headline	Front-loaded headline
Some More To Try <i>[doesn't tell the reader the page topic and has no keywords]</i>	Tips to Save Energy with Peak Solutions Program <i>[has keywords "save energy" and "Peak Solutions"]</i>	Save Energy With Peak Solutions Program OR Peak Solutions Program Energy-Saving Tips <i>[use this version if the focus is on Peak Solutions]</i>

Scannability

Create scannable pages

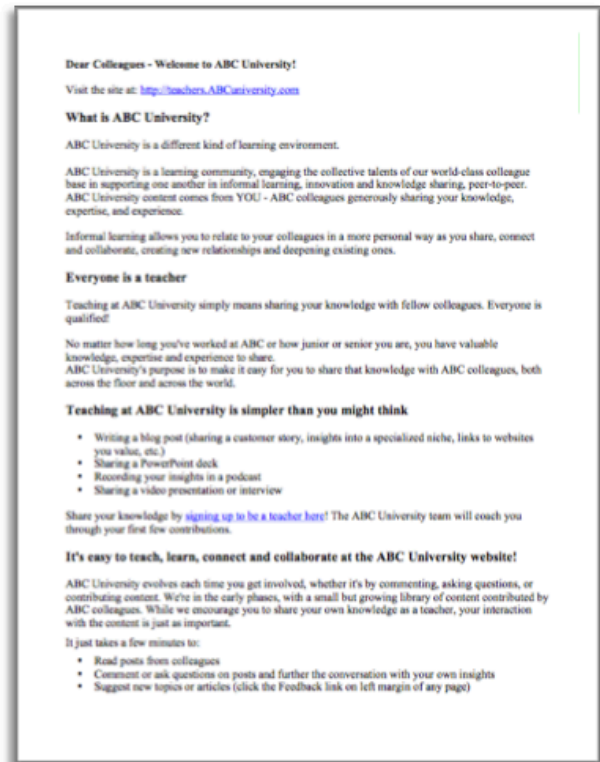
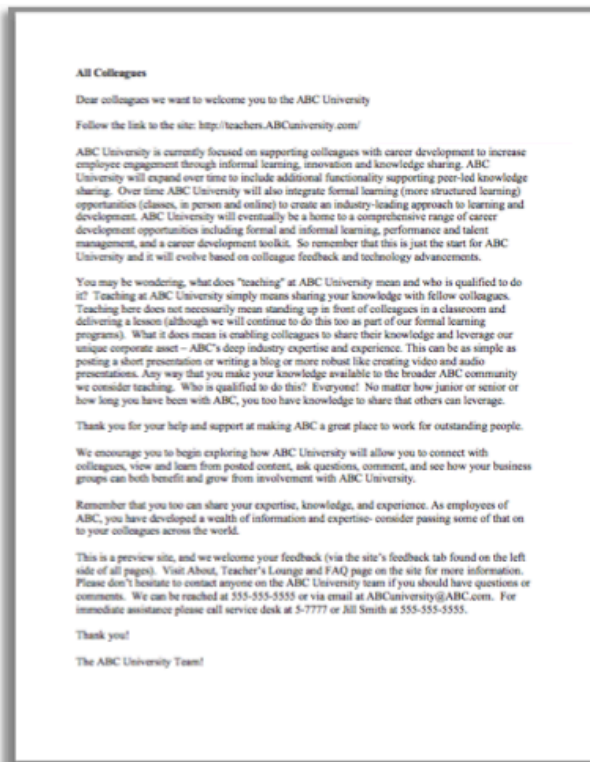
Website users do not “read” pages; they “scan” them quickly. This is why web pages must be written and laid out differently than printed pages.

A scannable page has copy with breathing room from:

- white space
- bullets and numbered lists
- subheads
- images (where appropriate)
- minimum links, and links in proper location (at end of paragraph, anchor text tied to an action)
- tables (instead of long paragraphs) to display or compare information

Example of a scannable page

You don’t have to be able to read the content on this page to see this page has been made more scannable with subheads, white space and bulleted text.



[pages not included in sample]

FAQs

The FAQ purpose

We recommend that FAQs be used as a holder for specific questions or edge cases about a topic, not basic information that should reside in that topic’s home page.

Occasionally a FAQ can be used as a support page for a promotion page, where the promotion page does the selling, and the FAQ answers basic questions that would otherwise slow down the sales language. However, this kind of FAQ should be the exception rather than the rule.

FAQ Content

In an edge-case FAQ, basic [topic] information stays on the “main” pages, and FAQs show specific questions.

Edge-case FAQ Questions	What should <u>NOT</u> be in a FAQ
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What if I change my mind and want to cancel?• Will my [X] work with the program [Y]?• I have [situation] and [this happened]. Who do I call?	<p>The following basic questions should not be in a FAQ (unless used to support a promotion page):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does [topic] work?• Who is eligible for [topic?]• How much does [topic] cost?

Use FAQs sparingly

If your content is focused and complete, you shouldn’t need a lot of FAQs. If you have a lot of FAQs with general or unrelated information, you need to:

- categorize the information properly and put it in the right home
- remove it because it’s probably not that important

Use a “how do I” structure for FAQ questions

The “how do I” structure for FAQ questions allows the clearest answer.

Avoid “can I” questions whenever possible, because you first need to answer “yes” or “no,” before you can move on to the answer.

Answering a “can I” question	Answering a “how do I” question
Can I edit my AutoPay payment? Yes. Here’s how you do it: 1. Log into your Account at [topic]...	How do I edit my AutoPay payment? 1. Log into your Account at ...

Answer the FAQ question directly

Answer the FAQ question directly, don’t make users infer the answer.

Vague Answer	Clear answer
Can I have my service turned on or off on the weekend? [COMPANY] field technicians work Monday through Friday. Your service request can be completed during this timeframe.	Can I have my service turned on or off on the weekend? No. [COMPANY] field technicians only perform service requests Monday through Friday.

Edit down user questions in FAQs

As long as you keep the spirit of the question, you can edit down a verbose user question.

Original Verbose User Question	Edited User Question
I installed a dimmer switch for my bathroom vanity lights. There are six bulbs. Sometimes I need all the light, but most of the time I use less light. I bought the dimmer switch to conserve electricity, but an electrician told me there is no energy savings when I dim the lights. He said the same amount of electrical current is consumed and is merely dissipated at the dimmer switch. Is this true?	An electrician told me there are no energy savings from using a dimmer switch for my bathroom vanity. Is this true?